

Program Summary:

A beloved food truck's first permanent home transformed a historic neighborhood washateria into a handcrafted, community-focused restaurant celebrating local identity, resourcefulness, and lively gathering.

Program Statement:

This project went beyond a simple restaurant build-out to embrace dining's role as social hub and gathering space. When the couple behind a famous food truck decided to set down roots and anchor their sought-after fare with a brick-and-mortar establishment, they wanted it to feel like it had been there all along. We cultivated a comfortable, hand-made space with a retro vibe to push against any sterile feeling of a fast-food chain that "chicken sandwich" might conjure. The restaurant is full of thrifted objects and salvaged fixtures that embrace imperfections, and the finishes were largely installed by the Owners and their friends.

A long-standing fixture on a prominent corner, many know the building from its previous life as a family-owned Washateria, but may not know that the building originated as a neighborhood pharmacy in the early 1900s. Newspaper ads for employment at the soda counter harken back to a time when the local drugstore was more than just a place to buy medication. The building's past has built up literal layers - including beautiful floors and wall panels - that begged to be preserved and highlighted. The resulting space feels quirky, functional, and embodies their beloved brand and unique flavor.

RR-15.01

Building Area: (sf)
2,025

Cost per Square Foot:
\$62

Construction Cost
\$125,000

Date of Completion:
January 2026

RR-15.02

Welcome to our Brick-and-Mortar

The project's primary objective was to create a sense of place that built upon the Owner's existing food truck branding, with this restaurant being the permanent embodiment of a look that was previously limited to social media posts and the truck shell. They wanted to maintain as much of the existing building as possible, both because of its uniqueness and to reduce construction costs.

They found a popular, yet closed, laundromat in a lively New Orleans neighborhood, owned by a close friend. Originally established as a family-run pharmacy in the 1910s, the building appears on Sanborn maps in its present form in the 1930s, with newspaper ads following it up until 1954 as a neighborhood pharmacy, though under different names over the years. Classified ads for soda jerks and "fountain girls" recall the boom of drugstore soda fountain counters that started during Prohibition and remained a hangout mainstay for teens and families well into the 1950s. In the 1960s, the building became a neighborhood touchpoint again when it reopened as a laundromat. A shopfront faces the main thoroughfare with space for a residence in back.

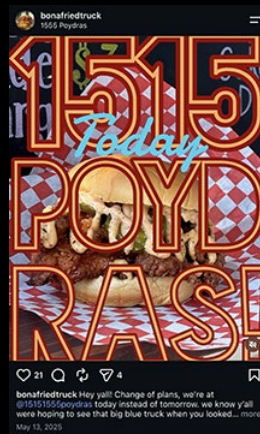


RR-15.03

Establishing the Brand

This project translates the distinctive Brand of an award-winning food truck into physical space. The adage "focus on one thing and do it well" drove the Owners to perfect their chicken sandwich, which directly inspired the restaurant's color palette: green pickles, sweet pink sauce, and orange crispy chicken welcome diners with a 1970's-flavored embrace. The historic ceiling is painted their signature blue color, adopted when the owners first repainted their food truck themselves. Reminiscent of a welcoming porch ceiling, it ties back to the branding's hue, while also signifying that all are welcome here.

Both artists, the Owners, along with their large community of friends in film and theater, knew from the beginning that they were searching for an architectural canvas to reflect their brand. A driving force in all design decisions, the Owners painted their own renderings and swatch board.



RENOVATED FLOOR PLAN



RR-15.04

What's Old is New Again

As an adaptive reuse project on a budget, great care was taken to utilize any existing structural elements. New counters and partitions fit like puzzle pieces onto the original layout, modified for the Owners' use and needs.

Limitations and obstructions were embraced, like an existing large concrete pad raised 6" above the main floor, and the entire rear portion of the building a good three feet higher than the main floor level.

Unforeseen circumstances like unclear gas and water line records, and plumbing adaptations from use as a laundromat to a restaurant involved some code-updates and design "in the field."

A brick fireplace and chimney were discovered behind the water heater during demolition. As removal of the fireplace and chimney would have been extensive and cost-prohibitive, there was no choice but to lean-in to the building's quirks. The bathroom was reconfigured to meet ADA requirements while keeping the fireplace, minimally furred-out as every inch counted for wheelchair clearance space. What resulted is an efficient and accessible facility, with the preserved flow of its cumulative uses.

PREVIOUS FLOOR PLAN



RR-15.05

Like Night and Day

A well-known fixture in the neighborhood with a recognizable street frontage, we did not want to do anything to take away from the local landmark.

Its unique combination of Spanish tile roof, flat roof, and barely-visible hipped roof, were reverently restored. The commercial kitchen hood vent became an indulgent budget item as the in-line fan and vent system were concealed in the attic space to prevent intrusion on its familiar historic elevations, and a subtle gooseneck exhaust is not visible from the main avenue. The restaurant owners plan to collect further neon signage to contribute to the illumination of this neighborhood beacon.



PREVIOUS CONDITION



RR-15.06

Honoring the Past

Many collected and salvaged components came together to tie the past with the present. Vintage milk glass pendants and large globe light fixtures were sourced secondhand, while the original ceiling fans and hex-penny tile floors were painstakingly refurbished in place by the couple. Remnants from the laundromat were reused as well. An old rolling laundry cart holds the restaurant's merchandise, and authentic washateria signage can be found popped in between the couple's artwork on the walls. A round, porthole washing machine window was saved from the prior business and incorporated into the swinging kitchen door. Tabletops and kitchen equipment were also sourced secondhand. Tying back to the building's origins, the brass foot rail from the old pharmacy soda fountain bar was utilized underneath the hallway condiment counter.

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RR-15.07

Order's Up!

The owners wanted to bring back a long, continuous dine-in bar, harkening back to the building's origins as a "mom-and-pop" drugstore. Negotiation with authorities having jurisdiction over the bar's primary dining function came about as eating counters have fallen out of fashion in more recent years. A generously lengthy bar top was proposed, though modified for today's use with an accessible portion for ADA compliance and a designated footprint for alcohol sales only, with the majority of seating oriented for expedient communal dining.



RR-15.08

It's in the Details

The restaurateurs built and trimmed out several elements themselves, like the soffit above the bar, the service window, countertop, behind-bar cabinetry, stair to the office space, doors and lots of painting.

A long, communal eating counter and bright orange booth seating were essential to cement the restaurant as a space in which to come together. By celebrating the historic palimpsest of the building's past as a pharmacy-turned-laundromat, the design concept for the project evokes a retro vibe with a modern twist.



RR-15.09

At Your Service

The owners are hands-on by nature, but were also operating with a very strict budget. Their tenacity to tackle challenges as a team of two, plus a village of friends, made this project possible. Working with a film lighting designer and others experienced with theater and production builds, the owners physically constructed the bar soffit and marquee lighting which highlights the long dining counter, along with trim elements, the pick-up service window, and backbar casework. Painted details that reference the historic tile floor, and wayfinding touches such as the striped doors, carry through the space with a touch of whimsy.



RR-15.10

Overhaul

The clients wanted to keep as much of the historic fabric of the building as possible, but needed to meet the current commercial building codes as well. Design-wise, this translated into carving out spaces for utilities, fire protection, and accessible clearance space for wheelchair navigation.

Some systems were able to be repurposed and recalibrated, such as the HVAC and newer portions of the electrical. Other systems like plumbing and sewer were completely upgraded and right-sized for the restaurant.

The pressed tin ceiling (and ceiling fans), molding and cornice work, as well as the hex-penny floor, vestiges from its prior uses, were given new life with a bit of cleaning and some paint.



RR-15.11

Welcome to the Neighborhood

Conscientious not to disrupt the neighborhood ecosystem of established dining options, the renovated restaurant nestles into its existing context as if it were an old friend. While focusing on the interior renovation, the exterior of the building was able to return to its simplicity of form, with only gentle rehabilitation measures taken to stabilize and repair to allow for it to shine once again.



RR-15.12

There's a Place for Us

As a walkable destination in a bustling neighborhood, known for music, fun and food, the new restaurant contributes to placemaking as a community space for gathering. Like a modern town square, the restaurant actually functions as an entry gate for a major New Orleans festival, popularly accessed via its neighborhood. Heralding the comradery and good times to be had, the lightness of the food truck-turned-brick-and-mortar destination uplifts and exhorts neighbors and visitors alike to come and enjoy.

