

(201)

THE BEST OF BERGEN

Designed to dine

The marriage of cuisine and atmosphere in Bergen restaurants

BY SUSAN LEIGH SHERRILL
Photos by Eugene M. Parciasepe

OCTOBER 2005

CHAKRA, PARAMUS

Also eager to provide his customers with a vacation from suburban life is Michael Heiden, principal owner of Chakra. Like Radisic, Heiden created his restaurant's unique look himself, and had a clear vision of what he wanted without ever having been schooled in interior design.

The restaurant is named for what some Eastern faiths believe are the body's energy centers – *chakras*. However, Heiden explains, the name is not a gimmick. It was chosen to invoke a feeling.

"I wanted to transport people to another place, to make them forget where they were for a moment in time," he says. "We want them to leave and say, 'Wow, I feel so amazing. I don't know why, but I just do.'"

Heiden uses what he calls "earthy elements" to set an exotic stage. Inside the soaring space, the rustic is paired with the new, and warmth comes from dark wood, stone, lush upholstery and scores of candles. Tables and flooring are teak, and massive walls of 120-year-old excavated bricks – assembled imperfectly according to Heiden's instructions – form two sides of the dining room. Hindu stone carvings are set into the walls and,

up high, fire crevices hold flickering pillar candles. A giant palm tree serves as the room's centerpiece. Deep, ivory-cushioned banquettes are draped with shimmering curtains. A limestone waterwall trickles softly.

Heiden's design is rooted in authenticity. While Chakra is a stage for what he hopes will be "special moments" for his customers, it is not a set. All the elements – except perhaps for the tiny, fiber optic stars that make the ceiling look like the heavens – are real. Heiden insisted the stars be faint so they would catch people by surprise and not make the ceiling look like a planetarium.

"I'm a big romantic," Heiden laughs. "I want people to feel at home, but not at *their* home."



ENERGIZING ENVIRONMENT Michael Heiden, principal owner of Chakra, wants his Paramus restaurant to evoke feelings of tranquil energy.

OCT