

# Clean Eats

Addressing leftovers in the hospitality industry, ZERO WASTE BISTRO sources and serves sustainability.

Words

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**WE ALL KNOW** the 'three Rs' by now: reduce, reuse, recycle. But times have changed, and post-manufacture waste strategies are no longer a maintainable solution for the crisis facing environmental stability. Designing for a circular economy, with greater consideration for sustainable resourcing, is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

At New York City's design week – officially NYCxDesign – the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York presented a fully working pop-up café intended to address an overwhelming need for smart approaches to sustainability in the hospitality industry. About a third of all food produced worldwide ends up as waste, and Finland is one of a handful of countries that's tackling the problem head on with a dedicated circular-economy programme enforced by the nation's government. It's this effort that provided the inspiration for the institute's contribution to New York's four-day design festival. 'We are simply running out of time to save our planet for future generations,' says Kaarina Gould, executive director of the Finnish Cultural Institute and the person who commissioned Finnish designers Harri Koskinen and Linda Bergroth to curate the installation.

The outcome, Zero Waste Bistro, embraced the challenge posed by a 'circular' café by demonstrating the concept in every detail of the design, from material sourcing and product placement to the food and its packaging. Bergroth's design of the temporary pavilion succeeded in drawing public interest and sparking conversation. 'Sustainability in design is often associated with a certain

sombre aesthetic,' she says, adding that her objective was 'something fun and stimulating'.

Occupying an elongated gallery space, the intimate dining installation was made entirely out of upcycled and recyclable materials. American-made choices went into the project's larger architectural elements to avoid unnecessary transport costs. Structural panels and overhead arches from ReWall were composed of mottled blue, brown and white industry-waste Tetra Pak, a packaging material often used for milk and yogurt drinks. Smaller pieces, such as furniture and tableware, were flown in from Finland. Durat, a polyester composite with a granular texture, was used to make the bistro's narrow table and serving items. Design brand Iittala manufactured a special dotted version of its Teema plate. Everything was speckled except for white lamps from Iittala and dining stools from Artek. The nearly animated surfaces of the room as a whole generated an intense experience that looked like a three-dimensional expression of white noise.

Zero Waste Bistro built on the initiative of three chefs who cofounded Helsinki-based restaurant Nolla: Luka Balac, Carlos Henriques and Albert Franch Sunyer. They source ingredients locally and steer clear of wasteful packaging. Rather than dwelling on the difficulties involved in running the kitchen of an environmentally led design project in a city like New York, the trio saw the challenge of a zero-waste restaurant as an opportunity to be creative. 'The way we work,' says Balac, 'is different to other restaurants but not necessarily harder.' »

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It's demanding on our producers and suppliers – we place constraints on production, packaging and deliveries – but we, and everybody else, must rethink the way we work in the hospitality industry, because the way restaurants operate at the moment is not viable for the future.'

Food brings people together, which is why the institute's Zero Waste Bistro was designed to trigger discussion and encourage an upsurge of imagination among and in its users. The installation was well received by design professionals, environmentalists and foodies at NYCxDesign. Gould believes that a project with a focus on sustainability – 'uncompromising, with an immersive social character, a contemporary look and a sense of fun' – came across as 'something very fresh'.

After the festival, everything from Zero Waste Bistro was reused in the name of a circular economy: panels were donated to organizations that distribute materials to artists, designers and schools; the Durat table now resides in the garden of New York's Cooper Hewitt Museum; furniture and tableware are being reused in multiple projects in various locations; and all organic food waste was composted.

Zero Waste Bistro proved that even design with a four-day life cycle can be environmentally and sustainably viable. A span the covers only a few days instead of months or seasons gave the team a chance to experiment with ideas that still seem impossible to implement on a larger scale. Bergroth is hopeful for the future, however. For the time being, she finds 'more creativity and vision in temporary projects', but doesn't see why the same spirit couldn't be integrated into a more permanent construction. ●

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