



BOILER NINE

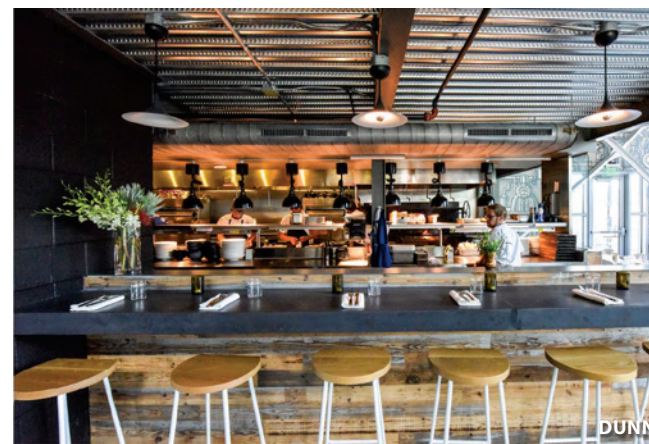
By Claudia Alarcon
Photography by Casey Dunn and
courtesy of Boiler Nine

Long-time Austin residents are more than familiar with the Seaholm Power Plant. The iconic Art Deco-style building on the shores of Lady Bird Lake was commissioned in 1948 to meet the city's growing demand for electric power. Designed by the engineering firm Burns & McDonnell, the plant was constructed in two phases, and originally included a turbine generator building, a water intake structure and an oil heating building. The facility, called "Power Plant No. 2," served as the sole source of electric power for Austin from 1950 to 1959, and was renamed posthumously for Walter E. Seaholm, a prominent figure in the administration of Austin's municipal utilities, in 1960.

Eventually, demand outpaced the power that the plant could generate, even with all five boilers running. Seaholm stopped providing power to the city in 1989, but remained open as a training facility until it closed permanently in 1996. In the ear-

ly 2000s, the City of Austin revealed plans for its redevelopment into a mixed use space including residential, retail and office. STG Design, a firm with ample experience in sustainable design, adaptive reuse and historic preservation, took on the challenging project, transforming the massive structure into a modern Austin landmark.

The STG team converted the interior of the turbine generator into private office spaces, with a stunning 10,000+-square-foot, four-story restaurant space on the west end of the building. Boiler Nine Bar + Grill is a casual space that gives a nod to what the power plant once was, featuring three distinct concepts: Boiler Nine Bar + Grill, a restaurant highlighting an open kitchen with a wood-fired grill; Deck Nine Observatory Bar, a rooftop bar with views of the city and surrounding hills; and The Boiler Room, a subterranean drinking den on the lowest level, near the original boiler room. The



concept from the successful La Corsha Hospitality Group is the only public use space located inside the former plant.

The idea was to preserve as much of the historic building as possible, respecting its former purpose while coaxing a new one. "The Seaholm is a very special and unique spot for Austin but very few of us have visited it," says Scott Walker, Vice President of Operations at La Corsha Hospitality Group. "We wanted to create a friendly, comfortable gathering place for the local neighborhood, Downtown Austin or just anyone who wants to check out the unique architecture of the plaza. The space did not lend itself to a restaurant environment easily — thick cement columns, existing steel support braces and years of history as an industrial facility worked against us at times. We did go through a few iterations with various parts of the property. The basement (The Boiler Room) and the deck (Deck Nine Observatory Bar) had a very different feel than the main level (Boiler Nine Bar + Grill). It was an opportunity to take each space and hone the concept to fit the natural environment." The enormous stacks, now painted white and lit in bright colors at night, stand just outside in the courtyard as iconic remnants of Austin's past. The project took approximately three years to complete once the concept was refined.

On the ground level, Boiler Nine welcomes guests into a bright, inviting environment. To counter the stark interiors, STG designed aluminum-framed, floor-to-ceiling glass walls that allow ample sunlight to shine throughout the space. Concrete floors and walls in a light gray and details in steel continue the industrial feel, and a whimsical mural depicting the plant's inner works lightens the mood. Tables in blonde wood tones and modern plastic chairs in white warm up the room. The team added both a staircase and an elevator to reach the



deck and the basement, and developed each space with a suitable feel. Deck Nine is an informal covered patio with picnic tables and steel railings all around that leave the space open to enjoy views of the surrounding development, Lady Bird Lake and the western hills.

The basement, however, is another story. Accessing The Boiler Room feels like entering a New York City speakeasy — or a war bunker. Once downstairs, a right turn leads into a low lit, mysterious yet inviting space, with a main room holding an ample concrete bar and a variety of cocktail tables and booths. "The walls are six inches thick, but some columns are 44 inches square — they weren't going anywhere," says Walker. "We played with the reconfiguration of the bar itself a few times, but always came back to its current locale. I always liked the idea of when you step into the space, the bar is directly in front of you — very easy to find — but there are nooks and other areas to explore. Everyone seems to have their own unique spot that they find most comfortable to hang out." ♦

BOILER NINE

512-220-9990 | www.boilernine.com

LA CORSHA HOSPITALITY GROUP

512-472-8100 | www.lacorsha.com

STG DESIGN

512-899-3500 | www.stgdesign.com