

Marketplace Changes

by Tony McReynolds & Sally Mitani



J. ADRIAN WYLE

Cafe Habana

Zeitgeist with a side of mojo

In the early 1990s, Jon Carlson and Greg Lobdell started buying up undervalued buildings in the center of Michigan's thriving smaller cities—Ann Arbor, Traverse City, Royal Oak—and turning them into restaurants. They reused as much of the original materials as they could—"so we're not just filling landfills," says Lobdell—and restored the original architecture. This green and aesthetically correct approach allows them to collect historic-preservation tax credits—and, by happy accident, tends to create environments favored by people who like to spend money downtown.

In filling those buildings, Carlson and Lobdell, whose company is called 2mission Design and Development, seem to have a direct line to the zeitgeist. Their first Ann Arbor venture was the brewpub Grizzly Peak, the second the wine-centric Vinology. (They recently sold their share of Vinology, though they still own the building.) Now they've added Cafe Habana.

The idea, says Lobdell, "is a celebration of 1920s Cuba. Art Deco was huge, and down in Cuba it fused with the existing colonial architecture." They re-created that atmosphere in the former Shalimar Cafe with crackle-glaze paint on the paneled walls, ornate crystal chandeliers, and gorgeous reproductions of Cuban poster art of the period.

Carlson and Lobdell stay pretty much out of the day-to-day running of their restaurants, which now number over a dozen: their energy goes into the initial renovation and careful choice of partners. "We have lots of partners," says Jon Carlson, "and we understand our limitations." Their partner in this restaurant (and in the Blue Truck, which is planned to open in 2008 in the old Jewel Heart space next door) is Dan Glazer, who has managed several of their restaurants.

Cafe Habana is a large and ambitious operation, open from early-morning breakfast, with a full menu of huevos rancheros and corn pancakes called *arepas*, until the mojito bar closes at 2 a.m. The menu, based on the one chefs Maggie Long and Enrique Ayala created for their much smaller Cafe Habana in Royal Oak, is not rigidly Cuban but sits easily with the Lost Generation theme. (One doesn't imagine many club owners in swanky, expat-loving 1920s Cuba were too concerned with presenting an authentic Cuban culinary experience—whatever that might mean in this famously creole part of the world.)

In a few months Carlson and Lobdell will be opening a nightclubby mojito bar in the basement. Till then, you can drink your mojito at the upstairs bar.

Dan Glazer, Greg Lobdell, and Jon Carlson celebrate 1920s Cuba (think mojitos) at Cafe Habana.

Cafe Habana, 211 East Washington, 332-6046. Mon.-Fri. 7 a.m.-2 a.m., Sat. 8 a.m.-2 a.m., Sun. 8 a.m.-10 p.m.

Lexi's Toy Box

The other Metzger legacy

When Ann Arborites think of the Metzger family, their first thoughts are likely to be of knackwurst and sauerbraten. And Crystal Metzger understands. Her dad, Robert "Bud" Metzger, owned the former Old German Restaurant, where she waited tables as a teen, and her second cousin John owns Metzger's on Zeeb Road. But to the fifty-two-year-old retired therapist, European toys—particularly the kind of finely detailed, hand-painted wooden ones she played with as a child—are every bit as much a family tradition as the restaurant business. This fall she's opened her own toy store, Lexi's Toy Box, to share that tradition with the rest of the town.

Metzger focuses on what she calls "quiet" toys—heirloom-quality playthings that power the imagination. You can see the influence of her German-born mother, Gretel—who owned the University Flower Shop in Nickels Arcade from 1975 to 1990—in toys from European companies like Vilac, Haba, and Holtzinger. An entire rack is devoted to Holtzinger's beautiful hand-painted maple animals, and there's an old-fashioned German *Kaufladen*—a child-size "market" with bins of wooden fruits and vegetables. Pint-sized customers can use their own baskets or buy a \$3.50



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Crystal Metzger, right, enlisted cousin Monika Cornelius to design a signature line of "Lexi" dolls for her new downtown toy store.