

TEXAS ARCHITECT

ARCHITECTURE INTERIORS PLANNING DESIGN

JANUARY FEBRUARY 1991

FOUR DOLLARS





Above: The entry facade of the West Lynn Cafe is sheathed in gray panels of Pyrok, a concrete-based material; the panel junctions are marked with white ceramic road-divider buttons.

Right: Painted particle-board cutouts, nailed to the bottom chord of the cafe's sloping roof trusses, orient the room to the front wall's tall windows.



Neighborhood Service

West Lynn Cafe, Austin

WHAT IS NOW the 2,500-square-foot West Lynn Cafe in Austin started as a service station in Clarksville, a racially and economically mixed neighborhood west of Austin's downtown. The low-key ambience cherished by long-time Austinites still thrives in the area, despite the proximity of several of the city's best-known upscale eateries. The new cafe's proprietors—who also own a '70s-vintage vegetarian diner north of the University of Texas campus—wanted both to capitalize on a desirable location and to preserve that neighborhood feeling.

Architects Mell Lawrence and Paul Lamb wanted to maintain the existing building's simple form while increasing its interior volume. Their task, they say, was to "create a sense of theater" for diners and for pedestrians.

The architects converted the former gas station building (at the back half of the site) to kitchen and service space for the new restaurant; its white porcelain-on-metal exterior panels were left intact. On the street side, the architects added a double-height volume as a dining-room; they sheathed the addition in panels of Pyrok (a smooth, concrete-based material) screwed straightforwardly to the underlying studs and following the rhythm established by the gas station's exterior. They marked the panel junctions with ceramic road-divider buttons, and they used galvanized metal as column-like corner protectors and for a cornice-like cap.

The street elevation features tall windows in white frames; the set-back entry is reached by a wheelchair ramp and curved steps with serpentine steel handrails. Both windows and entry are capped by spindly awnings in wood and galvanized metal; these provide only minimal shade but they establish a strong visual connection to a nearby landmark radio tower, as well as a continuation of the ceiling plane of the interior.

The interior, a simple volume with cream-colored gypsum-board walls and a concrete floor, is dominated by the light from the window wall. The room's roof is held up by gang-nailed trusses whose bottom chords slope upward from the back wall to the front. To emphasize the connection of the room to the street, the architects elaborated this truss with fiberboard cutouts painted in warm colors in a quilt-like pattern; this jangles those who expect a continuation of the exterior's low-tech edginess; others find it complementary.

The jury praised the project's lively use of low-cost materials and its meshing of indoor and outdoor spaces; they added, however, that a planned pergola and outdoor tables were needed to establish a firmer street edge.

PROJECT *West Lynn Cafe, Austin*

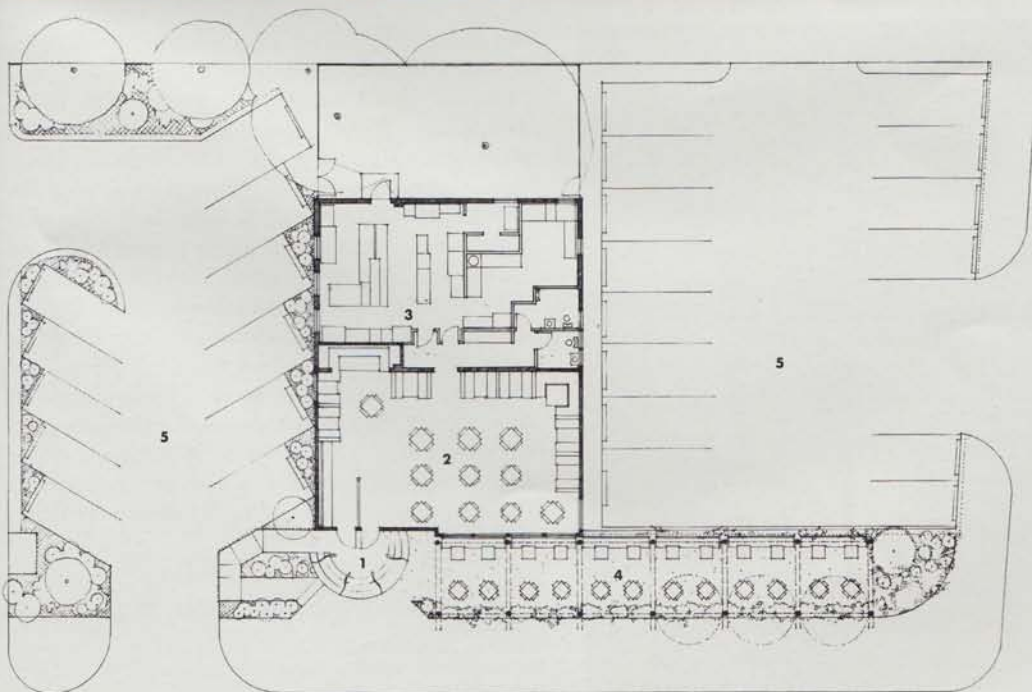
ARCHITECT *Mell Lawrence, Architect, and Paul Lamb, Architect, joint venture (Mell Lawrence/Paul Lamb, F. Chris Wise, and Steven Dvorak)*

CLIENT *Myriad Foods, Inc. (Cameron Alexander, John Silberberg, and Anne Daniels)*

CONTRACTOR *Mart Austin*

CONSULTANTS *Jerry Fleming (mechanical), Jaster Quintanilla (structural)*

PHOTOGRAPHER *R. Greg Hursley, Inc.*



Paul Lamb and Mell Lawrence tried to mediate between a low-key neighborhood, a nearby row of trendy restaurants, and such industrial influences as the site's existing gas station and a looming radio transmission tower.

- KEY TO PLAN**
 1 ENTRY
 2 DINING AREA
 3 KITCHEN
 4 PARKING
 5 FUTURE OUTDOOR SEATING