

SUPPER

HOTEL FOOD & DRINK



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Ready, Set, Go!

As **Makeready** continues to expand its portfolio, the group's President and Chief Operating Officer discusses placemaking, community connections and staying true to brand concept.

Words: Eleanor Howard

PROFILE
Christine Magrann
President and COO, Makeready

As President and Chief Operating Officer at Makeready, Christine Magrann has been tasked with leading the experience-driven group's expansion across the US. Her extensive hospitality experience includes various F&B-focused leadership roles within the sector, including Assistant F&B Director for The Mansion On Turtle Creek and The Breakers Palm Beach. Since its inception, the Dallas-based operator has grown its portfolio to more than six hotels and 24 restaurants, bars and coffee shops, with more developments on the horizon for 2023 and 2024.

Upcoming Openings:
The Junto, Columbus (May 2023),
Hotel San Carlos, Phoenix

Established from the ground up to elevate independent hotels to a new level, Dallas-based experience-led operator Makeready is poised to take the US hospitality landscape by storm.

Founded by private investment firm Rockbridge in 2015, the self-proclaimed placemakers are on a mission to develop a carefully curated portfolio of independent hotels, restaurants and retail concepts that are completely different from one another yet all share a common purpose: to become an essential part of the community in which they sit, cultivating deep, emotional connections between hotel guests and locals, as well as in-house operations teams and the businesses with which they partner.

THE PLOT

They do this by taking a decidedly epicurean approach to development. "I think many guests today choose a hotel based on its food and beverage offering," states Makeready President and Chief Operating Officer Christine Magrann. "They're well-travelled, more sophisticated than ever and more exposed to the variety of options out there, so it's critical that we create options that raise the bar."

In plotting their growth, Makeready begin by assessing potential projects through the lens of a city's culinary landscape. "We like to build a presence in cities that lean towards the foodie

community," explains Magrann. "We look for places that already have a strong line-up of independent restaurateurs or where chefs have been able to thrive and make a name for themselves without the backing of big corporate brands. This gives us confidence that a city is ready for an independent lifestyle hotel and welcoming of restaurateurs who want to bring a unique experience to the site."

What follows is comprehensive research, or homework as Magrann puts it: "We start with what I call the not-so-fun information. We pull a lot of the economic and demographic information to help ground us in the state of the city and community we're going into. But where we spend a lot of our time is examining what is successful in the market, and asking where is there possibly a need for something new?" To do so, Magrann and team approach those who know the place best. "It's meeting the bartenders and chefs within the city and understanding from their point of view what the city is looking for."

While trendy food hotspots are a common thread running through the Makeready portfolio, this is where the similarities begin and end. "Each one of our experiences has its own unique point of view - we don't stamp out the same concept in multiple locations," notes Magrann. "It's a harder way to do things but our overall philosophy focuses on being very intentional."



SERVICE

In Dallas for example, The Adolphus' F&B programme includes a Viennese café, while The Alida, a converted warehouse hotel in Savannah, Georgia, offers up coastal cuisine that celebrates the bounty of the Lowcountry at Rhett.

THE ASSEMBLY

The process begins with the discovery of the heart and soul of each city and its people. "Our team will work with the owner to create a mood board of what we envision, and then we will work with a third party branding agency to help us bring it to life through the name, font, graphics and the story," she says. "Once we create our concept, we lean into that brand identity, and make sure to keep asking ourselves how do we keep the integrity of our true north? One of the challenges in hospitality is sticking to your intentions, so keeping grounded in the roots of the concept is really important."

Then it's all about bringing the right people onboard - those who see their city's true culture and can shine a light on it for others. "We hire chefs and general managers that are well connected," explains Magrann. "We also invite other chefs to our tastings when we're opening a new restaurant to get their feedback. A big part of our strategy is to become part of the F&B community, not competing with it. And in those markets, great restaurants recommend other

great restaurants, great bartenders recommend other great bartenders, so we really tap into this spirit that sets a stage for humbleness. And you have to be humble when you're going into F&B because it's hard to get right, so having this point of view and mindset has helped us to be successful."

THE PULL-THROUGH

Listening to local voices during the development process effectively translates to filling tables. According to Magrann, Makeready seeks to achieve a 60:40 split between locals and in-house guest covers. "The benchmark of local versus tourists is something we talk about a lot, how do we drive that? It's a very important part of our strategy and is one of the hardest goals to accomplish."

With Emeline's woodburning concept Frannie & The Fox in Charleston for example, Makeready are already succeeding in this area. So how do they go about achieving this? "I think it comes with recognition and personalised interaction. How do we engage with the guest a little quicker because we see them tagging us on social media while they're in the space with us? How do we foster that relationship and capitalise on it by making them feel special."

So how does Makeready measure the success of a restaurant or bar? "Of course we also have

financial responsibilities, so achieving our monetary goals by year three - have we stabilised and gotten to the point we said we would when we first set up the concept?" reveals Magrann. "But a great mark of success is when we have other restaurateurs recommending us or coming to visit us and inviting us to their experiences. Just being beloved within the industry and within the community."

Only time will tell with Makeready's latest opening, The Junto in Columbus, but Magrann is confident they are onto a winner. "We knew that food in Columbus is a little more mainstream, it has an average price point, which is really important, and it has a great vibe to it. It's a young, energetic, artistic city, so we leaned into those elements." Billed as a 'club for mutual improvement' the opening marks the city's first independent hotel, bringing a down-to-earth F&B programme with it. Guests and locals can expect a wood-hearth dining experience and an all-day neighbourhood coffee shop, but what Magrann is most looking forward to is the rooftop bar. "The Brass Eye rooftop experience is going to be really special," she reveals. "It has near panoramic views of the city with great cocktails and a great beer programme. I'm excited about the playfulness of the concept because it has allowed us to be a little more free-spirited and create something that will have real longevity."