# La Belle Boulangerie

Nestled in the corner of the iconic Point House, is a 2,000 square foot bakery that has taken Hamilton's food scene by storm.

The brainchild of Parisian owner, Thomas Bekhazi and French baker, Vincent Hild, the star of the show at l'Artisan is, without doubt, the sight and smell of all the freshly made baked goods, and the space has been designed with this in mind.

"We tried to keep it simple and let the food speak for itself," explains Jason Makertich, a partner at BotelhoWood Architects who worked on the project with interior designer, Daria Schonenberg. Together they made the place light, bright, open and simple.

"I wanted open plan, I wanted for people to be able to see what is happening in the bakery as things are getting done. Just to show the process. There are no shortcuts. We use the best products," says Bekhazi.

Instead of being closed away from the clientele, all the food preparation can be seen through a glazed viewing wall on the far side of the restaurant. "They can see what's going on and you can see where it comes out to the final front of house display area," continues Makertich.

The colour palette is neutral, with natural looking fixtures, fittings and lighting. The ceiling is open, but painted white to maximise volume, and carefully placed greenery provides contrast with the white and beige, while also defining certain spaces.

Down one side of the huge windows is a green wall created using petrified moss, and rectangular planters containing vertical greenery have been strategically placed along the bottom of these windows. "These are quite architectural," he explains. "They're not really obscuring the views but they help soften the area.

Planters have also been used to separate the outside seating area from the pavement. "The plant pots outside were key to create this outdoor space, sectioned off from the road," he says. "They're more of a visual to help curtail where the public walk".

As you enter l'Artisan, you take a few steps up to a deliberately raised floor. The higher surface creates a terraced effect down to the outside seating area giving diners the feeling of being outside, but not at street level.

Being part of a former bank building, presented some challenges in the design, in particular the almost 2-feet concrete vault walls, however Mackertich found a way to not just incorporate them into the overall design – the former vault now houses the bathrooms - but also make a feature of them.

"I was adamant we keep the original Bank of Bermuda vault wall," he says. "Behind that, when you go into the bathrooms, that's the original bank vault. We were really keen to keep this as a nod to what the building's history was."

The vault isn't the only former bank feature that remains. In the kitchen area they have kept the original terrazzo floor,

regrinding and sealing it instead of retiling it, which saved the owners a considerable amount of money. "It's 50 years old and has come up like new," he says.

While the delicious smell of freshly baked baguettes and pastries may help to draw in customers, this 'side-effect' isn't ideal when you share a building with corporate tenants and a floor with Clarien Bank. Mackertich and the team had to very carefully plug up any gaps which tasty aromas could use to escape through and instead, they all come out of a single vent on the side of the building.

All the cooking equipment was imported from France including a huge Bongard modular deck oven, which created quite a challenge given it didn't even nearly fit through any doors.

"It was a major piece of work," says Mackertich adding that they had to remove one of the windows and break the oven down into three parts. "D&J did it. D&J were the contractor and they were a dream to work with."

In spite of the raised floor and steps to get into the restaurant through the main door, l'Artisan is fully accessible through the main entrance of Point House, up the lift and in through the back entrance. Building tenants can also enter in through this way as well, avoiding the outside.

In addition to the obvious design aspects that immediately catch your eye on entering l'Artisan, are more subtle features that, although small, make a big difference. No handles on storage cupboard doors and the clever use of a large mirror down a narrow corridor, create actual and perceived space, for example.

When Bekhazi stands behind his display counter he has a view not just of all his happy customers inside and out, but also down Par La Ville road as well. That, he says, is his favourite part.

## Key contractors

- BotelhoWood Architects
- D&J Construction Co. Ltd.
- Eminence Tile & Stone
- H&H Plumbing & Mechanical
- P&M Electrical
- Signworx
- Sound Decision Ltd

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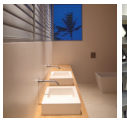

8 SOUTH ROAD
SMITH'S, FL05

t (441) 232.6563
info@bwarch.bm
www.bwarch.bm

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