

The Better Good

By Kimberly Gomez

Silver Lake: Just days before the 2010 Sunset Junction, Good Microbrew and Grill, whose beer garden has long been the favored watering hole at the street fair, was ramping up to unveil a better “Good.”

Good’s owner/entrepreneur Ron Martinez, took a minute to talk about the 2010 transformation of Good by Karen and Guy Vidal, the creative forces behind the Design Vidal Interior Design team.

No ordinary interview, the conversation was wired with a deep respect of each other’s work that ultimately brought the three together.

“For three years I was trying get the plans together and figure out what it would look like,” said Ron. “One day I came across Karen and Guy’s name. I’d contacted them a year prior and never left info and when I found out they did Gobi down the road I said to myself they were the one.”

“My first impression of Ron was that he was kind of coy,” remembered Guy. He sent me these cryptic emails from an address where I didn’t know where it was coming from, and then we didn’t hear from him for a while.”

“He’s got this great menu and then I started to learn about his philosophy and how he came into the area with more than 500 beers it really seemed remarkable,” said Karen. “Go back 10 years and it was way ahead of the curve.

“I got it. I got him. The place was heinous because it had been a coffee shop,” laughed Karen. “It was good for what it was but it was time to get it going some place.

Long familiar with his own Midas touch, Ron Martinez's businesses and marketing prowess won him recognition at a very young age.

"10 years ago I decided to do something with my life where I was going for the future," said Martinez who remembered boldly offering to buy what was then the Crest Coffee Shop when it wasn't even listed for sale.

"At the time I couldn't get just regular beers -- there's a lot of politics and certain case minimums so a vendor said 'you should try these two micro brews,' and they didn't do too well but I loved the micro brew concept so I ordered two more and we were carrying the beers around in a plastic tray, then we were rolling 20-25 beers around in a cart, now we keep it to around 300 beers. We were the first in the industry east of La Brea to start introducing microbrews. "

In 2004, Ron bid farewell to Crest On Sunset and ushered in the Microbrew and Grill for Good.

Good quickly established its niche along the Sunset Junction hipster row with its fun family and dog friendly patio, mix of pub food and endless selections of specialty beers to satisfy the not-so-average beer drinkers.

"I'm someone who likes the idea of drinking beer but I like sweet stuff and had already tried Good's beers with all kinds of unique flavors," said Guy.

"The beer was the star and if you don't know what that means but you are interested in beers you have to come here," said Karen.

In the competitive field of restaurants and bars, Martinez was willing to allow "Good," to evolve into its full potential and for years had been thinking of a new look.

“It was the third remodeling and biggest and it was extremely important for me to have a designer that knew where I was coming from and transform what I had in my mind.”

Enter Design Vidal: Karen Vidal’s passion for restoring and remodeling homes with historic and classic architecture has enabled her to become the “designer of choice“ in Silver Lake, Los Feliz and surrounding areas from Monrovia to Bel Air and Santa Monica.

“I was actually working with a pretty well-known designer and he couldn’t get it together,” recalled Ron. “It was like I would tell him something and he would come up with something completely different. But because Karen is from the neighborhood she knows the customer.”

“The biggest enhancement is it finally has a bar,” said Karen. “Ron’s launched many artisanal brands and has a loyal following which was very visionary. It’s what really makes it why you want to go there. For me it was about making it comfortable, masculine, and a place that you would feel like you want to go and hang out.”

With the go-ahead from Ron, who jokingly told her he wanted to pull away “bury and cremate it,” from the Crest Coffee Shop past, Karen applied her own romantic view of what that ‘hang out’ would be.

Karen was lured in by vintage images of bars, restaurants and dazzling clubs.

“I was pulling black and white photos in Havana, Cuba in the heyday. I wanted it to be comfortable and polished and still have some soul. Not too hipster, the goal was to keep those regulars and attract others. I wanted it to look polished but didn’t want to put anyone off.”

And though Ron had been formulating the remodel for years, it took a strong visual example to make the call.

“As soon as he saw the three- point perspective he said ‘let’s go.’ It kind of took that extra little bit.”

As a business, it was important for Ron not to shut down during the remodel. “Everything was built off-site and choreographed so when it came to the install for such a major transformation it only closed a total four days. And this was with walls being built and the entire women’s room remodeled,” said Karen.

For the bar top, Karen fought for wood with a comfortable edge that enriches with age and Ron contracted a professional bar company to install the state of the art tap system giving a colorful active display of what’s offered. Tin ceiling panels reflect early 20th century and the walls are primed stenciling.

Demo’ing a service station and defining the space with a new dividing wall added sophistication to the dining room layout that now seats 82, and 14 in the bar. Muted tones and darker old-fashioned wood furniture will balance flat screens set high on the walls to view multiple sporting events.

“The loyal customers will still feel welcome. Ron wanted the transformation but it’s very understated with a beautiful pebble floor and only a hint of strong color down the hallway. We’re still working on the dining room -- we didn’t want to overdo the room you can always add but harder to take away. And we are working on the exterior colors. From the outside it looks the same, you gotta get people in here to experience it,” said Karen.

“Good evolved this way which was good for the business. It wasn’t a sudden change,” said Ron of Good Micro Brew and Grill having found itself at the pulse of

hip Silver Lake's Sunset Junction district. "The neighborhood started to change in the same direction and this is the final act. It couldn't have been a better name."

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