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# Taking Flight

STORY BY SUSAN FOTOVICH MCCABE

## KEY PLAYERS:

**Designer:**

design Eric Negrete

**Architect:**

International Architects Atelier

**General Contractor:**

Centric Projects

If the fragrant aroma of coffee doesn't draw you into the front door of The Roasterie in downtown Kansas City, then the enormous DC-3 airplane mounted on top of the building is sure to have you crossing the threshold.

Of course, drawing more visitors to The Roasterie brand is what's behind the company's \$5 million expansion, a move that doubles the capacity of its production facility and introduces both a third Roasterie Café and the new Bean Hangar event space to the metro.

"We wanted our plant to be brand central," says Danny O'Neill, The Roasterie's owner and president—or as he's known in the company, the Bean Baron. "The experience we want customers to have from the moment they walk through the door is, 'These guys are different.'"

Founded in 1993 in the basement of O'Neill's Brookside neighborhood home, The Roasterie is a specialty coffee roaster with a reputation that stretches across the nation. The company is known for procuring the best coffees from around the world, then roasting the beans using a convection air-roasting method to ensure superior consistency and a tastier, smoother cup of coffee. The company's success over the years has prompted several moves to larger facilities. In fact, in 2011, The Roasterie's revenues increased more than 30 percent to top \$10 million.

The company broke ground on the renovation and expansion in May to the cheers of loyal Kansas City coffee fans, as well as Kansas City Mayor Sly James, the city's Downtown Council, economic development committee, Missouri Gas Energy and others. Prior to the renovation and expansion, The Roasterie already had a plant in place at its current location but acquired additional property to complete the project. The Roasterie also has two additional Roasterie Café locations, in Brookside and Leawood.

According to O'Neill, much of the production and material handling equipment for The Roasterie's expanded space came from the recently closed Folgers plant.

"It's been bittersweet for us to watch Folgers leave downtown because they were so good to us, taking us under their wing from day one and looking out for The Roasterie's best interests," O'Neill says. "The downtown Kansas City coffee tradition will continue as we use their equipment

## THE ROASTERIE

to produce coffee and even welcome some of the Folgers employees to The Roasterie.”

In addition to the plant expansion, which will allow for a second work shift, the project includes an expansive parking lot across the street and several new features, including its cutting-edge Cupping Room. The Cupping Room is where new and custom blends are developed and sampled for retail customers, restaurants, coffee shops and more. O’Neill says what occurs in the Cupping Room is similar to wine tasting. Roasterie employees sample the various coffees, charting the characteristics and attributes of each to decide which coffee lives up to The Roasterie name. In addition, O’Neill says the Cupping Room will offer private cuppings for those chefs and other professionals who want to develop their own custom blends.

Another feature of the renovation and expansion is The Bean Hangar, The Roasterie’s new event space. Designed to accommodate between 10 and 400 people, the Bean Hangar, says O’Neill, will be the backdrop for weddings, rehearsal dinners, class reunions and social and corporate events. He expects to have an average of two bookings per month starting out.

“We are going to use the space to host a number of year-long celebrations of the new facility as well,” O’Neill says.

Of course, the expansion would not be complete without the addition of The Roasterie Café. The 3,000 square-foot space features 18-foot-tall glass windows and seating for up to 100 people. O’Neill says the space, designed to reflect a “trendy, industrial-chic” style, sets the tone for a quiet cup of coffee for two or for larger groups.

Certainly, one of the most visible additions to the downtown facility is the full-size DC-3 plane perched atop the building. The aircraft, which symbolizes the company’s logo and “air-roasted” slogan, was transported in five pieces from Ottawa, Kan., aircraft dealer Dodson Aviation. Former local employees of TWA and volunteers worked together to



assemble the aircraft. This DC-3, in particular, boasts an adventurous spirit of its own, O’Neill says. In 1948, the aircraft served as part of the Berlin Airlift. DC-3 airplanes also were used to transport harvested coffee beans from remote areas.

However, the idea to add the aircraft to the building did present some challenges that couldn’t be planned for. Specifically, it had to be dismantled into more pieces than O’Neill had originally thought when budgeting for its transportation. Likewise, O’Neill had to add to the aircraft’s ballast to keep it stable high above the building and prevent a potential uplift.

“No one has mounted a DC-3 75 feet off the ground like we did, so we had some different engineering issues,” he says. “We wanted something dramatic—a real icon.”

Design-wise, the interior of the new facility was given the same care and attention as its jaw-dropping exterior. O’Neill contracted with Kansas City’s design Eric Negrete to provide that same industrial-chic style throughout. A longtime standout in Kansas City interior design, design Eric Negrete is behind the design flair of 40 Sardines restaurant, the historic renovation of the Hotel Phillips, Michael Smith restaurant and Extra Virgin.

O’Neill says there were few surprises in the design and construction of the new space, but acknowledges some unexpected challenges, particularly the age of the multiple buildings involved in the renovation.

“We weren’t sure what we’d find, but when you’re knitting four or five buildings together, there are certainly some issues,” O’Neill says.



Visitors can easily catch a glimpse of all the changes at The Roasterie by taking advantage of the company's tours, a staple of The Roasterie's persona dating as far back as the company launch, in O'Neill's basement. Free guided tours are available at 10 a.m., six days a week and by appointment for groups. The newer, multimedia-based tours allow visitors to peer through 127-foot glass walls into the bean-to-brew facility, walk through the production floor and sample varieties of Roasterie coffee.

"This is a complete game-changer for us," O'Neill says. "The expansion will enable us to accommodate growth, but also allow us to open our doors to our neighbors so they can come and enjoy their favorite coffees and explore all we do from bean to brew." **cj**

