

Breaking Ground

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PROJECT PROFILE

SOUTHERN TIER BREWING, PITTSBURGH TAP ROOM AND BEER GARDEN

Ahead of the 2017 baseball season, Southern Tier Brewing opened a much-anticipated tasting room and restaurant on Pittsburgh's North Shore Drive. The opening marked the end of a frenzied, \$2 million first phase buildout of new tenant space that was accomplished in less than five months. The tight schedule was one of the more obvious challenges of the project, but the speed of construction concealed a highly-fluid and creative job site.

Southern Tier Brewing chose Pittsburgh to open its first tap room and brewing location outside its home in Lakewood, NY, located just west of Chautauqua and Jamestown. The brewer leased the roughly 6,500 square foot space on the eastern corner of North Shore Drive. A North Shore location put Southern Tier in the midst of a robust neighborhood driven by crowds attending Pirates and Steelers games. Those professional sports crowds also created scheduling goals that were inflexible. To accomplish the project and optimize the beer-selling opportunity, the project was split into two phases, separating the interior fit-out from the

outdoor beer garden.

"I came here in November of 2016 just before the project really got going but Landau and Fukui Architects had already been working on it," says Mike Puschaver, general manager for the Pittsburgh tap room. "One reason we targeted Pittsburgh, from a brand standpoint and that location in particular, was obviously the proximity to Heinz Field and PNC Park. I think we're exactly halfway between the two. The other reason is that Frank B. Fuhrer Distributing is also in Pittsburgh and we are their second biggest brand in terms of sales. We knew we already had a great following here."

Because of the tight schedule, Southern Tier chose to hire its contractor shortly after bringing the architect on board. After requesting proposals for fee and approach, and conducting interviews with a select group of general contractors, Southern Tier chose Landau Building Company to manage its construction.

Landau was joining the process at the early stages of



Southern Tier's sign was cut by Hranec Corp. and mounted on a background and frame that Jeff Bono fabricated using scrap lumber.

development, even though there was not going to be much time before construction got underway. The architect, Fukui Architects, was still in the midst of interpreting the owner's needs and making that work in a practical way. Felix Fukui believes that having a contractor involved during that stage of the project helps clarify the design.

"As a firm, we tend to respect what builders bring to the table," he says. "I like to bring builders into the mix early

because of their input. They know things and do things that we just do not."

Sharing that knowledge was especially valuable for this client. Southern Tier was a boot-strapped startup brewer that had succeeded famously and had recently been acquired by Art Brew Ventures. While Southern Tier had expanded its footprint in Lakewood, the Pittsburgh tap room was its first new construction experience. Like many inexperienced owners, Southern Tier had to come to grips with the gap between its wish list and its budget. Having the contractor and the architect at the table during the design of the space was influenced by Southern Tier's home brewery and tap room, which included both industrial and rustic spaces.

"Southern Tier has a pre-engineered metal building at its brewery, but has also added onto that with heavy timbers and a rustic feel," notes Fukui. "They wanted to reflect that feel, saying that it was what people knew of them. The Pittsburgh tap room was going into a steel-framed office building. Our idea was to marry that rustic, heavy-timber vocabulary with the structural steel. The materials tend to be handled very simply and honestly to reflect that. And then we tried to have as much fun as we could with those materials."

Because the tap room was also going to include brewing



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production in about one-third the space, there were related design considerations. Glass walls separated the dining room from the brewery but they were over budget. Hollow metal storefront was substituted without detracting from the appearance.

One of the biggest challenges for Phase One, the interior portion, was incorporating the larger-than-expected German brewing equipment in the limited space. The second-floor mezzanine, originally planned to be storage and office space, was re-programmed to accommodate the brewing equipment that would not fit on the first floor. Fukui studied the brewing process and redesigned the system using 3-D design models. The vertical hops mill was relocated to the new mezzanine to create space on the ground floor. Landau designed, fabricated, and installed steel barn doors and a crane hoist on the beer garden-side of the second floor so that brewing materials, such as the hops, can be lifted straight to the mezzanine.

That sort of seat-of-the-pants problem solving became the norm for the Southern Tier project. More often than not, key elements of the project that the owner requested early in the design process exceeded the budget once details were worked out. Faced with little time, the project team could not go through the typical

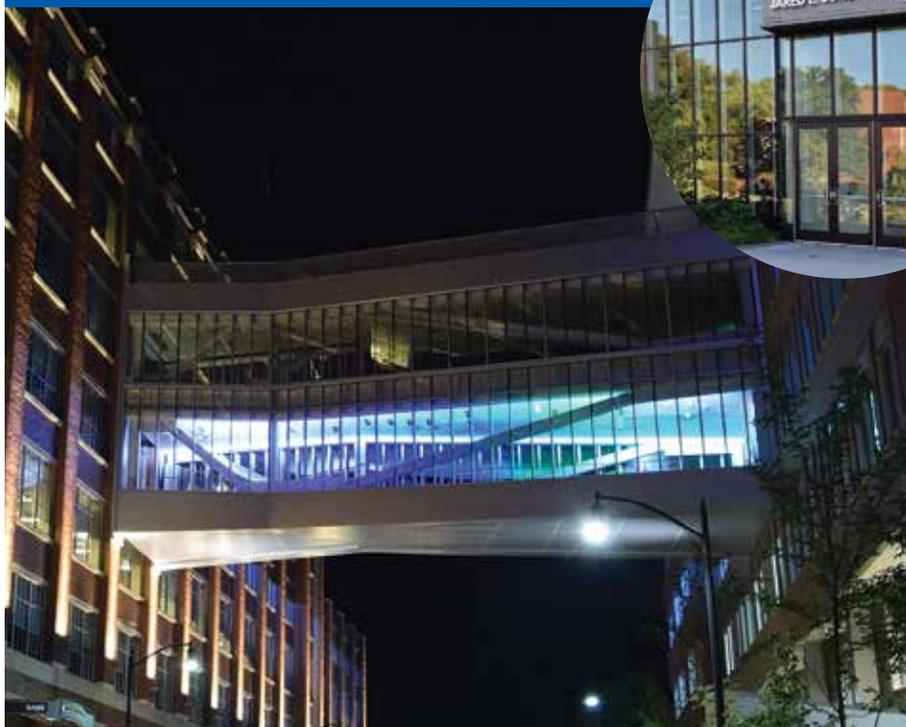


Staves from used Southern Tier barrels were woven to create wainscoting.

request for information (RFI) and submittal protocols. Solving problems became a matter of Landau's superintendent, Jeff Bono, imagining a solution in the field and bouncing it off Fukui and his team. Bono is a skilled carpenter and his ideas were creative and practical. Fukui learned he could trust Bono, whether or not there was an approved submittal in advance.

"There was some of that, obviously at the right time,"

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recalls Fukui. “We were pressed for time. We were all told to fish or cut bait, whatever the issue was. Sometimes we held our position too. Ultimately, we respected what Landau added and they respected our position. I didn’t get the sense that Landau was suggesting things just to cut corners but they were trying to get done what we had in mind. They wanted to do things the right way and some of their solutions were actually more difficult.”

“Felix was awesome to work with. To be honest with you, everyone from Landau to the architect to the owner were very collaborative,” Bono says. “The paper chased the job; the job didn’t chase the paper.”

This freedom unleashed dozens of solutions that were worked out in the field, in real time. Recalling the days when superintendents and architects huddled around sheets of bum wad, hashing out details and approaches to field problems, the Southern Tier team took on each situation as a solution waiting to happen. Field issues sparked ideas rather than RFIs.

One of the most difficult of the problems faced during the construction was the main bar. Fukui had a vision for the bar that blended the cold, modern look of glass and stainless steel with several variations of wood. There was a completed elevation drawing of the bar, but it was difficult to document how the varying materials, most of which were custom fabrications, would be integrated. Rather than looking for the architect to detail assemblies that were likely going to be modified in the field, Bono and his team started talking through ideas with Fukui. Bono says that Fukui warmed to the process, feeding back his own ideas as the design was adapted to something that could be fabricated within the client’s budget.

Stock timbers were purchased locally and milled to add the curves that the



architect envisioned for the wooden beam canopy over the bar. Landau used a scaffold to rack the beams and connected them with a single pipe slipped through each beam. Adding to the utility of this solution, the spoils from the beams were used to fabricate the individual tables that sit in front of the bar.

The placement of the bar required that a large piece of structural steel be added for header support to the adjacent wall. Rather than fighting the look of the 40-inch plate, a companion piece of non-structural plate was added to the wall on the opposite side of the bar. Completing the bar's finishes, stainless steel is used decoratively to hide the bar's piping and tap system components. A long live edge wooden slab is the bar surface. Aged wood panels and boards are used in the casework to create a rustic contrast to the stainless steel. And barrel staves are used decoratively, including as the vertical pieces of the shelving at each end of the bar.

Barrel staves proved to be a key design element throughout. Fukui's design emphasized the rustic elements of brewing in contrast to the cool stainless of the mashing and fermenting tanks. Southern Tier encouraged the use of the staves, which were taken from dozens of its older oak barrels from its brewery and distillery. The design called for weaving barrel staves into a herringbone pattern on wainscoting and vertical counter surfaces. Staves

were bundled to create the custom light fixtures that hang above the dining tables. Barrels were cut in half and used as lighting fixtures. The same rough, rustic treatment was used for the design of the individual and communal dining tables.

Part of the appeal of the rustic wood is the patina that the material picks up over time. Weather and heat (or fire, in the case of the barrel staves) give the wood uneven staining, which is the desirable effect. It proved difficult to match that appearance with stain for the trim that would surround or offset the natural wood. None of the wood stains were satisfactory to Bono or Fukui. Bono used a torch to seal and darken the trim, which gave the appearance of a picture frame when finished. A similar treatment was used to treat wooden covers for electrical outlets and access panels, which were originally designed as steel plates.

There were other field changes that enhanced Fukui's rustic design. Cedar siding was used on an exterior panel that was to be face brick. Bono asked Phoenix Roofing to fabricate aluminum panels on plywood to replace more expensive insulated panels for trim. Balancing the look on the interior, the building's exposed structural steel was clear-coated, painted black and left raw, depending on the design.

"Jeff and his team did a lot of improvising on the space. They were magicians," Puschaver says. "From an aesthetic standpoint they hit the



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Phase two of the project was the outdoor beer garden.

nail on the head.”

“The challenge was meeting the owner’s budget and maintaining the integrity of design at the same time,” says Bono.

Phase one started in July 2016 and was completed in December 2016. During the football season of 2016, Landau installed a temporary bar so that Southern Tier could serve its beer to Steelers fans. Phase Two kicked off in February 2017 and was completed in June 2017.

Although the outdoor beer garden was new space, building it wasn’t without its challenges. The first of those was in the ground.

“All the infrastructure for the lower end of the Downtown goes through that parking lot, so we were not allowed to do deep foundations,” says Bono. “There were electrical, phone and data lines within 18 inches of that canopy foundation. We contracted ground-penetrating radar to document where the utilities were during the first phase. What we built was basically a floating slab. Some of the

encumbrances were only 17 inches below the surface. We did a lot of digging and a lot of worrying while we were digging.”

The popularity of the Southern Tier location has proven the decision to locate in Pittsburgh was well-founded. Even the delay between the two phases had a happy result.

“Everyone’s goal was to get both the interior and exterior open at the same time,” recalls Puschaver. “That obviously didn’t happen, but from an operations standpoint, it was a blessing in disguise. Whenever you open a new location you really don’t know what you’re going to be faced with, so opening in two phases gave us a chance to adapt.”

In other circumstances, the Southern Tier Tap Room could have been a recipe for disaster. An inexperienced owner, asking for a design that isn’t tested in the marketplace, brought an architect and contractor together without much documentation to protect budget or schedule. Had any of the parties become uncommunicative or self-serving, it’s not hard to envision how badly the story could have ended. Fukui had recommended Landau Building Company as one of the contractors to compete for the job, but there existed no repeat client relationship between the three parties. Even without that history, trust developed and the team worked to reach the finish line.

“Southern Tier got the space they wanted, on budget and better than they probably expected,” concludes Fukui. “On most jobs you’re picking things from a catalog. On this project we had the opportunity to create things that won’t be in another project.”

“That’s why I say the relationship with Felix was awesome,” says Bono. “Felix was flexible on his design to give the owner the look that they wanted, but that they could not afford. It was an awesome project to work on.” **BC**

PROJECT TEAM

Landau Building Company.....	General Contractor
Southern Tier Brewing	Owner
Fukui Architects	Architect
Ruthrauff Sauer	Plumbing/Process Piping
Hranec Corporation	HVAC
M & J Electric.....	Electrical
Courtman Painting	Painting
Caseworks Inc.	Bar Casework
Phoenix Roofing Inc.	Roofing/Siding