



Mark Handian (second from left) celebrates with the owner and staff of The Room Sushi Bar in Los Angeles, after receiving the restaurant's Certificate of Occupancy at final inspection.

DESIGNING. ENGINEERING. BUILDING. EATING.

Handian Construction Provides All-Inclusive Construction Menu

by Meredith Wargo

Restaurant construction is a complex and multi-layered process that requires more than just swinging hammers to get a space ready for opening day. It's understanding the maze of paperwork and permits and streamlining the processes. It's integrating the work of dozens of subcontractors performing their specialty tasks. It's maximizing kitchen design and equipment layout to create functional and efficient spaces.

And it's something that Mark Handian, owner of *Handian Construction* in Altadena, Calif., takes great pride in.

Handian's background in architecture and construction is the perfect blend for providing services in this niche industry. "I've always been a hands-on kind of guy," says Handian, "and the fact that I love to cook and consider myself a foodie doesn't hurt, either."

Handian graduated with honors from California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, Calif., where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering. He also earned a minor in architecture. To help put himself through college, he worked as an electrician and a welder. After graduating, Handian spent six years working as a

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structural engineer in the manufactured housing industry before switching to the high-rise building structures industry, where he worked for an additional six years.

"It's equally exciting and rewarding to take everything I learned in my early years and use it to make people's culinary dreams come true," he says.

BUILDING THE DREAM

But restaurant construction wasn't originally on Handian's radar. It wasn't until he stumbled upon an opportunity that he realized the value he could bring to the table.

"A realtor friend needed input when he was showing a space to a potential client interested in starting a restaurant," explains Handian. "I was working as an engineer at the time and my brother-in-law volunteered my AutoCAD services to create a design for them. The drawing got approved and the restaurateur hired me to complete his build-out. It was at that moment when I realized I could do the design, permitting and construction myself while providing a valuable resource to realtors in helping their clients get answers."

Handian started approaching realtors throughout the Southern California area and offered free consultations to their clients who were planning to open restaurants. It didn't take long before his phone started ringing.

"Anyone interested in leasing a space would call me and I would evaluate the potential space for free. I would listen to people's ideas and requirements and give them a range of appropriate costs for building their restaurants. People started holding

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Mark Handian, Owner, Handian Construction

off from signing their leases until I gave them the okay. It put us in a very good spot but I had to make sure the figures I was giving them were accurate since we would have to live by those numbers if they hired us for the project," he says.

But Handian wasn't content with just reaching out to realtors to build his clientele. He started attending networking events where food trucks were often present. He would introduce himself to the food truck

owners and tell them if they ever wanted to go brick and mortar to give him a call.

"I would also sample their food and evaluate it on social media," says Handian. "It was a great way to start interacting with them. And for those restaurant owners who didn't hire me, I would still attend their grand openings and celebrate with them. I'm interested in keeping the lines of communication open in case I can be of service on future projects."



B Nutritious in Fountain Valley, Calif., is ready for business. The restaurant started as a meal preparation service out of the owner's home kitchen before going brick and mortar.



The menu at Market2Plate in Mission Viejo, Calif., features handmade pasta served with locally sourced produce.



Located in the heart of Pasadena, Calif., the Meat District Co. is an upscale, open-concept steakhouse specializing in farm-to-table meats.

ONE-STOP SHOPPING

In the early days, Handian recalls pushing the envelope in starting his company. "I would ask potential clients what their biggest complaints were in working with architects and contractors and vowed to do the opposite," he says. "Budgets are key issues for most owners. If we exceed clients' budgets and they don't have the money to pay us, what does that accomplish? I want to make people aware that they can have a design that's affordable and meaningful to them."

By keeping the design and construction under one roof, Handian is able to move projects through the pipeline faster, which helps keep costs down. His average turn-around from the initial drawings to turning the keys over to the owner is usually six months.



A Handian Construction professional carefully installs decorative Mexican tile at Lola's Mexican Cuisine in Long Beach, Calif.

"I tell my clients I don't do drawings to make them look pretty for you," Handian says. "I do drawings for my subcontractors so they can understand what they're building. When we submit our plans to the local jurisdictions for approval, they are extremely buildable. I don't want to spend valuable time making corrections. My goal is to get the permits as quickly as possible."

For efficiency, Handian also uses the same electrical and mechanical subcontractors on most of his projects to generate accurate drawings for his subcontractors. "I'm very particular about which subs I use," he says. "Everybody has to work together as a team, which requires each discipline to work in tandem."

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Handian's plate is full keeping up with the ongoing demand for his services. Since 2013, he's completed more than 50 restaurants of all sizes, shapes and cuisines.

"Medium-sized and smaller restaurants are our ideal projects," Handian explains. "We can help the owners of these types of facilities quite a bit. They're on a budget and we know how to keep them on track. I always take my mechanical and electrical engineers to the job site and have them evaluate everything before they start preparing their calculations."

He adds, "I'm proud that our client relationships evolve through the projects into true partnerships. And when the restaurant is finished and the doors open for business, we always look forward to being one of the first customers in line to sample their goods." 🍴

Texas-based Meredith Wargo is a contributing writer with more than 30 years of experience writing for a myriad of industries.