

**WORLD CLASS**

Following its success in Australia, the Gold Class Cinemas concept and brand launched around the world—in Asia, Europe and now its first North American location in South Barrington, Illinois

**CAPTAIN'S CHAIR**

Patrons are escorted to plush recliners minutes before the movie begins. Built-in call buttons can summon staff at any time.

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"The concept originated in Australia about 12 years ago," says Gold Coast Cinemas Vice President of Marketing, Mark Mulcahy. "We're trying to create an experience for every person that goes to the movies that a studio executive might have when they go into a screening room on the lot."

According to Mulcahy, the idea began germinating during an afternoon meet-up between Roscoe "Roc" Kirby, founder of the Village Roadshow cinema chain and film production company, and then-CEO of Warner Bros., Terry Semel.

"They were touring theater sites and it started raining," says Mulcahy. "They needed to come up with an alternative game plan. They decided they were going to go see a movie and Kirby asked Semel, 'Where do you go to the movies?' He said, 'I usually just watch them on the lot at the screening rooms.'" If people who live and breathe movies aren't choosing to do so at public theaters like Kirby's Village Roadshow cinemas, what would lure them in? An idea was born.

Upon his return to Australia, Kirby mulled over the notion of an elite movie theater experience coupled with the cinema-eatery model. And he built them—Down Under there are more than a dozen luxury cinemas with screens that seat less than 40 people, all feasting on mini risotto balls, cheese plates and local Cabernets. And when Gold Class Cinemas broke ground in Chicago alongside the \$200 million

Arboretum of South Barrington Shopping Center, the plan was a first-class facility from the doorknobs to the rivets.

"When you walk into Gold Class, you enter a lounge that looks nothing like a traditional cinema," says Mulcahy. "Instead of feeling compelled to go and stand in line, you sit down, you have a chance to relax and unwind and then we present you with a menu and an 80-bottle wine list—30 more available by the glass—and 12 beers on tap."

Being seated inside the 40-seat Gold Class auditorium is like riding first class in an airplane. The plush, golden-orange seats not only recline—they have buttons to summon wait staff.

"Most of our employees have a hospitality background and they go through six weeks of training before they hit the floor," says Mulcahy. "We go through mock-service exercises and get them tuned up for serving in the dark cinema. They have got to pass various certifications so that they really do provide excellent customer service."

Meals from the local-based menu are prepared fresh by an in-house chef. The wait staff is prompt and knowledgeable. "If you were to ask 'What glass of wine would go well with this chicken Caesar salad?' they would be able to suggest something that's on the wine list," says Mulcahy.

And like tucking in for a flick over the Atlantic, Gold Class Cinemas stocks blankets and pillows. Stay awake after that bottle of Shiraz and soak in their super-wide screens, all-digital projection and sound and 3D.

Opening the first Gold Class Cinemas in the mellow American Midwest was a calculated risk. "You have to remember, in cities like Los Angeles, you already had places like the Arclight—or in Texas where you have Alamo Drafthouse—people have already been introduced to the cinema and dining concepts. But there haven't been that many in the Midwest, so I think for us the growth there has taken a little bit longer."

Mulcahy admits to trepidation. "I'm going to tell you, the community was a little bit skeptical," Mulcahy recalls. "If you look at the history of theaters in the Midwest, it's very common for it to take a while for communities to warm up to a new concept. But soon they are very much embraced after people go in and experience the concept." And this Chicago suburb has started to eat it up—with lobster rolls and blue cheese potato chips on the menu, how could they not? Smiles Mulcahy, "From what we've seen lately, they are definitely big supporters." ■