



Photos: Eric Laignel

# Smoke and Mirrors

In New York City, a cellar-space cafeteria uses the magic of illusion

BY LEONORA DESAR

In October, 2012, an eatery in lower Manhattan in operation for just a few years seemed to be hitting it in stride. Then along came Hurricane Sandy, which literally swept it underwater. The space would have to be redone. From scratch.

It was every designer's worst nightmare. Or so you would think.

"Limitations often become opportunities," says Stephen Margulies, partner of One Lux Studio in New York City. "We thought—what could we do to make this an opportunity?"

The 15,000-sq ft space at 85 Broad Street came with limitations. The eatery is in the basement, which means no daylight, and the 8 ft 6 in. ceiling height left something to be desired. To overcome these challenges, the designers harnessed the power of illusion. The entry doorways are very low, making the rooms appear taller than they are. The space also includes a mirrored ceiling, which magnifies the eatery and lends it volume.

To make the space appear brighter, the designers developed light-colored finishes with archi-

tect Mancini Duffy. "If we lit the floor and the tables, that lighting would reflect in the ceiling, and the ceiling would help create a brighter sense of space," Margulies says.

## WHIZ-BANG

The next step was to create defining elements in the project, which uses all LED sources and went on to earn an IES NYC Section Lumen Award of Merit. A serpentine wall constructed from vertical baffles arrests the eye. The team was unable

A serpentine wall uplit with RGB fixtures between each louver introduces a sense of theater.



Decorative LED pendants in the ante-room draw visitors inside.

to create a trough in the floor or bury the fixtures, so instead used a plinth structure to support the wall's bladed louvers. An RGB uplight (Color Kinetics) placed between each louver provides a range of lighting effects, from subdued, simple white to animated color-changing for special events. One Lux Studio was drawn to the fixtures for their compact and powerful nature, and for the beam control they provided. A lens placed above the fixture helps to camouflage them.

"Uplighting is always very dramatic compared to downlighting," Margulies says. "[The wall] actually became more impactful than we ever thought it would be, especially when it [appears] doubled in height because of the mirrored ceiling. It wasn't very tall, but by the time you put it below the ceil-

ing it became a rather impressive piece of art."

The designers programmed different light shows for the space. During one loop, the wall transforms into all of the colors of the rainbow. "When you walk in, the wall might be white and you can't tell that anything's happening, it just looks very crisp and elegant and architectural—like a beautiful piece of art. If you walk in and it happens to be blue, it has a very different kind of impact. It speaks to more drama, more theater."

The wall's whiz-bang loop is even more theatrical. "It's very animated," Margulies says. "Not only do [the lights] change color at a fast pace, but they also dim and chase. It's like a color wave."

In the dining room, a color-changing luminous box highlights a communal table. The box



uses an RGB light strip (Color Kinetics), which backlights a luminous membrane. "The design of the box prevented any shadowing from internal framing that supported the box," Margulies says. "This created visual tension between the rectilinear box and the serpentine color wall." Banquette and wood walls are highlighted with LED strip lights. The team found that they easily integrated into the small architectural coves and created additional drama by visually floating the banquettes from the wall.

#### IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FOOD

But while drama and color-changing are all well and good, let's not forget the mission of the eatery—food.

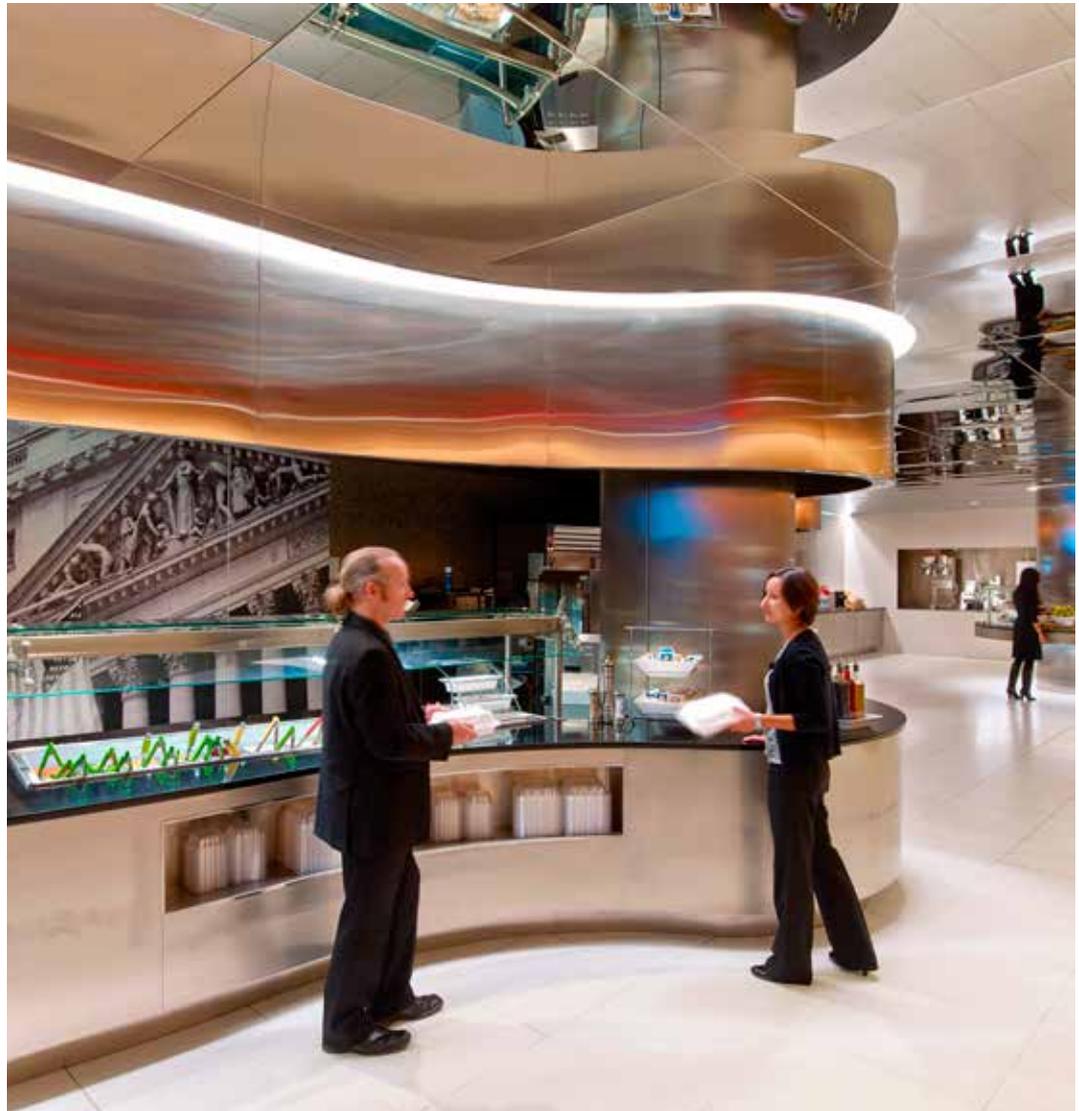
"You need to make sure," Margulies says, "especially when you have colorful events with lighting, that the food and the places where people are sitting are lit with white light, so that people don't look like Smurfs."

To this end, the team had LED downlights (Kurt Versen) recessed into the mirrored ceiling. The fixtures have low brightness reflectors, which mitigate glare, and help the fixtures blend. "We are always more interested in seeing the lighting effect than seeing the fixtures," Margulies says. "The light must magically appear from the architecture."

The luminaires have a CRI of 90 and a color temperature of 3000K, which makes the food appear vibrant. Track-mounted accent lights (Lighting Services, Inc.) contribute to this effect as well.

A color-changing lightbox hangs over a communal table. The box's RGB light strip backlights a luminous membrane.

LED downlights recessed into the ceiling show off the food and patrons.



#### FAST FACTS

- Challenges included lack of daylight and low 8 ft 6 in. ceilings.
- RGB uplights deliver dramatic color-changing effects to the curved wall.
- LED fixtures with a high color-rendering index make the food appear vibrant.

“When you’re lighting a servery, it’s all about the food,” Margulies says. “The food has to be well-lit and it has to look good, otherwise it makes it harder to sell.”

The brightness of the space allows patrons to enjoy other tasks, in addition to simply eating. “It’s not a nightclub. It’s not a bar,” Margulies says. “It’s an office building food service facility, and people have to have enough light to be able to read. We wanted the brightness to be reflected in the ceiling—the materials, the furniture, the food—everything just got very brilliant because we used good color-rendering LED light sources.” □

#### THE DESIGNER



**Stephen Margulies**, Member IES (1981), is a partner with One Lux Studio in New York City.