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By Michael Webb
Photography by Erhard Pfeiffer

catching the wave

A new restaurant captures Santa Monica's natural resources



This and opposite page photo: A folding screen of aqua shagreen conceals the entry to the kitchen behind Catch's massive main dining room bar. *Right, top to bottom:* Floor and table lamps illuminate the restaurant at night; white woven chairs and a shark's jaw-inspired patterned carpet decorate the space.





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but it’s **respectful**
of what we found.”

A former New Yorker, James Gillam, a partner in the Sausalito, California-based architectural firm Backen Gillam, is still in awe of the West Coast way of life. “Coming from New York to California, I wanted to take full advantage of the natural resources of beach, water, and light, as well as the fabulous climate to create a more transparent lifestyle,” says Gillam of his newest project Catch restaurant in Santa Monica.

Floor-to-ceiling windows framing palm trees and the beach swing open to admit ocean breezes. A central bar counter is covered with abalone shell tiles, framed with polished nickel steel, and a folding screen of aqua shagreen conceals the entry to the kitchen. Elsewhere, the angular pattern of the carpet is a stylized version of a shark’s jaw, woven white leather chairs and bar stools are set at different heights to give everyone a good view, and stained hardwood tables have an understated luxury.

Though the surroundings were inspiring, the space itself proved challenging. Set in the Casa del Mar, a Spanish-style hotel built in the 1920s, Gillam and colleagues April Powers and Steve Elerding had to remove unsightly additions, and paint the walls, bracketed columns, and ceiling beams a gleaming white to serve as a foil for the new furnishings.

While capitalizing on the sunny locale was key to the design aesthetic, it also proved to be problematic. “It was essential to mute glare, or you would feel you were looking out from a tunnel,” says Gillam. Sunlight is filtered by gauze drapes, a layer of woven hemp, and mesh roller blinds. As darkness falls, the white shaded floor and table lamps come on, and pin spots gleam from silvery hoops and frames. Guests’ eyes are drawn to the vintage prints of marine life and to the glistening sculpture of coral beneath the sushi serving counter. “Catch is modern, but it’s respectful of what we found,” he says. **hd**

Left, top to bottom: Floor-to-ceiling windows capture Catch’s scenic beach setting; the private dining room. *Opposite page:* Bar dining.



Catch Restaurant

Santa Monica, California

Owner Edward Thomas Company

Architecture Firm and Interior

Design Firm Backen Gillam Architects,
Sausalito, California

Architecture Project Team Jim Gillam,

principal and architect; and Steve
Elerding, interior architect

Interior Design Project Team April

Powers, associate and senior interior
designer; and Jennifer Corteville,
interior designer

Contractor Ramland Construction

Purchasing Firm Robert Lastra &
Associates

Lighting Consultant Ann Kale &
Associates, Ltd.

Lighting Fixtures Niedhardt and
Charles Lamp Company

Artwork Natural Curiosities

Window Coverings 5-Star Interior
Services

Embroidery Jaron Logo

Fabric Bergamo, Valley Forge Fabrics,
Carnegie, and Dedar

Leather Moore & Giles and Edelman
Leather

Tabletops/Barstools/Dining Chairs
Hospitality Furniture Collection

Table Bases West Coast Industries

Rug Design Origins

Booths Republic Furniture

Private Dining Table D. Angelo's