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The Designer Behind Top Chef Izard's New Room

Posted by: Michael Arndt on June 29, 2010

Over her 10 years as vice president of design at 555 International, [Karen Herold](#) has produced interiors for nightclubs in Las Vegas for Playboy and N9NE as well as retail space for Chanel, Valentino, Armani, and the Dallas Cowboys. She's proud of every one of them, of course, but she notes that they're really the taste of her clients, especially the flashy casino venues. Now Herold says she finally has a room of her own.

Actually, the new place, a Chicago restaurant called [Girl and the Goat](#), will be identified with [Stephanie Izard](#), the 2008 winner of television's Top Chef, who'll be managing the kitchen when it opens shortly after the Fourth of July weekend. And financially and legally, Girl and the Goat belongs to [Kevin Boehm and Rob Katz](#), a duo who already own three other restaurants in Chicago. But the interior design is Herold's throughout.

"This is exactly how I wanted it," Herold says. "I wish I could buy a house right now. I would make it the Goat house. Everything I would have in my house."

Herold, a 38-year-old Dutch native, showed me around the 150-seat dining room the other evening, as workers were still installing light fixtures. It is purposely anti-Las Vegas—Izard, whose previous restaurant, Scylla, was often described as cozy, and her backers had made "no glitz" a hiring condition. But the space does have some dazzle, which I'll get to in a moment. (Sorry, no photos yet.)

Girl and the Goat is made to feel comfortably worn, lived in. It is Old World heavy and dark, from the 10-seat communal tables made of thick, weathered oak planks and lit by clear incandescent bulbs in antique glass fixtures to the back bar, which is made of 14 iron fireplace grills from the early 1900s that were sandblasted and fitted in a two-row

span. Colors are muted. The seat cushions on the steel-brushed oak chairs are so deep green they look black.

The fireplace grills, which will be backlit when everything is up and running, are one of Herold's three big statements in her design. Another is a brightly colored, boozy painting of a girl and a goat that measures 7x7 feet and commands an exterior wall. Izard (the wild-haired girl in the painting) personally commissioned Quang Hong to do the work, based on a smaller one he had done for Scylla.

The other is a pitch-black screen in the center of the room. It's what's left of the supporting wall that had bisected the 116-year-old structure. Rather than leave the exposed bricks, Herold decided to encase them with cedar boards—after setting them on fire in a big parking lot to char them and then coating them with resin. Herold says Japanese builders have used this technique for ages, though she had never done it anywhere before.

“It is very bold without being loud,” she says. “I wanted to make strong statements without being in your face about it.”

Until now, neither Herold nor [555 International](#) has had much of a profile in Chicago, though the design and custom-furniture firm has been based in the city since 1988, when it was founded by industrial designer James Geier. Herold, an interior-design graduate from the Institute of Fashion and Design in Amsterdam, hired on in 2000.

In all, Boehm and Katz have spent \$1.6 million to create Girl and the Goat. Boehm says it was well worth it. “I always expected it to be really cool and really authentic, but I didn't expect it to be sexy.”