

# bon appétit

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## The Best Designed Restaurant of the Year Is The Grey



A dilapidated Greyhound bus terminal that had been abandoned for 12 years is not most restaurateurs' idea of promising real estate. "It was a genuine mess," admits John Morisano, who purchased the space. But "all the bones and the footprint" of this Savannah, Georgia, station were still there, he recalls, which meant one thing: It could be saved.



The result is [The Grey](#), one of the most stunning and unique restaurants to open in recent memory (and one of this year's [50 nominees](#) for the Hot 10). Over 20 months leading up to the December 2014 opening, Morisano worked with the design firm Parts & Labor and chef Mashama Bailey to painstakingly restore the space. If it looked half as good in 1938 as it does in 2015, we would hardly believe it.



Morisano pursued the project as a historic restoration, which meant that the remodel had to be approved by the city of Savannah, the state of Georgia, and, finally, the National Parks Service. No walls could be taken down, and no walls could be added. That existing footprint thus determined the layout of the restaurant. The old diner became the magical little bar at the front, with the counter now at bar-, rather than lunch-counter, height. The main space—the waiting hall—became the dining room. The kitchen was the biggest challenge: The Art Moderne design of the building meant that most of the walls are angled—there was just one straight wall in the kitchen that could be used as a hot line.





The bathrooms had been segregated: A white women's bathroom upstairs became one private-dining room, the white men's bathroom downstairs another. Rather than erasing this history of segregation, the team wanted to pay tribute to black life in Savannah. Outside what was formerly the "colored" restrooms on the first floor now hang original prints from local photographer Jerry Harris of the gospel singer James Cleveland performing at the First African Baptist Church in the mid-70s.

These prints are just a few of the artworks on display in the restaurant; Morisano commissioned pieces from Georgia artists such as Marcus Kenney and Betsy Cain. These contemporary works stand in contrast to the shiny, retro, blue-and-white facade, which itself is in contrast with the handsome interior—all soft-colored leather and rich, deep wood. It all adds up to a space that feels not trendy but timeless, gesturing toward the past while creating something truly original.