

Brian's 24 gets a facelift

24-hour downtown San Diego diner still casual, now more colorful

By [Ron Donoho](#)



Jen Guerin

- Photo by Ron Donoho

The first time I interviewed Jen Guerin she was a contestant on HGTV's reality show Design Star. It was 2009, and a public relations flack in New York got us on a conference line. I was on the phone in Cortez Hill; Guerin was on a line in her office in Bankers Hill. The call relayed coast-to-coast, and we laughed when we figured out we were literally less than a quarter mile away from each other.

And now she's sitting right across from me in a colorful new booth she designed for the venerable **Brian's 24** (828 Sixth Ave.). The all-night downtown eatery (24 refers to the number of hours per day the diner is open) needed a cosmetic facelift, says Guerin, whose company is called JG Color Studios. A San Diego State University grad, Guerin is one of less than 200 people in the United States certified by the International Association of Color Consultants.

"This was a fun and interesting challenge," says Guerin, resting in one of two 60-inch, Pacific-blue booths she placed in the front windows. We're noshing on a heaping plate of chicken tenders and tater tots awash in Buffalo sauce. "A 24/7 restaurant needs everything to be indestructible. That's not something you have to take into consideration at The Smoking Goat, or Starlite. Everything here had to be built to last."

Guerin worked with Helvey Design Studio to create dark wood banquettes that are placed against two walls. The banquettes have LED lights, but have a church pew look that keeps the restaurant looking more orderly than it did when loose chairs were all over the place.

Brian's is well known for oversized portions, like a truly scary "pancake monster" breakfast with all the fixins, and the "massive breakfast burrito," an aptly named torpedo-like entrée. I've ordered it in the past, and armed with a doggie bag, found it sustainable for a breakfast as well as lunch and dinner.

Because of the heft of the food, I jokingly ask Guerin if she widened the seats.

"It's funny because we wanted to streamline things," she says. "And we actually had widened the seats, and then all the seats couldn't fit. So, now we are back to small seats, and that's fine because everybody has room to move and to get through this place. Because sometimes on Saturday mornings, or Friday nights, there can be a 45-minute wait to get seated."

Speaking of Friday nights, after last call at the downtown bars, Brian's is no longer allowed to sell alcohol. (The booze is stored behind a wooden bar that formerly occupied space in the L.A. manse of Joan Crawford. Of course, the redesign included this infamous bar, which still shows dings from when Crawford reportedly danced atop it in high heels). Since patrons always ask if they can order one more late-night drink, Guerin installed a number of wood-framed "text boxes" on the walls. One says BOOZE; another can be illuminated after last-call that says NO Booze.

"We call them our vintage text boxes," says Guerin. "Instead of looking at your phone for information, you're looking up at these old signs. The mottos change out to things like 'Yes, we're open 24 hours,' or 'No, you cannot have a beer right now.'"

At two in the morning, simplicity in this kind of messaging is essential.