

projects **nickel & diner**

# graphic design

## Reinventing a diner for Chinatown

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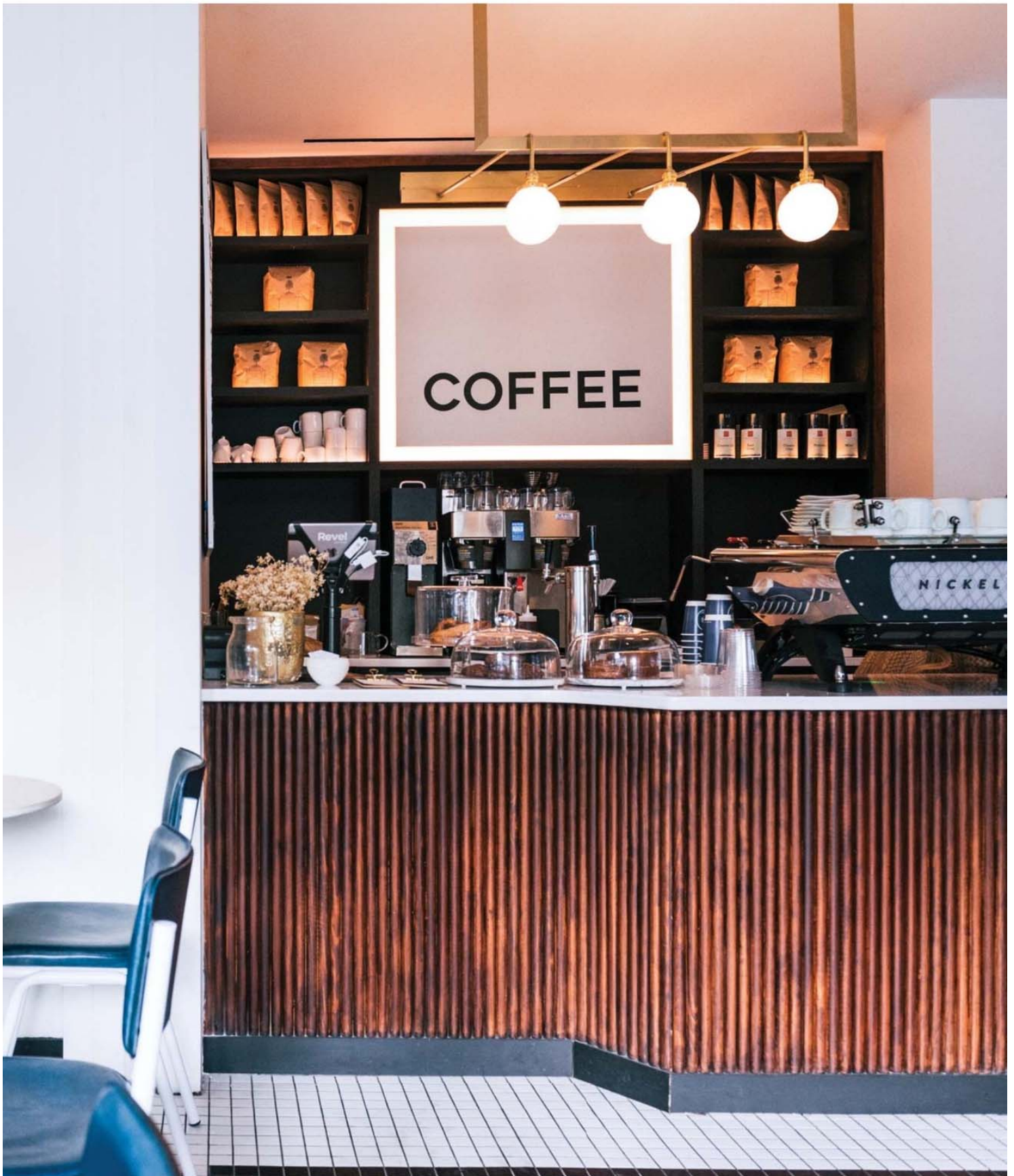


**New Yorkers of every ilk** have diner rituals: solitary morning counter coffees, convivial weekly lunches that span decades, late nights crowded into booths to soak up libations. Still, even the most storied traditions must evolve with the times. Enter Nickel & Diner, a classic American five and dime-meets-diner, reinterpreted from a modern perspective.

The challenge for New York designers William Oberlin and Larah Moravek, cofounders and principals of Dutch East Design, was updating that nostalgic standard without losing authenticity. After all, Nickel & Diner is not only a contemporary take on a classic 1920s diner (the heyday of such establishments), but it's also a culinary destination, serving elevated fresh and local cuisine. "There are certain elements of a diner that are universally understood: a pass-through counter, open kitchen, Pullman-style booths," explains Oberlin. "The trick was employing those big elements then putting our own twist on it." One example is a corridor's traditional

**1.** At Nickel & Diner in New York's Chinatown neighborhood, a walnut-clad coffee bar greets guests upon arrival, illuminated by midcentury pendants.

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wainscoting, but here, vertically laid black half rounds feature a repeating Art Deco-inspired detail: the designers painted a series of the dowels white at varying lengths.

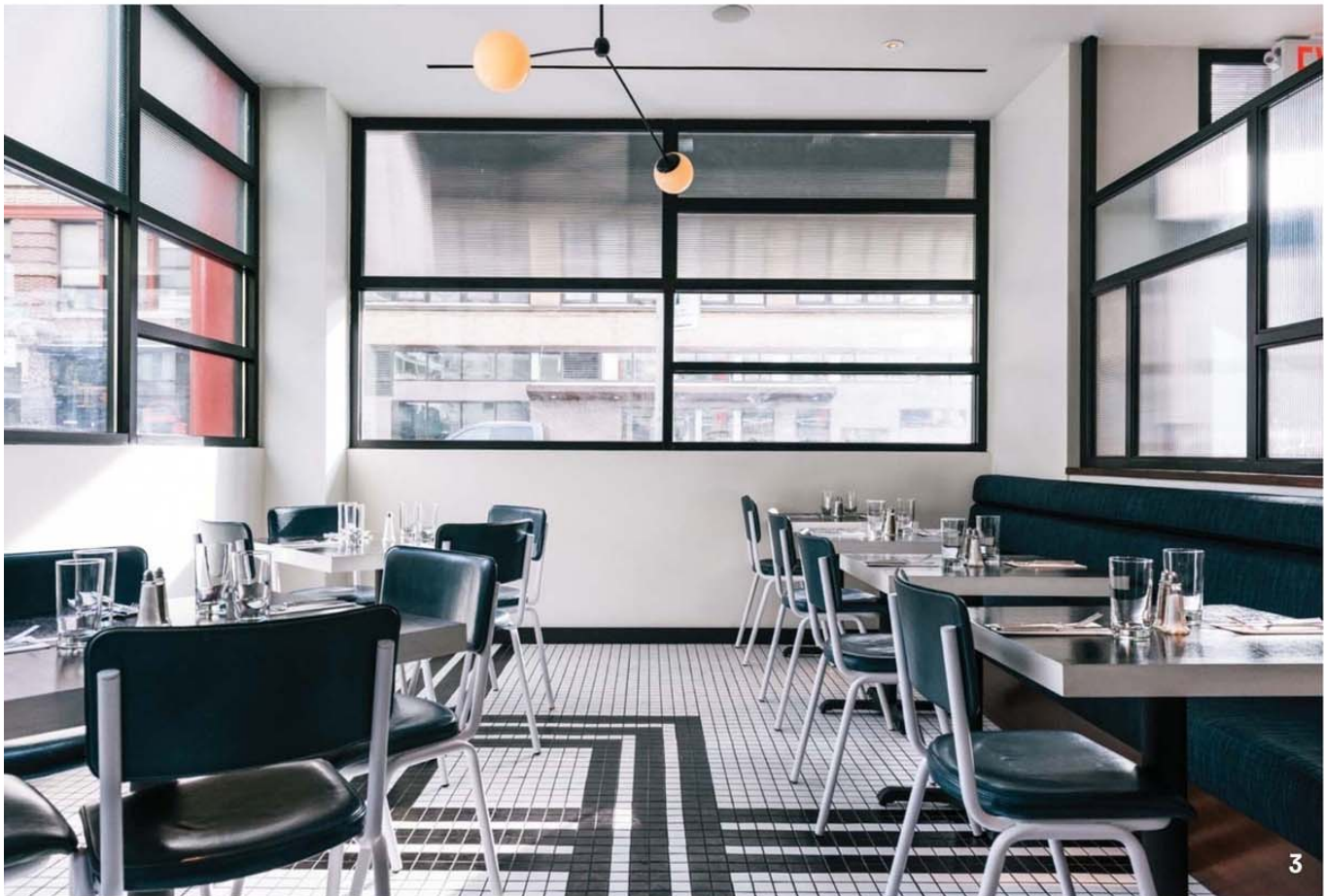
The melding of two hospitality styles wasn't the only directive to consider in the gut renovation. The designers were also asked to reference, with restraint, that Art Deco style, as well as the Chinatown location and its heritage as a former Chinese buffet. On the retro front, the team focused on geometric and graphic details everywhere from tabletops and wallcoverings to stainless steel lights over the bar, created from Shell globes—a nod to 1920s cars. Greenish-blue upholstered booths and chairs, as well as walnut wood finishes on the booths and the ribbed fronts of the coffee bar and the host stand, add a pop of color and texture to the

**2.** Tabletops feature a monochromatic graphic pattern that echoes the wallcovering, light fixture, and mirror overhead.

**3.** An intersecting black and white floor tile complements the geometric windows and ceiling pendant.



2



3

otherwise monochromatic black and white palette. "We articulated space that way," explains Moravek of the color scheme. "The main dining ceiling is matte black, whereas the coffee bar ceiling is white."

The Chinese elements are even subtler. For instance, there's a modern day Chinatown-inspired toile wallpaper wrapping the private dining room, and traditional Chinese serveware and ceramics are used for plating. It's the exterior of the building that is perhaps most pronounced. Here, the designers did little to compete with the original ornate façade

except at street level, where they dreamt up an enticing storefront for passersby, courtesy of portions of ribbed and clear glass. "We're close enough to the West Village that the Ed Hopper painting *Nighthawks* suddenly becomes relevant," says Oberlin, who notes that large windows are fairly standard for classic diners. Adds Moravek: "We thought a lot about where to place light fixtures and what you'd see from outside, so you get all this diffused light. From the street at night, the whole restaurant looks like a lantern." hd

dewr.studio; nickelanddiner.com

4. A corridor leading to the bathroom is lined by Art Deco wallcovering and half round wood dowels painted black and white.

5. Wooden coat posts flank tufted greenish-blue Pullman booths, while fixed stools are placed along the diner bar with peekaboo views of the open kitchen.



## Nickel & Diner New York

Interior Design Firm **Dutch East Design, New York** Interior Design Project Team **Fiona Sanipelli, Larah Moravek, and William Oberlin** Purchasing Firm **By client** Lighting **Jeeyong Park** Paint **Benjamin Moore** Floor **Custom by Dutch East Design**; tile from **Design & Direct Source** Storefront Window, Dining Room Tables, Mirrors, and Coat Post **Custom by Dutch East Design**; fabricated by contractor **Banquettes Custom by Dutch East Design**; fabric from **Fabricut**; fabricated by **Five Star**

### COFFEE AREA

Bar **Custom by Dutch East Design**; counter from **Silestone** Pendants **Tom Dixon** and custom by **Dutch East Design** Table **CB2** Chair **Industry West**

### DINING ROOM

Ceiling **Custom molding by Dutch East Design**; paint from **Benjamin Moore** Bar **Custom by Dutch East Design**; counter from **Silestone** Lighting **Tom Dixon** and **Allied Maker** Barstools **SASS**

### SIDE DINING ROOM

Wallcovering **Design Your Wall** Lighting **Roll & Hill** and **Atelier de Troupe** Chair **Industry West**

### CORRIDOR

Wallcovering **Design Your Wall** Wall **Custom pattern by Dutch East Design**; paint from **Benjamin Moore**