

The 1997 Winter Restaurant Guide

JANUARY 1997 \$3.50

Boston

Great Food

Healthy Dining at Some of the
Top Restaurants in Town

Birth of a Bistro

Ever Dreamed of Opening
Your Own Restaurant?
Dream On

Trial and Error

The Scandal that
Haunts Two of
America's
Greatest
Scientists

THE BATTLE FOR LEGAL SEA FOODS
FOOD FIGHT AT BOSTON'S FAVORITE FISH HOUSE



IT STARTS AS A DREAM; IT BECOMES AN OBSESSION; THEN IT RULES
YOUR LIFE. WELCOME TO THE NEWEST NEIGHBORHOOD BISTRO.

The Making of a Restaurant

BY SALLY SAMPSON



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1996

At 7 a.m., Andy Husbands is in his Boston home looking at himself in the mirror. With his seven silver rings, tongue stud, close-cropped brown hair, long sideburns, and abstract tattoos on both biceps and both shoulders, the 27-year-old former chef at East Coast Grill is a study in understated punk. • For years, Husbands has dreamed of starting his own restaurant. But he knows that bankers are conservative, homogenous creatures: They tend to lend money to people who look and think like they do. • He removes the rings—not the tongue stud. If he removes it, even for a few hours, the hole will close up. He decides to leave it in but he will take care not to open his mouth too wide. At 9:30 a.m., clad in green Converse sneakers and a short-sleeved cotton shirt tucked into black wool pants, he goes off to meet the banker.

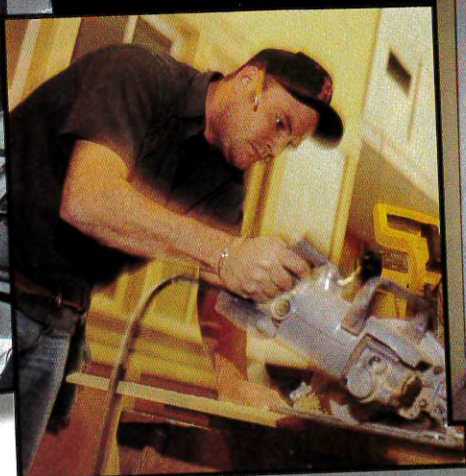
PORTRAITS BY KIMBERLY HOLCOMBE STUDIO COURTESY ELECTRONIC IMAGING CENTER CONSTRUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS BY DARLENE DEVITA



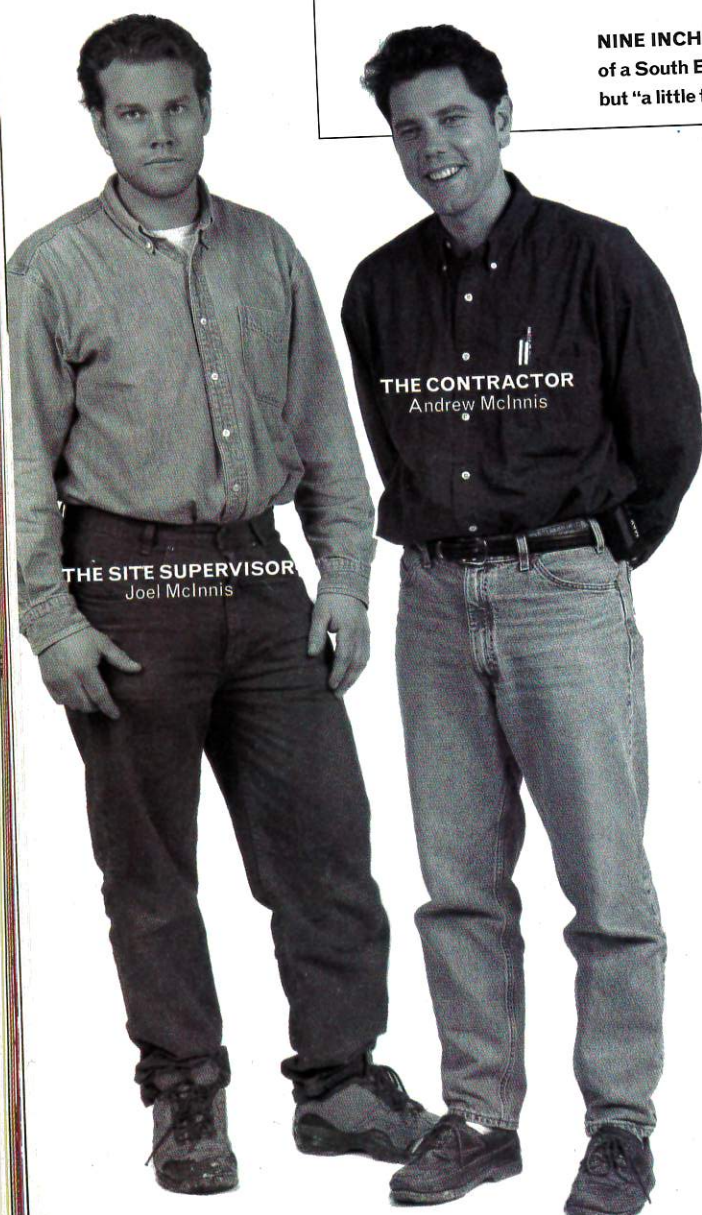
THE CONSULTANT
Michael Staub

THE DREAMER
Owner/ Chef Andy Husbands

THE PRAGMATIST
Owner/Manager Chris Hart



NINE INCH NAILS: Construction begins on the raw space. The idea is to create the ambience of a South End townhouse—with a front and back parlor divided by an arch (above and right)—but “a little flamboyant and bohemian.”



THE SITE SUPERVISOR
Joel McInnis

THE CONTRACTOR
Andrew McInnis

AUGUST 1995

Husbands's adventure—launching his own restaurant—had actually begun a decade earlier. But it was not until a year ago that he really started to take serious steps. On a crisp, clear fall-like August night, he had dinner with Chris Hart, his 27-year-old boyhood friend from Needham, at Les Zygomates, the French wine bistro in the Leather District, to discuss becoming partners in a new restaurant. “He was looking to see what my commitment level was,” recalls Chris, the former manager of Bread & Circus in Wellesley. “It was obvious to everybody that Andy’s was completely there. He was looking to see if I was on the same page.”

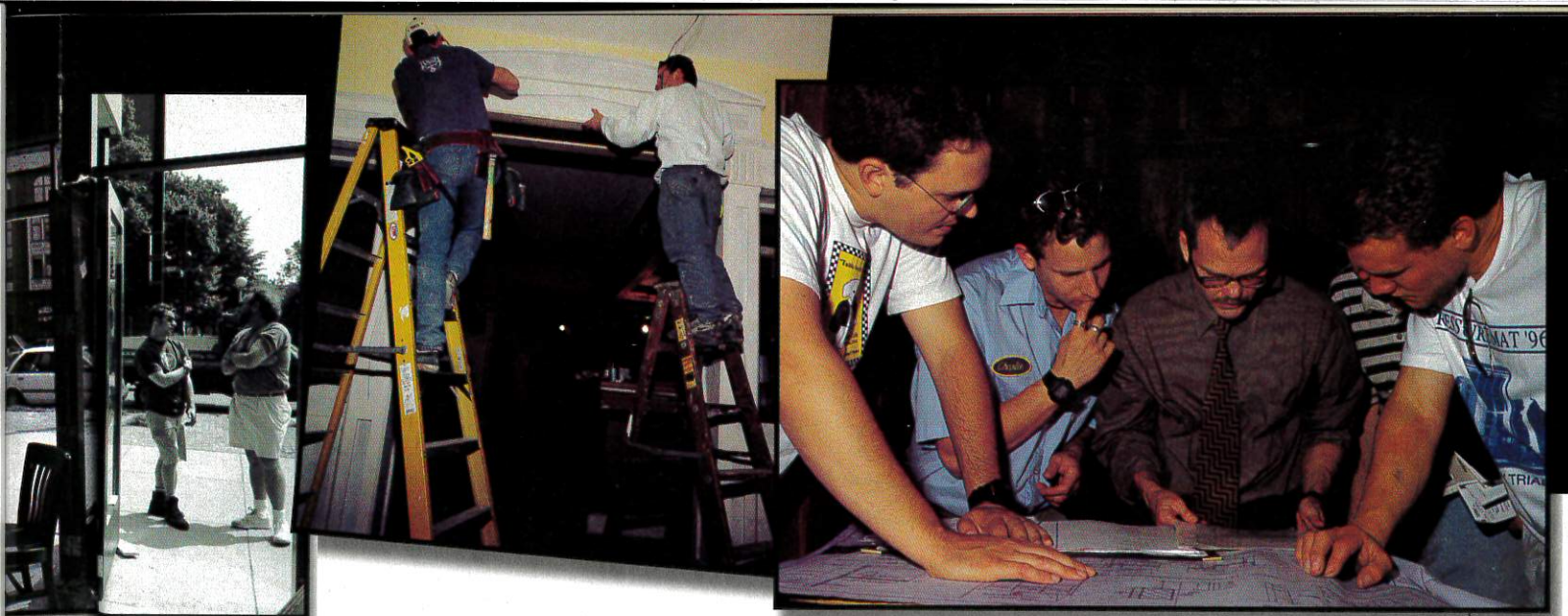
With his naturally reserved manner and gentle, straightforward way, Chris gives the impression of being the more levelheaded of the two, especially next to hyperkinetic Andy, who wears his heart and soul on his sleeve—when he’s wearing sleeves. Usually sporting clean-cut khakis, a casual polo shirt, and wire-rimmed glasses, Chris is the perfect foil to Andy’s wild creativity. Despite these physical contrasts, the two men have the same business philosophy. After four years in Bread & Circus management, Chris had learned a lot about pleasing and educating the customer. “Bread & Circus sells things that people don’t really understand and it’s great to be able to say, ‘Take home the mirin [Japanese sweet rice wine] and try it. If you don’t like it, bring it back.’ It makes people not afraid to try new things, and, as a rule, most people are not going to take advantage.”

Andy and he agree they have to convey this philosophy at their restaurant. They have to empower the wait staff to do, in his words, “whatever is needed to make customers happy.” Andy adds, “I don’t care if you don’t like a particular dish, I just want you to have something you do like.” Ordered sweetbreads but don’t like them? They’ll take it off the bill. Don’t like their roast chicken? They’ll offer you something else.

“People are honest,” says Chris, “and if I put my guard up for the few who aren’t, I’m hurting the rest.”

The two men envisioned an in-town neighborhood restaurant, 50 to 75 seats, with a knowledgeable and well-trained staff. They agreed that a wood grill was critical. A full liquor license would be a plus, but not essential. Andy would cook and Chris would run the front and handle

**BY THE TIME THEY FINISH DINNER AT LES ZYGOMATES BO
TO TAKE THE PLUNGE. EACH WILL PUT \$2,500 INTO A JO**



BOYS TO WORKMEN: Tremont Street in the South End (above, center) is an integral part of the restaurant's personality; the Monday morning meeting (far right) usually takes about an hour, says Andy, "depending on how much we goof around."

the money. They discussed smaller matters. If customers wanted to bring in their own birthday cake, they would charge a plating fee. In addition, if someone wanted to bring a bottle of wine, they'd charge for the cheapest bottle on the restaurant list. That way, they resolved, they could be good guys but also run a business that would make money.

Discussing the food was superfluous. Andy would cook the kind of food he likes to cook, which he describes as adventurous American cuisine, "using aggressively seasoned, distinct, big flavors, a little something for everyone." Although heavily influenced by Chris Schlesinger, of East Coast Grill fame, Andy's focus is not on grilling. "Mine is a little more refined," he says. "My dishes will take longer to get out and his are more homestyle."

His menu will consist of authentic regional food from many parts of the world: Miso Marinated Seared Black Cod; Crispy Buttermilk Fried Chicken with a Sticky Orange Glaze; Grilled Striploin with Thyme Jus, Roasted

Carrots, and Fontina Stuffed Truffle Scented Tater Tots; Grilled Vegetable Tagine with Cilantro Couscous and Garlicky Yogurt. "The menu is fusion," says Chris, "but the food will be true to its region." In other words, the French food will be authentically French, the Vietnamese authentically Vietnamese—no Italian-inspired Chinese food.

By the time they finish dinner at Les Zygomates, both Chris and Andy have agreed to take the plunge. Each will put \$2,500 into a joint bank account.

OCTOBER 1995

Chris and Andy attend a seminar at The Charles Hotel called "How to Open a Restaurant." Sponsored by the accounting firm of Tofias, Fleishman, Shapiro & Company, speakers include a commercial real estate broker, a publicist, a building contractor, a lawyer, and Andy's mentor, Chris Schlesinger. Everyone's message: Use Professionals.

NOVEMBER 1995

Andy quits his job at East Coast Grill to go to California for culinary inspiration. He does day stints cooking at very high-end San Francisco restaurants, including Hawthorne Lane, Rubicon, and Bizou. He and Chris stay in touch regularly via e-mail.

JANUARY 1996

A Boston food entourage—including Chris Schlesinger and Cary Wheaton (East Coast Grill), Steve

HALT, FRIEND OR FAUX: To protect the restaurant's exterior during construction, Andy and Chris hired a graffiti artist to design this temporary façade.



ATES. BOTH ANDY HUSBANDS AND CHRIS HART HAVE AGREED TO A JOINT BANK ACCOUNT.



FURNALD/GRAY

OPEN FIRE: Both Chris and Andy agree that a wood grill (above, left) will be the centerpiece of the operation. As construction continues (above, center) the space starts to come together. Andy and Chris (at right) are finally ready for opening night.



Johnson and Nick Zappia (The Blue Room), Valerie and Ihsan Gurdal (Formaggio Kitchen), and Lisa White (Last Resort)—arrives in San Francisco to attend the Fancy Food Show. Chris Schlesinger pulls Andy aside to tell him that he and partner Cary Wheaton are toying with the idea of selling the East Coast Grill. (The Blue Room was already under agreement to its current owners: Nick Zappia, Steve Johnson, and Deanna Briggs.)

By now, Andy is running out of money and his choices are limited: He can either take a job in San Francisco or return to Boston. Schlesinger also tells Andy that Daryl Settles, the owner of Bob the Chef's, is looking for partners. Leery of making the necessary one-year commitment in San Francisco, Andy decides to come home and pursue the possibilities with Bob the Chef's and East Coast Grill. After a lot of discussion and negotiation, Andy and Chris discover that neither business is exactly right for them. On the plus side, they are learning how to sell themselves.

FEBRUARY 1996

Andy and Chris hire Michael Staub, a small-business-development consultant, whom they love and trust immediately. Bearded, boyish, bespectacled, and bookish, Staub is charming and warm, but he doesn't mince words when it comes to finances. He worked on the business plans of many local hot spots—the original Olives, Providence, Chez Henri, Salamander, Flora, Les Zygomates, Rustica, Pani, and Otto (of which he is a partner).

"My job," says Staub, "is to understand the day-to-day operations and crises." He approaches it differently from many other business managers. Instead of figuring out how much money his clients can make, he figures out what they have to make based on their fixed expenses. Rent

plus bank debt should not be more than 10 percent of income. He wants to know how they intend to spend money: Flowers? Laundering tablecloths or using paper? Wood and charcoal? Advertising budget? Compiling a lot of meals? Buying an ice machine or just ice? What kind of light bulbs? Leasing a car? Valet service? Your salary? The list is endless. "I tell them what they have to do—not what they can do."

Andy and Chris also hire Richard Perlmutter, a law professor at Suffolk University and a practicing attorney for Providence, Chez Henri, Flora, Les Zygomates, and Daddy O's. Although he loves to work with start-up restaurants, he keeps his role limited. "I will not invest in a client as a matter of principle because it will impair my ability to give impartial advice. I only work with people I like and have fun with. I must have confidence in the concept. Andy is very confident and talented, and Chris is very levelheaded and has great business instincts."

At \$75 per hour for Staub and \$200 per hour for Perlmutter, every day is an investment. "You're risking money and yourself every moment on something unknown," says Chris, "and you've just got to take a dive forward."

Charlie Perkins, a commercial realtor specializing in the sale and appraisal of restaurants, tells them about a high-profile South End restaurant that is for sale. They love the space but the terms of the deal are too harsh, requiring that they bring in \$1.2 million worth of business per year just to break even. The current owner is making less than \$1 million, doesn't pay rent, and won't budge on the \$250,000 price tag and \$7,000 a month rent. Including renovations, the project will cost \$400,000. After mulling over the (Continued on page 97)

ANDY AND CHRIS ARE JUST ABOUT OUT OF MONEY, BUT ALMOST NO ONE KNOWS. ROSENBERG IS CONSIDERING INVESTING \$150,000 MORE. AS FAR AS ANDY AND CHRIS ARE CONCERNED, ROSENBERG IS AN ANGEL.

Making of

(Continued from page 56)

advice of Staub and Perlmutter, Andy and Chris agree that this deal makes it impossible to net the kind of money they need to pay their bills. They decide that for \$400,000 they could do better.

MARCH 1996

Andy and Chris meet Joe Rogers from Restaurant Brokers of America at a round-table discussion called "The Opening of a Restaurant" at Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library—which just happens to be named in honor of Chris Schlesinger's grandmother. Rogers calls several days later to tell them about an unusual deal at 647 Tremont Street. Rumor has it that the landlord, Mario Nicosia, who is known on the street as a very tough businessman, wants to build a restaurant to his own specifications, then lease the space. "Everyone," says Andy, "told us not to get involved with him, but we decided to meet him." Telling Andy not to get involved is the same thing as egging him on.

TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 1996

Andy guest-chefs at Daddy O's in an effort to publicize his forthcoming restaurant and offers a free dinner—when it actually opens—to the customer who comes up with a name. Entries include Mad Cow Café, Stinky Cheese Café, Cross Currant, Bun-nies, Rabbits, Tapestry, Café Anxt, Spiney Norman's, Lucifer's, In the Weeds, Suffrin' Succotash, The Pressure Drop, Pecker, Bronco, Huha (Husbands and Hart), Boston's Unique Restaurant, Noshery, (B.U.R.N.), Nowhere, and Somewhere. There are no winners.

TUESDAY, MAY 7, 1996

Andy and Chris meet with Nicosia, a classically handsome fiftysomething man, who launches an on-the-spot interrogation rather than an interview. "No bullshit," recalls Andy. "No, 'Hey, I know someone you know.' He said, 'Why should I do this deal with you two? What's your experience? How are you going to get publicity?'" They like his straightforward style immediately.

Then Nicosia lays out his deal. He'll build the restaurant to his specifications and lease it for \$5,000 a month. Basically, Nicosia would be the landlord, and design and own the physical restaurant itself. With a 15-year lease, less debt, and an investment of only \$75,000 to cover opening capital, furniture, and fixtures, it doesn't look like a bad deal, but there is a catch. Although Andy and Chris might be able to make money running the restaurant under these terms, when they wanted out they'd have nothing to sell. Chris suggests that Nicosia do it more tradi-

tionally, simply lease the raw space and just be the landlord.

A couple of days later, Nicosia calls to find out what they would do if he leased them the raw space as they have suggested. When they tell him their plans, he is not pleased. "I don't really like it [your ideas], but here's the deal: I'll give you 20 months free rent, then charge \$4,500 dollars a month after that, and I'll transfer my liquor license to you." If they sell the restaurant, they can include the liquor license as an asset but if they go under, it transfers back to Nicosia. Either way, it's a good deal for Andy and Chris—the liquor license alone is worth \$100,000 to \$150,000, if you can even find one to buy. Still, it's not a bad deal for Nicosia either. Since he won't have to spend money to renovate the space, he gets to keep his cash in a bank account. Eventually they all agree to the terms, and Nicosia

"Why should I do this deal with you two? What's your experience? How are you going to get publicity?" asks Mario Nicosia, their landlord-to-be.

starts to draw up the lease.

TUESDAY, MAY 21, 1996

Chris and Andy hire architect Tom Huth, who designed the first and second incarnations of East Coast Grill, both funky, color-drenched spaces, and the original Blue Room (also owned by Schlesinger at the time), which was like a colorful container with sculptural objects. Huth does a rough layout and calculates the cost of the construction. He designs, with their input, a double parlor, in keeping with the neighborhood's townhouses, with a café and bar in front and a dining room and open kitchen in back. "We wanted it to speak to the South End townhouse," Huth says, "but be a little in your face, a little flamboyant and bohemian, including some bordel- lo touches like lampshades with fringe, multi-colored lights, and big chandeliers."

They begin working on a business plan.

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 1996

Nicosia gives them a lease. They have their lawyer, Perlmutter, look it over. The five-year lease with two five-year options is exactly as promised and the negotiations go smoothly. Emphasizing that this is a neighborhood restaurant, Chris suggests the name Tremont 647 and Andy agrees.

FRIDAY, JUNE 14, 1996

Chris and Andy meet with five contractors in

five hours. Andrew McInnis is first at 9 a.m. They dislike him immediately—he looks just like a "wild and crazy guy" they hated in high school, not the dependable type you'd want to build your restaurant. In the end, however, they choose him because he doesn't act like his look-alike, and he woos them by being the most thorough bidder. Unlike the others, he brings in plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and painters to look at the space, and as a result, his bid, which is neither the lowest nor the highest, is the most accurate. He has also worked with Huth in the past. McInnis describes Chris and Andy the same way they describe him: young, eager, ambitious, honest, competent, and a team player.

MONDAY, JULY 15, 1996

A month after hiring McInnis, Andy and Chris meet with 20 neighborhood people including Tom Bryan, the head of the Pilot Block Neighborhood Association. Andy and Chris need local support for the liquor license transfer so they end up making a few concessions, such as allowing deliveries through the front door, agreeing to house garbage inside until it is brought out each night, and agreeing to have all mechanicals—vents, air ducts, smoke valves—on the roof. Everyone's concerned with parking and they debate a valet service. (A valet parking permit is still pending at press time.)

FRIDAY, JULY 26, 1996

By now, Michael Staub has finished the business plan. Meanwhile, Chris is still working 50 to 60 hours a week at Bread & Circus, and Andy is juggling cooking jobs at Delux, Casablanca, and Flora, while catering for East Coast Grill and A Mano. But now they are finally ready to start raising the \$300,000 they need to open, including working capital of \$15,000. "While we were doing the business plan," recalls Chris, "we were projecting what dollar value we could attach to each one of our potential investors, recalculating hourly how we would raise the money, trying to figure out who among the people that said they'd invest would invest—and for how much—based upon what they had offered. We came close to the necessary \$300,000 with this plan." On paper.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 1996

Steve Rosenberg, a long-time friend of the Hart family and vice president of HPR, a software company in Cambridge, agrees to invest \$50,000. Rosenberg is investing because he thinks they have a really good chance to succeed. He asks Andy and Chris to let him know if they get into money trouble. "I like them and Andy makes the best food I've ever eaten. I used to think that Chris's mom, Gloria, made the best food—until I ate Andy's food." He continues, "Gloria is a professional-level chef [she

Making of

cooked at Beacon's, in Walpole, and Cory's, in Dedham], but now she's yesterday's news." Rosenberg wants to see them do well and wants to have a place where—remember *Cheers*?—everybody knows his name. He wants a spot at the bar and preferential treatment.

When other money, in smaller denominations, begins to dribble in, they pay McInnis his first installment (\$60,000) and put deposits down on equipment: lights (\$2,000), tables and chairs (\$5,000), oven (\$3,500), mixer (\$1,500), computer (\$2,000). They contract out a new floor (\$3,000). Huth and Staub are paid regularly. Perlmutter is willing to be paid later when they have cash flow.

MONDAY, AUGUST 19, 1996

They sign the lease. So far they've raised \$100,000, one-third the amount they need to actually open the restaurant. A number of those who said they would invest have not delivered as promised.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 20, 1996

Construction begins. With financing still in its early stages, some might say that this is a reckless move, but Andy and Chris are confident that they can raise the rest of the money as they go along. "Some people," says Chris, "might not go so far and start construction before they get all the money they need."

Andy is philosophical. "It was gutsy. Okay, insane," he admits. "I was living in this land where I thought it would all be easier."

SEPTEMBER 1996

Andy and Chris are essentially out of money, but almost no one knows. Rosenberg is considering investing \$150,000 more to become part owner. They'll give him a 10 percent stake and 50 percent of the profits until he is paid back. Unlike other investors, Rosenberg would be an owner for life. His money will be secured with the assets of the restaurant, and if they sell he gets 10 percent of the proceeds. He would also be the first to collect if they go under. As far as Andy and Chris are concerned, Rosenberg is an angel. "We both really like him," says Andy. "He's excellent. He wants his money back, but he doesn't want any say. We need to come up with a bottom line for him, and our salaries need to be in proportion to it." Andy explains, "We're each going to draw \$40,000, which is a reasonable amount to make. If you take \$25,000, they know you can't live and will soon be taking money out of the register."

MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1996

The front room at Tremont 647 is blue with smoke. Andy is extremely nervous, and Andrew McInnis smokes a series of very

smelly cigars. Along with Chris, Joel McInnis (Andrew's younger brother and the site supervisor), and architect Tom Huth, they meet to go over new issues at the weekly Monday morning meeting, which takes about an hour, says Andy, "depending on how much we goof around." The walls have gotten their first coat of off-yellow paint. The bar and stove have been installed. Huth shows them three options for a glass wall. They discuss the pros and cons of each. It's a merry group, a bit like a boys' club.

When asked about who makes the final decision, Huth says, laughing, "We manipulate [pointing to himself and the McInnis brothers] and they [Andy and Chris] decide." Everybody laughs. First standing at the bar and later walking the whole space, they talk about the week's projects, discussing every item. The way the tiles have been laid near the cooler in the

By now, Andy and Chris are broke. Though they still appear confident, the whole operation will go under unless they can come up with some fast cash.

kitchen presents problems for floorwashing. Andrew suggests covering the space with waterproof mortar. As a rule, Andy and Chris are in agreement, except on rare occasions when one wants to take the easy way out. And even then, the other always shows him the error of his ways. They have never had a fight.

Together they inspect the new vestibule, which they recently changed from metal to mahogany, jumping the price from \$2,900 to \$5,500. They go over catalogs to debate the merits of different ceiling panels—the difference between inexpensive and expensive ceiling tiles is about \$4 per tile, adding up to only \$160 difference—but someone points out that every issue is the same, every choice they make adds up to a bigger bill in the end. The back-door molding is unfinished, and they need panic hardware—a push bar that opens the door in the event of an emergency. There is concern about heating in the back of the restaurant where the grill is. They need a backflow preventer for the soda tank downstairs. Huth asks Chris and Andy if they want to see the archway before it's delivered. "It's really irrelevant if we like it or not," Andy points out. "It's been built."

At 11:30 a.m., the granite top arrives, unexpectedly, for the open kitchen. Andy and Chris want to keep it because they're excited

to see some progress. Andrew and Joel McInnis want to send it back, they say, because they are not ready to have it installed and are worried about damage. Actually, there is another reason: Andy and Chris owe Andrew McInnis \$60,000 and he doesn't want any more assets installed until he is paid.

For McInnis, in fact, carrying Chris and Andy is no longer viable. By the end of the day, for all intents and purposes, he shuts down work, keeping only Joel and one other guy, the finish painter. The other workers go to different jobs. Looking back, Andy says, "They did whatever work they could."

By now, Andy and Chris are broke. Though they still appear confident, the whole operation will go under unless they can come up with some fast cash. Rosenberg has decided not to come forward with \$150,000, although he is considering investing another \$50,000. He had been tempted to put in the the larger sum, but it could mean the difference between buying a Jaguar and a BMW. Andy and Chris respect his decision.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1996

Michael Staub hosts a meeting at his Cambridge office with Andy and Chris, and Harry Aue, assistant vice president of Wainwright Bank and Trust Company.

They are applying for a bank loan to save their skins. Which brings us back to Andy and his seven silver rings. Unfortunately, removing his jewelry and baggy sweatshirt does not transform him into a banker's poster boy. He's a nervous wreck and his neck muscles are bulging with tension. Chris, on the other hand, appears to be calm and in control.

Firmly and slowly, Chris explains how they got into this situation. When they were trying to raise the \$300,000, Andy and Chris were really asking for loans more than investments. The "investor" would get a food allowance and interest on the money for the first three years. Then, after three years, he/she would get interest and principal until the loan was paid off. In addition, Andy and Chris could prepay at any time. These terms were such that a number of potential investors backed out. "They fell down like birds," says Chris. "They always came up with the least amount. If they had projected \$10,000 to \$30,000, they would end up at \$10,000 or even \$5,000 or zero. They loved the plan, but not the terms."

"If we were willing to sell equity," says Andy, "we could have had investors like mad, but we wanted to be sole owners. And Perlmutter and Staub insisted." Perlmutter's advice: "If you have to have an outside investor, get someone from another

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Aue says the bank will okay the loan if the Small Business Administration (SBA) backs it. The original intent of the SBA, a federal agency, was to help people who didn't have enough of their own money get into business. A bank goes to them when they can't get the necessary collateral from loan applicants. The SBA then guarantees about 75 percent of the loan, thereby reducing a bank's exposure. If applicants default, the bank goes after the SBA, and the SBA, says Staub, "would chase Andy and Chris for the rest of their lives."

They all agree that their chances for getting the loan are greater if they ask for \$100,000 rather than the \$150,000 they really need. Andy and Chris feel confident that they can get \$50,000 elsewhere, most likely from Rosenberg. Aue is reserved but support-

Starting construction before financing was in place was highly questionable. But Andy says, "I'm the kind of guy who doesn't regret anything."

ive and says he'll let them know within three to five days of receiving the proper paperwork. What he means, but does not say, is three to five days in government time—which can be a lot longer.

They deliver the paperwork by lunchtime.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1996

One week later for Andy and Chris, but apparently not for the SBA. They meet with Steve Rosenberg. He agrees to invest an additional \$50,000 if the bank gives them \$100,000. If the bank says no, he'll still give them \$50,000, but only after they raise \$100,000 elsewhere.

By now it seems that having started construction before financing was in place was highly questionable. But Andy defends it. "I'm the kind of guy who doesn't regret anything," he says.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 1996

Still no word from the SBA. As tension mounts, Andy is no longer the kind of guy who doesn't regret anything. "I regret putting all our eggs in one basket [that is, not pursuing more banks in the beginning]," he says, "not starting the construction."

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 1996

There is still no word from the SBA even though it has been two weeks since the application was submitted.

McInnis still has his brother, Joel, and the

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Making of

finish painter doing what little work they can: The bar is now stained. He is confident that they will get the money to finish but is being realistic and working at other job sites.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1996

Staub had predicted that they would get the nod from Aue today. Now he says they'll know on Monday. Although he is hopeful and confident, Staub suggests a nightmare fallback: Sell everything they've bought to a leasing company who will then lease it back to them—very expensive, but it could float them long enough to get the doors open.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 1996

Sitting in the rain after taping a radio show, Andy and Chris have a big talk: What if the loan doesn't come through? Options are Staub's leasing possibility or giving away equity. Someone new has just invested \$5,000. Andy goes to the restaurant to work on the mailing list. Chris goes home to work on his computer. No work is being done on the restaurant. "It's depressing," says Andy.

Although things are tense, Andy and Chris never get at each other's throats. "We know we're in this boat together," says Andy, "and we're big on communication." So they talk things out.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1996

At noon, Chris calls Harry Aue at Wainwright. After all this waiting, there is still no answer. Aue tells them they should hear sometime this week. It has been 20 days since they turned in their application.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1996

They are at the restaurant, says Andy, "putzing around, and the phone rings. Chris goes downstairs to take the call. I'm like Oh, gawd. It was Harry, and we got the loan. I thought I was going to cry."

The money will not arrive right away, but Rosenberg will now give them his \$50,000, which will allow construction to resume in earnest. In addition, they have raised another \$17,500, which will go toward deposits on tables, chairs, and equipment. They decide to hold off celebrating until the next night.

They agree to a list of priorities, including plumbing work; getting the gas turned on; installing track lighting, interior windows, and the archway between the front and back parlor; tiling the floor; and faux-painting the walls.

Asked if the walk-in refrigerators are cold, Andy answers, "Cold as hell—I was living there last week."

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1996

Halloween night. Andy dresses up as a woman: full makeup, blue bow in his red

bobbed wig, blue floral dress, black tights. Chris dresses up as a mad scientist: teased-up hair, lab jacket, thermometer in his pocket, and rubber tubing around his neck. They go to the East Coast Grill to celebrate getting the approval of the loan and drink many, many margaritas. After dinner, they go to a party in a loft at Fort Point Channel.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1996

Major hangovers. They have a meeting with a prospective investor, and when they go into the bathroom to throw cold water on their faces, Chris notices that Andy still has make-up on from last night.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 1996

They must now get down to the business of finishing the interior work, ordering the food, testing and retesting the menu items, installing the carpeting and the lights (with

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the custom-designed lampshades), and, most important, training the staff. "We're cleaning like crazy," says Andy, "waiting for the health inspector." Deliveries are arriving. Through the front door, of course.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1996

Andy and Chris meet for two and a half hours with Richard Perlmutter, Harry Aue, and the lawyer for Wainwright Bank and Trust Company to complete the business of approving the loan. "I must have signed my name at least 45 times," says Andy. "My first son will have to be named Wainwright." The bank promises to have the \$96,000 in their account by Monday.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 1996

They host the Christmas party for Operation Frontline and make assorted pizzas. The restaurant gets smokier than they would like so they decide to re-vent the pizza oven. "We are massing our troops at the border before the invasion," says Andy. Five hundred invitations have been sent out for the opening party scheduled for December 17. They're expecting more than 200 people to show up to eat pizza, steak, and momos. Andy: "We're nervous, excited, we're having every emotion you could possibly have."

The road ahead will no doubt be as rocky as the one they've just traveled. And even though they've already put in countless work hours, they are just beginning. **B**

UnMaking of

(Continued from page 57)

was waiting tables, seating guests, busing tables, making sandwiches. It was major family togetherness in a high-tech world. My mother claimed that she liked being the daytime hostess, but I wanted to replace her because of her loose definition of punctuality. I couldn't afford to fire her, though, because at least I could count on her to show up . . . eventually.

As a rule, customers are not supposed to know when anything is amiss in a restaurant. But, like children, they intuitively seem to sense the chaos and weakness of the moment. Meals are returned and checks disputed. Tempers flare and wait staff burst into tears. For sure, this will be the moment when the entire computer system will mysteriously crash, taking all credit card records with it, and every medium-rare steak will be served medium-well. The front-of-the-house staff attempts to pretend that all is just fine and aren't we happy to see you tonight? The lights are dimmed, the candles crackle, the hordes queue up. It's Saturday night, ShowTime.

Restaurants are all about Show Time.

People eat out to have a good time. When it works, running a restaurant can be as much fun as giving a great party. People are happy, they love you, they adore their dining companions, they are reminded of the great bouillabaisse they had on vacation, and they want to tell you all about it. The owner basks in the energy of making this great night happen.

There came a point for me, though, when I would look at the throng of guests having a Saturday night dinner with their friends and feel jealous. The cash register was ringing, the awards were accumulating, and the customers were phoning in for reservations. But I longed to be going out for a simple dinner with my friends.

When operating a restaurant stops being fun, it becomes very hard to play-act. When you really want to be at home helping your kids with their homework, instead of explaining why a turkey burger cannot be served rare or patiently listening to a customer expound about the right temperature to serve a crème caramel, you have fallen out of love with your restaurant.

To truly love your restaurant, it has to become your living room, kitchen, dining room, salon, and clubhouse. It cannot feel like work—although, arguably, there is no industry where anyone works harder or longer hours. The restaurant must be the stage where your real life is played out. Whether it is a mom-and-pop takeout, or an award-winning and successful bistro like ours, the restaurant must be the focus of your life, not an interruption.

In other words, if you have a life outside the business, you might have to give one up—the life or the business. **B**