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# 66

## New York City

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**RICHARD MEIER STICKS TO WHITE (WITH TOUCHES OF RED) FOR A CHINESE RESTAURANT IN NEW YORK CITY'S TRIBECA NEIGHBORHOOD.**

**By Suzanne Stephens**

**Architect:** Richard Meier & Partners—Richard Meier, FAIA, principal; Don Cox, AIA, Thomas Juul-Hansen, design team  
**Client:** Suarez Restaurant Group with Jean-Georges Enterprises  
**Consultants:** Ambrosino DePinto & Schmieder (m/e/p); Goldstein Associates (structural); Mark Stech-Novak (restaurant consultation and design); L'Observatoire International (lighting)

**Size:** 5,400 square feet, 150 seats (plus 25 in the lounge)

**Cost:** Withheld

**Completion date:** Spring 2003

### Sources

**Glass partitions:** Architectural Glass Craft

**Stainless-steel mesh:** GKD-USA

**Absorptive acoustic-plaster ceiling:** RPG Diffusor Systems' BASWAphon

**Dining chairs:** Eames by Herman Miller

**Lounge chairs:** Cassina

**Stools:** Bertolia by Knoll

**Lounge tables:** Saarinen by Knoll

**Tables:** Atta Studios (custom table-tops); Gratz Enterprises (custom table bases)

For more information on this project, go to [Projects at www.architecturalrecord.com](http://Projects at www.architecturalrecord.com).

Since 66 opened last spring, its Shanghai-chic cuisine by Jean-Georges Vongerichten and Minimalist modern interior by Richard Meier, FAIA, have garnered the fervent attention restaurateurs crave. In this case, the clients are both the chef, Vongerichten, and Phil Suarez, also one of the investors in the Richard Meier–designed Perry Street Apartment towers in the West Village. Even though Meier had only designed one restaurant before—for the Getty Center in Los Angeles, where competition from other restaurants on its hilltop site is not formidable—Suarez was not deterred. “We knew Meier would provide the right excitement for Vongerichten’s cuisine,” he says. (Nevertheless, Vongerichten’s restaurant consultant, Mark Stech-Novak, was on hand to plan the kitchen and advise on other such matters, while the lighting consultant, L’Observatoire International, made sure the lighting would warm up Meier’s renowned white palette.)

### Program

Since Vongerichten and Suarez already operate a slew of restaurants uptown (Jean Georges, Vong, JoJo), the two decided on the ground floor of the Textile Building, a toned-down, Classical-style structure in Tribeca. Designed in 1901 by Henry Hardenbergh, the architect of the Dakota apartments and the Plaza Hotel, the landmarked building



is not too far from Odeon, a pioneer of downtown arty-elegant restaurants, which opened almost 25 years ago. During this time, Tribeca has become a residential-loft paradise catering to the affluent who like the casual lifestyle with concierges.

Accordingly, Meier thought the restaurant should be open and light. “I wanted people to experience a degree of intimacy as part of a larger space,” he says. “And,”

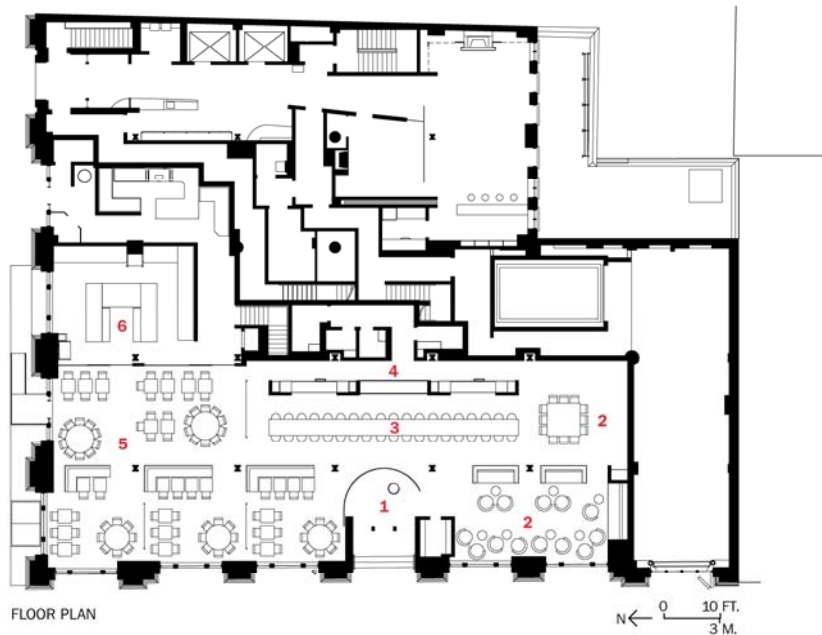
Meier adds, “I thought there should be no hierarchy in the dining spaces. Wherever you sit, you feel this is the most important spot.”

### Solution

Meier divided the rectangular space into three main sections around a central entrance vestibule, defined by a 12-foot-high, curved-frosted-glass wall. Floor-to-ceiling frosted-glass panels partition the various areas,

A curved, 12-foot-high glass wall (below) separates the communal table from the entrance vestibule (opposite). Behind the table, a frosted-glass wall (right) partially conceals drink preparation.





1. Entrance vestibule
2. Lounge
3. Communal table
4. Bar
5. Dining
6. Kitchen (final prep)

**The 44-foot-long communal table (below) has an epoxy resin top and stainless-steel base with Bertioia stools. Chinese ideograms on red silk banners visually lower the 12-foot-high ceiling.**

which are further subdivided by built-in stainless-steel-mesh cubicles with wood-panel and leather banquettes.

Behind the entrance vestibule, a 44-foot-long communal table seating 40 acts as the orienting locus in the restaurant, dramatized by a row of red silk banners hung from a slot in the dropped acoustic-plaster ceiling. The bar at the back of the communal table is concealed behind a frosted-glass wall, through which the bartenders' shadowy movements and the bottles' contours offer only ghostly traces of their presence.

In the dining area, the kitchen can be glimpsed through four glass water tanks containing vividly polychromatic fish. The immaculately organized kitchen is devoted mainly to the final stages of cooking; Halogen downlights prevent a harsh glare from being admitted to the dining room. (A second preparatory kitchen, for slicing and dicing, is located in the basement.)

#### Commentary

The combination of loft-renovation (with painted riveted-steel columns) and carefully designed dining alcoves shows the masterful attention to detail and craft for which Meier is known. The desired openness combined with intimacy is handsomely achieved through the translucency of the glass partitions and the gleaming stainless-steel-mesh cubicles, all of which subtly enhance the sense of elegance. The dominant use of white works well because of the softness of the ambient lighting (including candles at night) and splashes of color (red flags, variously colored fish).

Although the long communal table seems to be a fad appealing mainly to a cell-phone culture that thrives on strangers listening to private conversations, it seems to go over well (for now). The high culinary standards—supported by highish prices—have made 66 a magnet, even for those looking for a lunch spot while serving jury duty. Will it match the longevity of the less-expensive Odeon and its open and active bar scene? We'll have to see. ■



Four fish tanks divide the dining area from the kitchen (right). Sconces attached to the backs of wood and leather banquettes provide ambient lighting that flickers through the stainless-steel mesh of the squared U-shaped cubicles (below and far right).

