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## Game Changer

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# Striking a Balance

TPG Architecture updates a Jersey City restaurant with a fresh, yet familiar vibe

By Alia Akkam

Photography by Veronica Bean

While repositioning Harborside, a multi-use development on New Jersey's Jersey City waterfront, Mack-Cali Realty Corporation (recently rebranded as Veris Residential), turned its attention to Porto Leggero. The Italian restaurant, inside Harborside Financial Plaza 5, was coveted for business meetings and family dinners alike, yet the landlord felt it needed an injection of new energy to reflect Harborside's evolving personality. New York firm TPG Architecture, with offices in Manhattan and Melville, came to the rescue.

"Porto Leggero is a white-tablecloth dining experience and the neighborhood loves it, but it didn't have a very cool bar scene to attract

new tenants," explains Shay Lam Nakashiki, managing executive and studio creative director at TPG.

Expanding this zone was essential, as was introducing a lounge for more casual get-togethers. These interventions, however, needed to be delicate and ensure an organic sequence so that loyal clientele would still feel comfortable. Kitchen and management staff were concerned "because they loved their patrons and the patrons loved them and they didn't want the restaurant to become so bling-bling that the customers didn't recognize it," recalls TPG project manager Antoinette Belson. "We had to balance that love for the space with making it fresh and exciting."







**This page:** The horseshoe-shaped bar is now the restaurant's glamorous central focus, complete with fluted brass millwork; jewel tones and various seating options define the restaurant's different spaces.



**Opposite page:** A mix of materials welcomes guests to Porto Leggero inside Jersey City's Harborside Financial Plaza 5.

Given a tight timeline, the dining room was largely untouched save for soft renovations conducted during the one week that Porto Leggero was able to close. Existing light fixtures, for example, were maintained, "but we took off the previous frilliness and painted them," points out Belson. Original brickwork also remains a defining feature.

Now configured into a horseshoe shape, the roomier bar is the "heart of the restaurant," says TPG associate designer Tae Kim. "We compressed the ceiling so it's intimate and cozier," in contrast with the dining room and lounge's soaring heights.

TPG carved this new lounge area (as well as a private dining room) out of a former coffee shop. Wrapped in sophisticated Italian travertine, it melds with the bar's fluted brass millwork and the walnut cladding the dining room's arches and columns "that emphasize the bold gesture of the curve," adds Kim.

There is a decidedly more modern vibe, but at the same time, says Lam Nakashiki, it remains clear that Porto Leggero is where "you're still going to have your power lunches."

*Continued on p.82 )))*





**Above:** Overlooking the street through floor-to-ceiling glass, the dining room retains the space's original brickwork.

**Left:** Enclosed in glass, a private dining space was crafted from a former coffee shop.





**Above:** Dramatic lighting, walnut touches, and greenery hanging from the ceiling help create the restaurant's updated, yet familiar, vibe.

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**MANAGEMENT AND PURCHASING  
COMPANY**

Veris Residential

**ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN FIRM**  
TPG Architecture

**INTERIOR DESIGN PROJECT TEAM**

Shay Lam, James Phillips, Antoinette  
Belson, Maggie Heenan, and Tae Joon Kim

**CONTRACTOR**

Belle Construction

**CONSULTANTS**

Belle Construction (general contractor),  
MG Engineering (MEP), Thornton  
Tomesetti (structural), and Milrose  
(expeditor/code consultant)

**CARPET**

Ege Carpets

**CASEGOODS, CHAIRS, FURNITURE, AND  
TABLES**

Afra Furniture

**FABRICS**

Carnegie Fabrics, Mayer Fabrics, and  
Robert Allen Design

**FLOOR TILE**

Nydree Flooring, Stone Source, Cambria  
Stone, and Shaw Contract

**LIGHTING**

Viso Lighting, Leebrook, and Itallamp

**WALLCOVERING**

Arte Metal x Signum and Domus

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[tpgarchitecture.com](http://tpgarchitecture.com); [portoleggero.net](http://portoleggero.net)