THE 21 BEST DESIGNED RESTAURANTS IN AMERICA

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Dining out is a holistic experience — a commune between taste, aroma, sight, surroundings, and whether or not you can find parking (damn it what the hell is happening to this city). The surroundings can be especially important. What kind of monster would eat sushi in a Western-themed saloon, or drop $$$ on a steak while sitting on a plastic chair? People who separate sandwiches into their constituent parts, that's who. To the rest of us, restaurant design matters.

Because naming the best-designed restaurants, period, would be an exercise in apples vs. Boston's Union Oyster House (opened 1826), we decided to highlight our favorites built or remodeled within the past few years (the oldest/most recently redone is 8 years). From re-imagined warehouses to a fresh take on Charlie Chaplin's former digs, here they are.
19. Workshop Kitchen + Bar

Palm Springs, CA (address and info)
SOMA

The 2015 James Beard Award winner for Best Restaurant Design is a lesson in contrasts. It has all the trappings of a landmarked 1926 Spanish Colonial, like terra-cotta roof tiles, a 27-foot-high cathedral ceiling, and an exterior courtyard, but inside? Say hi to concrete Brutalism. It’s concrete with an ecclesiastical theme, however, drawn from the 34-feet-long communal table, “side chapels,” and the altar-like bar area, at the foot of a nave. All that’s missing is a confessional booth but hey, that’s what the bartender’s for.

Highlight: The daylit dining alcove, with seating for 16.