

# ALTRUISTIC

## Pizza



Pizza Fusion brings LEED practices to the quick-service restaurant sector.

By Val Hunt, associate editor

In 2006, Vaughn Lazar and Michael Gordon were looking for a different kind of business concept—and a different kind of lunch. Their frustrated search for quick-service restaurants that would honor their organic tastes (and the tastes of Americans who the Organic Trade Association estimates will spend \$23 billion on organic food and beverages this year) sparked the entrepreneurial breakthrough that gave birth to the Pizza Fusion chain.

Organic fare alone would have distanced Pizza Fusion from the field, but Lazar and Gordon were after a holistic approach that would create a design that's as fresh as the menu.

"When we approached the design of the store, we wanted to be like Starbucks, a hip pizza place where you could grab coffee, juice, salad or pizza and hang out. We wanted to break the 'greasy pizza' stereotype," says Lazar, co-founder and ceo of the Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.-based chain. Lazar and Gordon called in locally



**left** | Graphic panels near the service counter educate Pizza Fusion customers about the restaurant's green mission and tips for employing conservation at home. **right** | All the chain's restaurants feature a signature stone wall that's designed to add a lounge vibe to the spaces.

**right** | Signs help communicate Pizza Fusion's eco-friendly practices, such as using Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood for the Fort Lauderdale site's shelving. **below** | Simple design choices, such as compact fluorescent lights and low-flow faucets, help the restaurants save money.



MIKE BUTLER, FT. LAUDERDALE, FLA



## Tips to green up restaurant design:

Vaughn Lazar, Pizza Fusion: "Don't over-complicate things. Address major areas like power and water use. Find ways to reuse things."

Jeff Baker, Image4: "All of your decisions—construction, sourcing—need to be in the context of reducing the facility's carbon footprint. That's the No. 1 thing to do. From that other decisions follow. Second, go look for a LEED-certified contractor or architect. The U.S. Green Building Council has a web site with everyone who's certified."

Cesar Conde, Casa Conde: "Lots of manufacturers make products that have green features. Lighting fixtures that use LEDs, low-flow faucets, tables made from recycled products—make sure furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E) have green properties."

based design firm Casa Conde to deliver a mood that matched the food concept.

"We took this restaurant to the next level by making it LEED-certified," says Cesar Conde, principal, referring to the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. All Pizza Fusion stores have to apply for LEED certification, although at what level depends on the franchisee's green ambitions.

Conservation starts with the skeleton, made with 30 percent recaptured industrial concrete and Forest Stewardship Council-certified lumber. The drywall, which is manufactured near store sites, is 95 percent post-consumer content. Restaurant floors are made of bamboo and sealed with volatile organic compound (VOC)-free finishes. "It was important for us to choose products with low or no emissions because we want our employees and customers

to enjoy good air quality," Conde says.

Pizza Fusion's furniture is salvaged, recycled or reclaimed from local sites, a plus for franchisees both in terms of cost controls and design flexibility. The Seattle store repurposes old church pews and seating from a bowling alley. In San Diego, patrons can eat at tables fashioned from high school bleachers. Discarded slate roof shingles are reused as wall tiles in Florida's Palm Beach Garden and Weston stores.

Pizza Fusion continues to close the reduce-reuse-recycle loop with ceiling grids made from 74 percent recycled aluminum cans and 24 percent post-industrial metals. Natural light is used to its full potential in each store, and the window treatments are made from recycled materials. The bathrooms feature bamboo sinks. Even glass bottles disposed at other Pizza Fusion stores are made into countertops for new locations.

Though Pizza Fusion leaves franchisees the freedom to link their look to their locale, it keeps certain design elements consistent to reinforce the brand identity. "We use deep, organic colors—bronzes, beiges, deep rustic reds—to give the store that natural feel," Conde says. "It's a warm, casual environment people from all walks of life can enjoy."

Patrons won't find a photo of the Leaning Tower of Pisa in these stores. Instead, they'll encounter graphic panels explaining the chain's history, purpose and conservation methods. Education is an important aspect of the chain's mission. "Pizza Fusion really is the story it tells," says display marketing consultant Jeff Baker of Manchester, N.H.-based Image4. "It's a very different business model, and I suppose you've gotta have some guts to do it."

But not every design aspect earns LEED points. "Sometimes we have to select a material that has no 'green' value," Conde says. "For example, we used natural slate in the bathroom. Faux hedge is applied to the walls—it's made

from polyester. With these few sacrifices, we created a really rich design and still attained LEED certification."

Some market hurdles still remain. While franchise costs remain competitive, ranging from \$350,000 to \$470,000, the organic menu items incur a big price tag, which means customers have to dig more out of their wallets when the signature hybrid delivery car rolls up.

Nonetheless, 10 Pizza Fusions already are operational, and 50 are projected to open by the end of 2009. "We've sold more than 75 franchises in 15 states since launching our program in February 2007," Lazar says. Which means there are plenty of franchisees who believe customers will pay more to eat a better quick meal. "This is something that's important to people," Conde says. "People are becoming more aware of what they're putting into their bodies. I definitely see this as a concept that can be taken anywhere." **HSI**

**Learn More** about Pizza Fusion on page 85

**opposite and below** | These renderings show the standard layout for a Pizza Fusion franchise. Cesar Conde, of Casa Conde, says his design firm wanted to showcase the restaurant's natural elements. "We really pushed for an open kitchen plan," Conde says. "And the ingredients needed to be displayed in the dining room."

