Coming Up Orchids

By Anna Maria Stephens | Photo: Darren Bradley | November 20, 2015

San Diego's annual feting of the best local architecture has upped the ante. October's Orchids & Onic awards show sold every last ticket—in advance, no less. It's just another sign that the city's design scene is on the rise. More proof? This year's winning entries. Ranging from a welcoming port of entry San Ysidro to a newish noodle bar in North Park, they're laudable on many levels. We get the behind-the-scenes story from two of the O&O jurors, architect Gordon Carrier and interior designer James Denton.

![Image](image_url)

**BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY**

The Quarryard, made of shipping containers, was dreamt up by NewSchool of Architecture alumni.

**KETTNER EXCHANGE**

It's already a crowd favorite for its creative all-American menu and sexy vibe. Now the Little Italy restaurant has won top architecture marks for its stylish design. "It feels like an eyeful of detail," says Carrier, who toured the nominees with fellow jurors. Designed by S.D.'s Bluemood Architecture, the two-story Kettner Exchange features a display kitchen, striking architectural elements and an extroverted attitude. "It's a light machine during the day and a beacon at night, lit up to the street," says Carrier, who was also impressed by the restaurant's series of scaled, intimate spaces. "They're so comfortable and interesting and inspired," he adds. "They really did a brilliant job."

The Detail: "The large sculptural element in the middle of the space isn't just beautiful to look at," says Carrier. "It's a deflector of natural light and unites the two-volume space."
SAN YSIDRO LAND PORT OF ENTRY
A multiphase project is set to bring the busiest land crossing in the Western Hemisphere up to par, with a complete overhaul that includes everything from lanes and inspection booths to administrative buildings. Designed by Miller Hull and expected to achieve LEED Platinum certification, the first phase has already won raves. “It’s very well-executed in detailing and materials,” says Carrier. “It’s articulated in a scale that makes a large facility feel inviting.”
The Detail “The freshness of the blue facade has a welcoming attitude about it; that’s what the border crossing is symbolically about.”

SOFIA LOFTS
Multifuse and multigenerational, Golden Hill’s Sofia Lofts by Nakhshab Development & Design was a popular pick. “It’s a beautiful mix of scale, massing and contrasts,” says Carrier. “This project was really unexpected,” adds Denton. “It has such smart concepts, like a pebblestone surface that serves as both driveway and courtyard, that encourage community and interaction with neighbors.”
The Detail “It’s very site-specific,” says Denton. “Windows frame the Coronado Bridge or other viewpoints of San Diego.”

THE PATIO
The Patio in Mission Hills definitely showcases its star attraction: a glass-encased cheese cave right in the middle of the restaurant. “This property was a vacant eyesore for a long time,” says Denton. “And now they’ve not only improved the local environment, but they’ve brought a phenomenal new service to the community.”
The Detail Aside from the cheese, check out the succulent wall and the namesake happening patio.

QUARYARD
The brainchild of a group of NowSchool of Architecture students, Quaryard turned an abandoned downtown lot into a bustling social hub with a cluster of shipping containers. “It has almost become a public park for the neighborhood,” says Denton. “In urban areas, you want to create density and a feel of community and excitement rather than pockets of void spaces. Quaryard fulfills so many functions.” Plus it looks really cool.
The Detail “It may be temporary—and really, the whole place could be dismantled in a few days—but Quaryard feels like it’s always been there. There’s everything from a dog park to food trucks and a stage,” says Denton.

UNDERBELLY
Part of Jonathan Segal’s much-ballyhooed North Parker, this second location of Underbelly plays well with the minimalist architecture. “A lot of times tenants just do their own thing,” explains Denton. “But Underbelly fits in so well with the modern-style building.” Designed by Paul Basile Studio, the hip noodle eatery also carries over subtle design elements—like the use of subway tile—from the original.
The Detail “The superclean lines have an organic touch that plays off the geometry of the space and building,” says Denton.