

Crudo

Christopher DeSantis • August 05, 2015



As young professionals make their way into Boston's North End neighborhood, an area synonymous with Italian cuisine, an entirely new culinary scene is developing, and **Crudo**, having opened last month, is at the cusp of it. An Asian-fusion restaurant owned and operated by local restaurateur Nicholas Leo, Crudo is far from average in an area steeped in Italian tradition.

"The team wanted to create a lighter alternative to the local mom-and-pop Italian spots, a comfortable space for a younger crowd seeking a more current after-work bar scene, date spot, or social hangout," says Robert Stansell, co-owner and design principal of New York-based **Emporium Design** with Timothy Welsh, who helped Leo realize Crudo.

Each floor of the two-story, 3,000-square-foot building features hand-hewn Douglas fir—repurposed as ceiling beams overhead—and reclaimed barn boards for a weathered aesthetic juxtaposed with colorful Japanese-inspired artwork by local artist Markus Sebastiano. Meanwhile, antique brass light fixtures with blown glass shades complement new-face walnut furnishings that contrast with the 80-seat eatery's ubiquitous rustic design language. A backlit sign bearing the restaurant's name flanks a large steel panel with a waterfall feature set against a vintage-mirror background.

The eatery's focal point is undoubtedly the first-floor sushi bar, which is topped in white marble and trimmed with a hand-forged steel rope inspired by the city's historic maritime industry. "We drew inspiration from the inherent contrast between the worn, industrial-commercial fishing piers and private yachts that share the same local waterfront," says Stansell. Referencing a yacht's sleek, refined finishes, the bar is clad in walnut paneling accented by blackened steel edges. Studded barstools upholstered in plush chocolate leather form a halo around the open kitchen-style counter where sushi is prepared in plain sight.

Behind the second floor's 10-seat bar, an oversized, slate-panel water feature is offset by a steel-and-walnut shelving unit housing the liquor selection. The walls are lined in expansive, operable windows that overlook Salem Street and let in natural light during the day, while brass-and-glass wall sconces along the perimeter create a warm ambiance at night. Blackened steel-frame benches with new-face walnut backs sit in intimate groupings throughout. "It was very important to us that the space could be flexible enough to offer various seating types yet remain consistent in concept and palette throughout," explains Stansell.

Though the project initially faced opposition from long-time neighborhood residents who valued the area's Italian culture and tradition, the modern hotspot has since been accepted—but not without a bit of persuasion. "We engaged them, walked them through our concept and design, and gave them the confidence that Crudo would be sensitive to the fabric of Salem Street and the North End," says Stansell. "It has been very well received."