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These Walls: The Wine Loft and La Crepe Nanou

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A spiral staircase of glowing glass connects The Wine Loft's black industrial bar area to its more secluded mezzanine. (Photo by Rip Stell)

TULSA – Pedestrians see The Wine Loft and La Crepe Nanou as neighboring storefronts within south Tulsa's The Vineyard shopping center.

Stepping within the two restaurants reveals strikingly different designs. A spiral staircase of glowing glass connects The Wine Loft's black industrial bar area to its more secluded mezzanine. The French restaurant next door boasts a 6-foot golden crown molding separating a patterned wall and dining area from La Crepe Nanou's high-rise black ceiling.

"It really looks beautiful," Executive Chef Jake Smith said of the restaurant. "I do like it at brunch, how the sun filters in through these golden drapes here. The room's really big, tall and open, and the sun really shrinks it down and makes it very warm and inviting and comfortable. So even though it's very open, it feels very private."

But these two diverse nightspots actually represent one operation under owner Jenna Krimbill. The business plan and design started with shared entryway, kitchen, bathrooms, and other infrastructure. Since The Wine Loft opened in August, followed two months later by La Crepe Nanou, those operating synergies have extended into cross-trained serving staffs.

"We're hitting some of the best labor costs I've ever seen, and I've been doing this for 17 years," said Wine Loft General Manager Cory Kester. "The idea of having two high-end concepts that build on each other, with the same kitchen staff, that's really exciting. It's a new challenge."

KBI Construction of Jenks built out the 8,500-square-foot complex, working from designs by the Tulsa architectural firm Kinslow, Keith and Todd.

While the franchises included some directives, KKT interior designer Crystal Hendricks said those guidelines left room for the KKT team to play in.

Krimbill wanted a dark atmosphere for The Wine Loft, so KKT combined a black tile concrete floor with black walls and plush black furniture, principal Carson Smith said. Lighting came not just from the custom staircase, but also recessed sources around a white bar, backlit crystal domes within black metal squares, and a chandelier of wine bottles.

The bistro countered that with abundant New Orleans wall art enlivened by pendant lighting. That ring of molded gold crowns the French atmosphere below that exposed black ceiling, the one unifying design trait Le Crepe Nanou shares with its neighbor.

Hendricks pointed to the curved bar as her favorite element. The staircase provides Smith's favorite contribution, its intricacies worked out by KKT principal and architect Jed Ballew.

Four stacked and laminated glass plates make up each step within that helical spiral, all linked by a steel pipe.

"We had to actually engineer how many layers of glass it would take, and how much that would support," said Smith.

Recessed lights along one edge lend a pale glow to each transparent slab.

"So when you're walking on the stair, it kind of looks like it's floating," Hendricks said.

KBI's staff built that from individual pieces, said Vice President Charly Basnett. They encountered difficulties just getting the custom core delivered from their Chicago supplier.

"The things you don't think about on things like that are how you ship those giant elliptical pieces," Ballew said.

That section of the restaurant complex had to be built around the staircase, even as Basnett's crew figured out how to assemble the 2-inch-thick steps.

"Any time you're working from a compound radius, that's challenging enough in itself, but then you put the glass in there," Basnett said with a smile. "We had to build the whole staircase around that."

Kester marveled at the process.

"It had six guys and it took them three days to put it in, and that's just the skeleton," he said. "When it's all completed, I believe it weighs about 2 tons."

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