

# restaurant development + design

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PROJECT PROFILE

# ANTHONY'S RUNWAY 84

Supper-Club Glam, Italian-American Style



The new layout features an entrance hallway that sets the stage for the experience within via an artistic collage of modern and vintage Italian-American celebrities. Images courtesy of Craig Denis Creative

## Snapshot

**Location:** Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

**Concept:** Classic Italian-American supper club

**Size:** Approximately 5,000 square feet, plus 1,200-square-foot patio

**Seats:** 200 (dining room, bar/lounge, PDR, patio)

**Project type:** Full remodel

**Build out:** 11 months

**Average check:** \$100 per person

**Design highlights:** Upscale, residential-style decor; tufted velvet seating; elevated booths; center lounge with music stage and proscenium; photo wall of fame and Italian-American celebrity mural; multiple flooring styles; coffered walnut ceiling; walnut and burnished brass accents; warm architectural lighting; colorful, patterned carpet; indoor-outdoor bar to patio space; rich burgundy, green and gold palette; crystal chandeliers; glass-enclosed wine room

last spring, they pulled back the curtain this February on the new Runway 84 following a \$4-million-plus renovation.

By Dana Tanyeri

Remember that scene in *Goodfellas*? The single-shot, unbroken sequence in which mobster Henry Hill ushers his girlfriend, Karen, through the back door and kitchen of the Copacabana, slapping backs and greasing palms along the way to a prime table set up for them on the fly right in front of the stage? The ambiance in the lounge is elevated and electric. The lights are dim, the cocktails flowing and the staff well-versed in the polished art of VIP service.

That scene captures the vibe that the team behind Anthony's Runway 84 in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., had in mind while redesigning and repositioning the 40-year-old, classic Italian-American dining destination for a bright new future. But first, some backstory.

Anthony's Runway 84 had long been an iconic establishment beloved by regu-

lars, visiting snowbirds, celebrity athletes, entertainers and others for its old-school, Italian-American food and big-hearted, friends-and-family-style hospitality. Opened in a freestanding building near the Fort Lauderdale airport in 1982 by Anthony Bruno and his father, a former New York City restaurateur, the restaurant was authentic to its genre. But with few changes having been made over the decades to its menu — heavy on the red sauce — or to its kitschy aviation-themed interior, Runway 84, like much of its most loyal clientele, was showing its age.

The restaurant's 40th anniversary in 2022 provided impetus for reinvention. Bringing in new partners — Marc Falsetto, CEO of multiconcept firm Handcrafted Hospitality, and Pat Marzano, a previous owner and executive at Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza, the casual-dining chain founded by Bruno in 2002 and acquired by BurgerFi in 2021 — the family set out to deliver a fresh, modern Runway 84 experience. Closing the doors on the original

## Retooled for the Next 40 Years

With Falsetto as creative visionary and designer Callin Fortis, of Miami-based Bigtime Design Studios, leading the way, the project morphed from initial discussions of cosmetic renovation and refresh into a complete, down-to-the-studs remodel, including an entirely new kitchen, all new mechanicals, a new front-of-house layout, new facade and expanded outdoor dining space.

"During the pandemic, I had approached Anthony about a supper club concept that I'd been working on," Falsetto says. "I wanted to do a fine-dining, elevated Italian-American experience with a lounge and live music, a kind of nostalgic, swanky, Las Vegas-meets-New York-in-the-1960s vibe. We all thought the time was right to bring this concept to life at Anthony's. The demographics around Fort Lauderdale are changing, becoming younger, more affluent and less seasonal. We wanted to retool for the next forty years and appeal to a new generation of guests."

## ANTHONY'S RUNWAY 84



**Above:** Set in the center of the space, between dining room and bar, the small lounge includes a raised stage for nightly live music performances, low seating and inlaid wood flooring.



**Left:** The new layout features an entrance hallway that sets the stage for the experience within via an artistic collage of modern and vintage Italian-American celebrities.

While the idea was to dramatically transform Anthony's Runway 84, preserving and creatively integrating elements of the iconic original was non-negotiable. Much of the menu would remain the same, with a few updates and new additions, such as prime steaks and chops. The aviation-themed decor could be dialed down and reimagined but not abandoned. It now appears in the restaurant's stylish, vintage artwork and in a sleek new logo, which appears at the host stand, in the tiled entrance flooring, on menus, cocktail napkins and on custom tableware. Red would remain a central interior color. And hundreds of framed photographs of Italian-American celebrities, sport stars and loyal customers, amassed over 40 years, would continue to welcome guests on a Wall of Fame and help define the Runway 84 experience.

From there, however, Falsetto and Fortis took a blank-slate approach.

"Mark had this vision for a place inspired by the Copa scene in *Goodfellas*; that's how he first pitched it to me," Fortis notes. "I knew exactly what he meant. But I am also a big believer in unique brand storytelling versus just recreating a look. We needed to jump off from that inspiration and tell the Runway 84 story. I talked a lot with Anthony about what it was like growing up in New York; what it was like for him and his dad, classic New York characters, coming to South Florida in the '80s; about what Runway 84 represents as a gathering spot to generations of customers and how Anthony's brought this sort of Italian-American family-dining destination to the city. I studied a lot of classic New York and Vegas restaurants and supper clubs in the genre. The farther we

got into it, the more the project grew in scope. It didn't just need to be a beautiful space, it needed to nail the ethos of what the brand is about."

Describing the freestanding structure itself as "like something you'd see along the highway in the mid-60s headed into Vegas," Fortis says design discussions began with the bones of the building. Seen from the exterior, it includes a small tower feature on the roof, evoking an air traffic control tower. The layout inside featured a bar in the middle and a separate dining room. Interior features included a large airplane model suspended from the ceiling and windowless walls decorated to make guests feel like they were seated inside a fuselage.

"There was nothing that we didn't gut," Fortis notes. "We moved the bar, opened the space up, put in a lounge. It is a big, open space now, but it is designed as several smaller, more intimate zones. A big goal was to make sure regulars would come in and be blown away at how different it is. It couldn't just be the old Runway with a paint job."

The space itself is roughly 5,000 square feet inside, including back of house. Bringing Falsetto's vision to life had the design team challenged with squeezing the equivalent of 10 pounds into a 5-pound bag. Among his requests: the retro-style lounge with music stage and low seating; generous, elevated booths; tableside preparation requiring space for mobile cart circulation; a round centerpiece table in the dining room; a private dining room; large, comfortable bar; and more space for outdoor dining with easy indoor-outdoor flow. All of it, with a few compromises along the way, made it into the final design.

### A Zoned Approach

The restaurant's new layout features an entrance hallway. On the left is a fully covered, semi-enclosed 1,200-square-foot patio dining area. The right side of that hallway sets the stage for the experience within, featuring large art panels with a collage of modern and vintage Italian-American celebrities, including Dean Martin, Sophia Loren, Madonna, Lady Gaga, Frank Sinatra and Miami Dolphins' legendary quarterback Dan Marino (also an investor in Runway 84) against a backdrop of Little Italy. Straight ahead, at the end of the hallway and along the back of the patio, an accordion-style wall opens to the bar area, providing direct views and a flow of energy from inside out. Guests can enter the bar area from there or turn right down the Wall of Fame photo-lined corridor — all of the old photos newly retouched and reframed — leading to the host stand, beyond which a neon "Supper Club" sign

points the way to the dining room. An enclosed glass wine room also adds to the entrance visuals.

Fortis notes that while the wide, rectangular interior space is now fully open, his team relied on furnishings, materials and ceiling heights to create distinct experiences within it. "In the dining room, the centerpiece table breaks up the floor area where we have loose tables and chairs," he says. "Around that area, we elevated the floor one step up and installed perimeter booth seating. The ceiling is higher in the center and lower over those elevated booths. The approach fit what Mark was looking for in terms of that Copa-shot feel, but it also had the effect of making the room feel larger and ensuring good sightlines."

Keeping red as the dining area's central color, Fortis created a sense of opulence and comfort with tufted velvet chairs and banquettes in shades of rich burgundy, forest green and gold. Burnished brass trim and walnut millwork add elegance, while carpet — colorful, wildly patterned and selected for its '70s Vegas ballroom vibe — injects pizzazz into the room. "It's a very classic palette," he adds, "but it's twisted in a way that feels energetic, not old. We never wanted it to feel old."

While accommodating tableside preparations was a challenge, Fortis says the team leaned into that as a key ele-

ment of the overall concept. "We didn't have the luxury to create out-of-sight circulation pathways," he notes. "It was a dilemma, but we went back to study classic supper clubs and steakhouses. There, waiters and other service staff have always been part of the show, often in jackets, bow ties and big black aprons, finishing dishes tableside. They're never hidden away. We embraced that and made servers a focal point. We also put big, swinging double doors at the kitchen. Every time they open there's a glimpse of light and activity in the kitchen behind. That's part of the experience and also a subtle nod to the Copa shot."

The private dining room, named for quarterback Dan Marino, provides another front-of-house experience. Set adjacent to the main dining room, it seats 16 to 20 and can be left open as an extension of the main room or closed off for meetings and other events. The room is fully equipped with audio-visual technology for meetings or other group events. As the patio does as well, it has an 80-inch TV screen on which the nightly lounge acts can be livestreamed.

"When open, that area can feel very much a part of the dining room," Fortis notes. "There are glass-paneled doors, so if you want privacy, you can close them and still see the room outside. Or if you want total privacy, there are drapes that can be pulled over the

## Project Team

**Partners:** Marc Falsetto, Anthony Bruno, Pat Marzano

**Design, architecture:** Bigtime Design Studios

**Lighting design:** Tarrant Lighting

**Sound system design:** Funktion-One

**AV installation:** ManTech Advisors

**Foodservice consultant:** JLA Equipment Distributors



The dining room features tufted velvet chairs and elevated banquettes in burgundy and forest green. Brass trim, walnut millwork and warm architectural lighting add elegance, while patterned carpet and wallpaper add pizzazz.



doors. Then it feels like a dining room in someone's house."

That type of residential feel is what Fortis and Falsetto were after throughout the restaurant, patio included — albeit a decidedly upscale residence, one in which every opulent detail is carefully curated and woven together. Among them: a solid walnut-trimmed coffered ceiling and walnut trim throughout; imported Italian tile; custom table lamps and crystal chandeliers; custom table-side carts and tableware; vintage mirrors and deco-inspired wallcoverings; plush furnishings; classic vintage glassware; warm lighting; and countless other details large and small.

While the dining room flows directly into the lounge, flooring and furnishing changes create visual separation and a distinct lounge experience. A large inlaid wood circle was installed on the floor directly in front of the stage, where Rat Pack-style crooners and combos entertain nightly. The circle contains a small cluster of low lounge tables and chairs.

"In the stage area, we created a proscenium of staggered panels, each with lighting details," Fortis adds. "The stage itself isn't huge — about 14 feet wide — but we considered professional stage design. We knew we needed a

proscenium and that it needed to be lit. A lot of clients would balk at that as unnecessary expense, but it makes the difference between good and great."

The bar beyond is separated from the lounge by a banquette and a shallow, walnut-trimmed frame with arched corners. Flooring changes again, here to dark hardwood contrasted against a swath of intricately patterned tile around the 15-seat horseshoe-shaped bar. And whereas red features prominently in the dining room, the bar has its own moody vibe. Here, deep forest green, walnut, gold and burnished brass dominate, with red being a simple accent color in the small table lamp shades.

"The bar area is very chic and bold," Fortis notes. "And the bar itself is sort of a monolithic piece. The die is tile combined with stone, and the top and back bar are glossy stone with deep metallic veining. To soften that up a bit, we added curves to just about everything, including around the brass back-bar shelving."

Playing again with ceiling heights, the designers installed stretched black vinyl in a section directly above the bar. "It punctuates the shape and gives the dramatic verticality," Fortis says. "As you approach, you see the back bar, the bar top, the people, the light fixtures

**Runway 84's bar area is bold and moody, with a primary palette of forest green, gold and walnut. The ceiling above the bar is covered in stretched black vinyl, which reflects the custom back bar, bar top and lighting below and adds dramatic verticality to the space.**

rendered double in the ceiling. It feels like it's 25 feet tall there."

For Falsetto, the remodel has exceeded expectations — his own, in terms of his vision for an elevated, "Copa-style" supper club, but business projections, as well, with 400 to 500 covers per night now the average. He chalks that up in part to what he sees as growing consumer appetites for old-school, experiential dining that's worth getting dressed up for.

"A lot of people, especially younger guests, have never had a classic supper-club experience," Falsetto says. "They've had Caesar salad at a fast-casual restaurant, but never an authentic tableside preparation. They're really wowed. Our menu is classic, our steaks are prime, and our cocktail program is fantastic. We're bringing back the art of service, which is the exact opposite of where the industry has been heading. Add in the live music and the gorgeous design and it's really a multisensory experience. It's not just dinner, it's a night out." +