

Construction

Bankers Club to invest \$3 million in face lift

BY MERCY MCCLOSKEY

mccloskey@sanjuanstarmedia.net
Of The STAR Staff

The Bankers Club at Popular Center in Hato Rey announced last week its \$3 million renovation plans.

The old fashion dark colors and woodwork will give way to a brighter atmosphere imbued with the colors and textures of Puerto Rico while encompassing the panoramic views of Old San Juan, today's vibrant Hato Rey, the Moscoso bridge over the lagoon and the distant geography.

The efforts began some months ago when the club's board of directors recognized that to continue its tradition of excellence they would have to innovate as well as raise the level of service and quality. The club facilities would need modification in order to better accommodate the way business is done today.

In a competition for designs to meet the challenge and fit the price, it was the Puerto Rico firm of Sierra Cardona Ferrer, or SCF Architects, whose design was selected by the board. For six months, they have been working in conjunction with interior designer Benjamín Noriega Ortiz, a New York-based Puerto Rican who has been named one of America's Most Brilliant Designers for eight years running by "House Beautiful" magazine.

The change in design is dramatically different. Noriega-Ortiz is acutely sensitive to the beauty of the island and uses colors and textures to bring that fresh brilliance into a sedate and comfortable atmosphere.

Donald Campbell, general manager of Bankers Club, explained the changes. "We have already raised the level of service and quality of food for our club membership. The next phase will create the finest atmosphere for business and pleasure for a vast improvement in the value of club membership."

Campbell quoted the Banker's Club mission statement as reason for the changes.

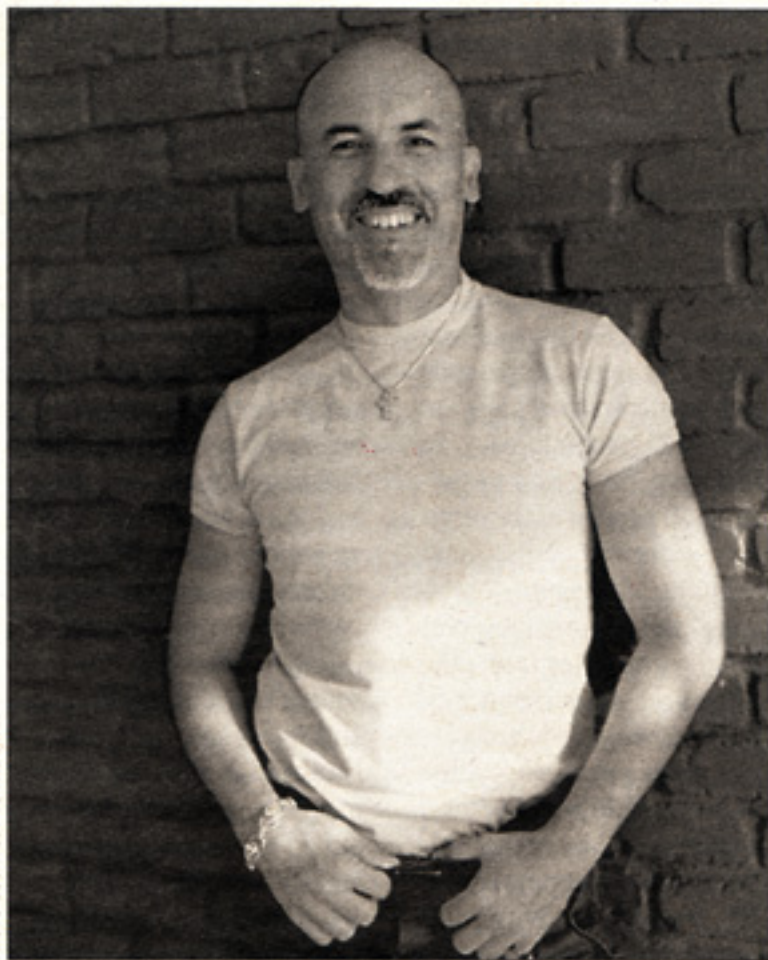


PHOTO COURTESY TO THE STAR

Benjamín Noriega Ortiz is custom-designing several pieces of furniture for the new Bankers Club. An interior designer of world renown, his local work includes Pikayo at the Puerto Rico Museum of Art.

"The Bankers Club provides an exclusive sanctuary where club members, guests and family conduct business and socialize, while enjoying both superior food and personalized excellent service in an elegant, convenient, secure and relaxed environment."

Rooted in P.R.'s business history

The club's history goes back to a time when all commerce on the island shut down from 11:30 to 1:30 following the Spanish habit. Rafael Carrión Pacheco, the founder of Banco Popular, encountered the Bankers Club in New York in the 1930s and thought it would work in Puerto Rico.

By 1939, Carrión and a group of businessmen had forged an agreement with the New York club to use the name and create the concept on the island. The first Bankers Club opened in the art deco Popular building in Old San Juan with 200 members. But it was gas rationing during World War II that made it a hit. Restricted travel forced businessmen to lunch in town and the club became the place to conduct business over a meal.

Space constraints for both the bank and the club forced a move to the new Popular Center in Hato Rey some 27 years later.

Architect Luis Sierra said he and his partner Alberto Ferrer share an intimate relationship with the Bankers Club. "We watched this building go up as kids," he said Thursday. They were responsible for the redesign of the club's main dining room 12 years ago. SCF is also the firm that designed the nearby Urban Train station and the new coliseum. Sierra said the rehabilitation of the club is a reflection of the board's vision and the design synergy in Hato Rey.

The architects said the choice of Noriega Ortiz as decorator was a natural since he had been a student of theirs at the University of Puerto Rico. "Benjamín has contributed tremendously for the new vision at Bankers," Sierra said.

Reorientation

The orientation of the various rooms of the Bankers Club will rotate a bit around

See "BANKERS," Page B-12 >