



CREATIVITY

DESIGN AND DINE

In San Francisco, hub of great food and great design, Josh Chen, principal of Chen Design Associates, has partnered with a chef on a new kind of creative business.

If ever there were a place where the paths of design and food intersect, it would be San Francisco.

The city is home to a vibrant visual culture, where the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and SFMOMA regularly showcase significant design works. You can't swing a cat in San Francisco without hitting an award-winning creative agency. Schools like Academy of Art University turn out top talent.

As for the Bay Area's food culture, forget about it. There's Chez Panisse, Betelnut, Boulevard and Gary Danko, to name a few. San Francisco has arguably done more to advance American cuisine than any other city.

"San Francisco is the perfect place in the universe for the intersection of food and design—it feels like it's a hotbed for anything creative," says design firm owner Josh Chen. "And this is the ideal environment that supports collaboration, doing new things with different people."

Chen's ongoing partnership with renowned pastry chef William Werner is a case in point. The two are collaborating on an unusual creative start-up, an umbrella business called Outfit Generic that aims to be an incubator for food and hospitality brands. Outfit Generic's first big project opened in June: Called Craftsman and Wolves, this impeccably designed



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name *Craftsman and Wolves* (above) is a conjunction of two ideas: the handcrafted nature of Werner's beautiful pastries and cakes, and the cutthroat nature of running a business in a competitive market. *Craftsman and Wolves*' signature item, the *Cube Cake*, comes boxed in Chen's beautifully designed, gift-able packaging (above right).



upscale pastry shop in San Francisco's emerging Mission District is a microcosm of excellent food and outstanding design.

Getting to that opening, however, required more than paper and ink, sugar and flour. Chen and Werner survived the demise of a previous business venture, and vowed that the do-over would be done right.

TELLING TALES

If you were paying attention to the design annuals in late 2010 and early 2011, you couldn't have missed the award-winning work Chen Design Associates (www.chendesign.com) created for Werner's start-up Tell Tale Preserve Co. The identity embodied Chen's and Werner's shared attention to detail, with gorgeous letterpress printing, intricate die-cuts, rubber stamping, tea-stained paper and other embellishments—all of which contained simple and beautiful food.

Tell Tale Preserve Co. was Werner's baby, his big launch after successful stints dishing desserts in the city's top restaurants, including the Ritz-Carlton and Quince. Werner had secured commercial kitchen space and began creating handmade preserves and baked goods for sale at a couple of farmers' markets in

San Francisco. The next step was a subscription-like program, where customers received a pretty muslin bag filled with goodies once a month. Werner's plan called for a storefront to open in May 2011.

Chen Design Associates was along for the ride. Werner had scouted a handful of SF design studios before asking CDA to create the look and feel for his vision.

"William first contacted us by e-mail, and then we met in person to feel out the vibe," Chen says. "It was an instant connection; there was something about how we approach our work, how we tap into different ways of doing things that really appealed to him. I think he has a similar approach in the way he comes up with dessert and pastry concepts."

As Werner moved toward the anticipated opening of the Tell Tale shop, things started to go south. Chen and Werner worked more closely together leading up to the launch, and Chen sensed trouble. Werner's partnership with an investor group soured. The store never opened. A portion of CDA's work went unpaid.

Still, Chen had relished the collaboration with a like-minded creative pro. And in the aftermath of Tell Tale's shut-down, he and Werner stayed in touch. When Werner decided to hit the reset button and try again for a retail store, Chen was ready to get back to work—but under different terms.

OPENING THE UMBRELLA

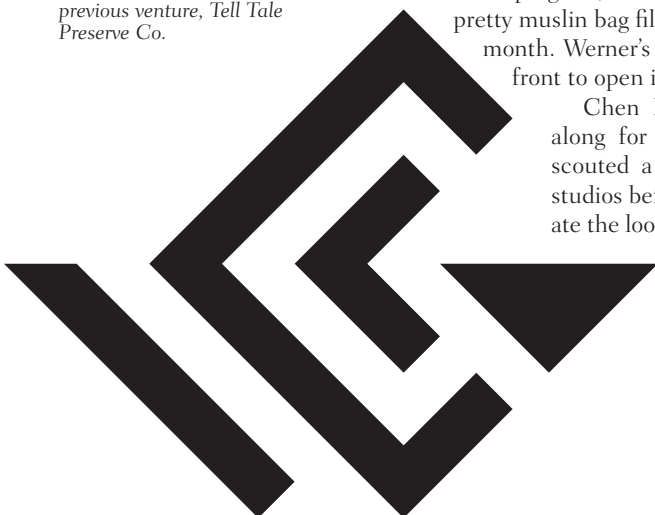
Werner envisioned a behind-the-scenes business that would launch small food brands that could include product lines, restaurants or retail shops. Outfit Generic includes five partners: Werner, two financial backers who own another upscale food business called Naivetea, a COO, and Chen as chief design officer.

Rather than contributing a financial stake to the business, Chen provides his design services in exchange for a share of the profits. CDA treats Outfit Generic like any other client, though Chen admits there's a paradox in the work: Chen has to rein in the amount of time these projects take away from paying jobs, yet his partnership in the business makes him want to do everything he can to make it succeed.

Outfit Generic and its first brand, the upscale patisserie *Craftsman and Wolves*, presented a major creative challenge for Chen and his team. A glance at the lean, spare look of the Outfit Generic website and the sleek, modern aesthetic of *Craftsman and Wolves* reveals why: The brands have completely different styles from much of CDA's work—and most specifically, from the Tell Tale identity.

TO THE POINT

Black and white, sharp angles, authoritative typography—the design elements in *Craftsman and Wolves*' identity contrast radically from Chen's work with Werner's previous venture, *Tell Tale Preserve Co.*



OUTFIT GENERIC

The 180 degree turn was deliberate, Chen says: Werner wanted a design direction that was radically different from the earlier venture. That's because the Tell Tale Preserve Co. had achieved a sort of cult status among San Francisco foodies, and anticipation was high for Werner's next move.

While Tell Tale's look was pretty, vintage-inspired and homespun, Craftsman and Wolves is stark, angular and black-and-white. The logo's CW monogram is all hard edges; the all-cap typography lends a compatible sharpness. The store design features exposed brick and duct work, with lighted display cases that resemble a modern art gallery or contemporary jewelry store more than a traditional pastry shop.

But the big creative shift challenged the design team, Chen says. "Creatively, we had to step away from Tell Tale and not do a redo of that from a brand standpoint," he says. "Part of the fun was that, visually, it couldn't be more different. We wanted it to be surprising, different, unexpected.

"On a big-picture level, it's reassuring and freeing to be able to do something entirely different," he continues. "At the same time, it was painful to get Tell Tale out of everyone's bloodstream, because that's what we were steeped in."

Werner's food is similarly well-designed, a mix of sweet and savory flavors, often in the same mouthful (like a seasonal scone of tomato, strawberry and pistachio). Like any good California chef, Werner sources local ingredients where he can, and his presentation is very stylized. A signature item is the Cube Cake—a 5-by-5-inch delicacy that's designed for gifting and sharing. With flavor combinations like chocolate, caramel and Vietnamese cinnamon, and semolina, corn nuts and espresso, the Cube Cakes are embellished with stencil patterns, which Chen and Werner both designed. Naturally, they're packaged in beautiful boxes embossed with the CW monogram.

Chen's partnership in Outfit Generic is so time-involved that he relies increasingly on the rest of his 10-person staff to handle the firm's other client work. Just a few weeks after Craftsman and Wolves opened to acclaim from Bon Appétit, GQ and Tasting Table, Chen says, "I am so, so tired right now.

"I don't regret it. It's definitely a challenge," he adds, giving props to design director Max Spector for handling so much of the agency's other work while Chen's been focused on Craftsman and Wolves.

While Outfit Generic is a labor of love for Chen, he's aware of his partnership role in the business. "This is more of a creative playground than other client projects," he says. "But I have a sense of the business needs, so it's not like I can impose my creative whims. Whatever we do has to tie back to the bottom line." **HOW**

Bryn Mooth is thrilled to write about her two great loves: design and food (not necessarily in that order).
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A TRUE SIDE BIZ

Outfit Generic is the umbrella brand conceived by pastry chef William Werner. Josh Chen is a partner in the company, his equity contribution coming in the form of dedicated design services.

FOOD MEETS DESIGN

Craftsman and Wolves is the first commercial effort from Outfit Generic. The upscale San Francisco bakery is part of the city's thriving foodie scene in an emerging neighborhood. The museum-like store interior (page 80) was created with Zack de Vito, architects.

