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## Business

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# New restaurants, retailers mark new era for Bottleworks

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AJ Reynolds/OnlineAthens.com & The Athens Banner-Herald

**Cullen & Co Interior Design in the Bottleworks in Athens, Ga., Thursday, Sept. 26, 2013. (AJ Reynolds/Staff, @ajreynoldsphoto)**

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After changing hands last New Year, the Bottleworks on Prince Avenue is primed for a new era come 2014.

It already saw the addition of Hendershot's Coffee Bar in June, where it quickly became host to running clubs in the mornings before filling with music lovers in the evenings. Recent additions also include Cullen & Co. Interior Design, a former Five Points firm that needed more space, and E&E Architects.

And in coming months, it's looking at the addition of two more restaurants: Eastside's Viva! Argentine Cuisine and Seabear Oyster Bar, a new venture from a National alumn. On top of that, the former Coca-Cola bottling plant is going through landscaping and interior renovations that will make it a "class A" office space without sacrificing its historic charm, said Sloane Nichols, the local broker for Atlanta-based property owner Parkside Partners.

"We can show people things are happening," said Nichols, whose office will be in the complex. "It's not just lip service. It's a happening place to be, and also a quality place to be."

Cullen & Co. held an informal soft opening party Thursday night. That afternoon it was buzzing with preparation and excitement in the new space, artfully manicured with a modern eclecticism of antiques. Pennsylvania Dutch wood work was on display against one wall

while glass-and-wood bowls served as centerpieces for coffee tables. The aim, they said, is to have antiques and accessories that aren't intimidating to someone wanting to spice up their living space.

"We're real excited because we thought it was great," owner and namesake Cullen O'Steen said. "The developers are putting up a fountain and completely re-doing this courtyard."

Her husband, Patrick O'Steen, said they loved the historic quality of the site and Cullen joked that it was like being in downtown, but with way more parking. But, echoing other future tenants, it was the diligence of Nichols and the emphasis on finding the right mix of Athens businesses that convinced them.

"That's what really sold us on it, talking to Sloane," Patrick O'Steen said. "They're being real selective about who comes in here."

Chris Luken, a co-owner of the forthcoming Seabear, said the restaurant concept had been pitched by partner Patrick Stubbers, who will be its executive chef. Luken and Peter Dale signed on, with Parkside Partners representatives approaching Dale soon after. They listened to the pitch, with its emphasis on local establishments and a complementary mix, and verbally committed to the space even before Hendershot's, though the coffee bar inked its deal first. Seeing the coffee shop's success has been "really heartening," Luken said.

"I think (Parkside Partners), they're just real go-getters. They understand revitalizing the Bottleworks is not that difficult and I tend to think they're right," Chris Luken, a co-owner of the forthcoming Seabear, said. "It's a beautiful place and I think it's a great location being just off the beaten path as far as where downtown goes. It's right between downtown and Normaltown."

Luken said the concept for their restaurant rests on getting fresh oysters from around the U.S. It'll focus on raw oysters with some baked recipes and other fresh and sustainable fish and sea food, and a full bar of craft cocktails, beer and wine. Its focus means a smaller menu than a place like the National, where the three co-owners all work now, he said.

The announcements of Viva! and Seabear mean there's only one restaurant area left in the development, the "turnkey" space where Graze used to operate, Nichols said. She said she's been in talks with various establishments, but doesn't have any announcements forthcoming. Luken didn't sound worried about a missing neighbor for long.

"It's sort of a critical-mass attraction," he said. "The more people there, the more people come. These guys from Atlanta, I think they've gone about it in a really good way, seeking out local people."

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