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Bullion's Over-the-Top Luxury Is All in the Details

Eater's most gorgeous restaurant of 2017 was fastidiously designed

by Alaena Hostetter | @alaenahostetter | May 10, 2018, 12:10pm CDT

Eighty Three Creative

Dallas has no shortage of swank, but few restaurants offer the kind of over-the-top luxury that Bullion brought to the city last year. Named Eater's most gorgeous restaurant of the year in 2017, the sophistication of Chef Bruno Davaillon's destination for chic French fare is all in the details.

Bullion boasts place settings imported from France and artwork from world-renowned artists like Jean-Michel Othoniel, who also has a permanent installation at the Palace of Versailles. Before diners even walk in the door, they're confronted with the restaurant's showy facade — a glistening gold bar that's suspended above street level at Downtown's 400 Record building.

“We realized we needed to elevate the restaurant in order for people to pass under it,” co-owner Thomas Hartland-Mackie tells Eater. “We really wanted to open it up to the city. It was built during a time when buildings wanted to close off from the city. Obviously today, the excitement and vibrancy of cities is, ‘How do we open up buildings to interact with the world around them?’” Designed by Dallas-based architecture firm Gensler, Bullion is now a unique part of Downtown’s landscape.



Bullion is suspended above the street at 400 Record | Bullion [Official Photo]

Hartland-Mackie's family purchased the building, built in 1985, in 2014. From the beginning, the team built Bullion to be beautiful in 360 degrees, whether diners approached from nearby Union Station on foot

or from the Omni Hotel across the street. Inside, a grand staircase awaits, which wraps around the Othoniel sculpture that's reminiscent of a strand of vibrantly colored pearls hung vertically from the ceiling. The Parisian artist's work can also be seen at the Palace of Versailles — his fountain installation is the first permanent artwork commissioned for the palace in the last 300 years.

The emphasis on high-brow art didn't stop there. Inside, a piece by Kathryn Andrews, who had a solo exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center in 2016, is suspended on the far wall opposite the bar. "She crafted that around the concept of creating a big mirrored wall that would reflect the space behind you, like in a brasserie," Hartland-Mackie explains. Then there's the red striped and flocked canvas pieces by Matthew Chambers that line a wall over booth seating.



Kathryn Andrews' *A Girl With Flute, Lighter, and Candy* hangs above velvet banquettes | Eighty Three Creative

The team tapped Martin Brudnizki Design Studio, which has offices in London and New York, to create the interior space. “What we loved about Martin is the timelessness of the design he created that will still be relevant 15 years from now,” Hartland-Mackie explains. “He can create a space that is incredibly elegant and has a lot of detail, but at the same time feels welcoming and comfortable.”

A representative from Brudnizki's firm explains Bullion's aesthetic: "We wanted to create an elegant fine dining restaurant which had the ambience, buzz and feel of a brasserie that felt contemporary, but also harked back to Dallas' history and the glamour of the mid-century period."



Even the napkins are gold | Photos by Eighty Three Creative



Bullion's luxe lounge | Photos by Eighty Three Creative

To that end, deep blues offset by gold accents dominate the interior. Rich brass and wood finishes complement lush mohair velvet and leather upholstery. Robert Shaw Manufacturing, a third-generation woodworker out of Fort Worth, was tasked with building cabinetry and sleek wood paneling for the restaurant. "It's really amazing, the work they have done. They are proud of what they do and their family heritage," says Georgina Hartland, a partner in the restaurant. "The fact that we have that kind of craftsmanship in this area is great."

Davaillon, a part-owner of Bullion and noted stickler for details, painstakingly worked alongside Hartland to choose the place settings and silverware that would serve as accessories to his understated French fare.

"They were only finalized after I really saw the design," Davaillon says. "We had a mockup of tables, chairs, and the brass and wood finishes so we could play with the table settings in situ," explains Hartland, who collaborated with Davaillon closely. Pretty much everything came from France, as the team wanted Bullion to feel as authentically French as possible.

The silverware is from **Christofle**, flower vases are **Lalique**, and the table china is **Bernaudaud**, shipped to the United States from Limoges, all luxury brands sold at upscale retailers like Bloomingdale's and Neiman Marcus. "It's a well-regarded brand and the type of plate that will last," Davailon explains. "I knew ceramic would not fit in this restaurant at all, so we had to come up with something elegant."

"The only concession we made is with the glasses," Davailon says. "We went with Murano glass for the colored glasses on the tables," Hartland explains. "The wine glasses are Bormioli, which is Italian. France doesn't do wine glasses," Davailon adds.



Poulet patte rouge rôti, served on Bernaudaud china | Bullion [Official Photo]



Chef Bruno Davailon is known as a stickler for details | Bullion [Official Photo]

Even the restaurant's steak knives went through a rigorous selection process for quality and aesthetics. "That one took a long time, we were looking at about 15 different steak knives," Hartland says. "When I went to France a year and a half ago, I fell in love with this steak knife in the South of France," Davailon explains of the Perceval brand eventually chosen. "They're a small company that's different, yet makes quality knives that fit the rest of the tableware." Here, even napkins and plates get the custom treatment — they're embossed with "Bullion" or simply a bold "B."

Some may say that the approach of Davailon and his co-owners verges on overkill, but this obsession with the details is clearly working. Hartland-Mackie says that the proof is in the public comments. "Some of the great feedback we've had are people saying, 'The restaurant transports me back to Paris. I feel like I'm in a

different place when I come into Bullion.”

This is the latest in a series of features highlighting Dallas' 2017 Eater Awards winners. Stay tuned for the next installment next month.