



THE ROOF IS ON FIRE

DOWNTOWN'S NEWEST BAR CREATES A SKY-HIGH EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER IN FORT LAUDERDALE

BY ALYSSA FISHER

Tim Petrillo wanted Rooftop to be more than its view. Its location is prime—in the heart of downtown Fort Lauderdale, surrounded by the city's skyline—but Petrillo didn't want to rest on the scenic backdrop.

If he were to put up curtains around the outdoor bar, would there still be a line snaking around the corner?

"That's how we approached it," says Petrillo, co-founder and CEO of The Restaurant People. "When you take the curtains down, [the view] becomes an added benefit."

Inside the elevator at 1 W. Las Olas Blvd., he presses "R," sending a group up seven floors to the new bar in the sky, a first for Fort Lauderdale. The doors open to a lush garden, the green foliage popping amid the neutral lounge decor. It's laid-back and trendy, evincing bigger-city vibes, with several nooks for seating.

"Sometimes you're not turned to the view, so we have to make sure what you're looking at is great. Here," he says, gesturing to a wooden bench in a corner of the 5,000 square-foot space, "you're sitting under a tree on the roof."

Under a vine-draped trellis, the bar features an ever-changing menu of craft cocktails. A cocktail cart replaces traditional bottle service, offering patrons for a few hours their own bartender. Light bites were a must for Petrillo—his company is responsible for upscale favorites YOLO, Boatyard and S3—but there wasn't enough space for a kitchen. However, there was room downstairs.

The first floor was converted into TRP, a "black box theater for culinary," Petrillo explains, that operates both with and separately from Rooftop. It will create snacks (also from a rotating menu) for the lounge above and act as a corporate kitchen while remaining a blank canvas for various culinary events. Petrillo says he pictures "pop-up" opportunities such as cooking and mixology classes, charity parties and special, somewhat-themed dinners. Eventually, an old-style movie marquee will hang outside, flashing "Now Tasting" above the upcoming event.

Back in the elevator, Petrillo admits that while Rooftop has been a fun venture two years in the making, it came with its share of trials and errors, including creating a code-approved system to install a fire table (flames are common in The Restaurant People's repertoire).

"From operations ... think about it, everything has to come up through these elevators. Every day when you're backing up your bars and your products, you're going down seven flights to get anything."

It all goes back to creating an experience, which Petrillo notes is becoming more of a focus in Fort Lauderdale.

"I think the city is maturing, and experiences are becoming more refined," he says. "People know more about food and beverage than ever before. We wanted to make sure that we gave them something special, and I think we did."