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The Heat Is On

Case study of heated glass technology at the Mahogany Grille in Durango, Colorado.

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The Mahogany Grille is a premier dining establishment in downtown Durango, Colorado. Located in the historic Strater Hotel, this upscale restaurant features exquisite seasonal menus, live jazz entertainment, an opulent Victorian bar — and the latest in heated glass technology.

The front windows of the Mahogany Grille provide an excellent view of the city's scenic downtown. Unfortunately, they also created problems keeping the restaurant warm and comfortable, especially in winter. Customers would regularly request a table away from the windows, despite the view. Even so, cold air from the windows would often find them anyway.

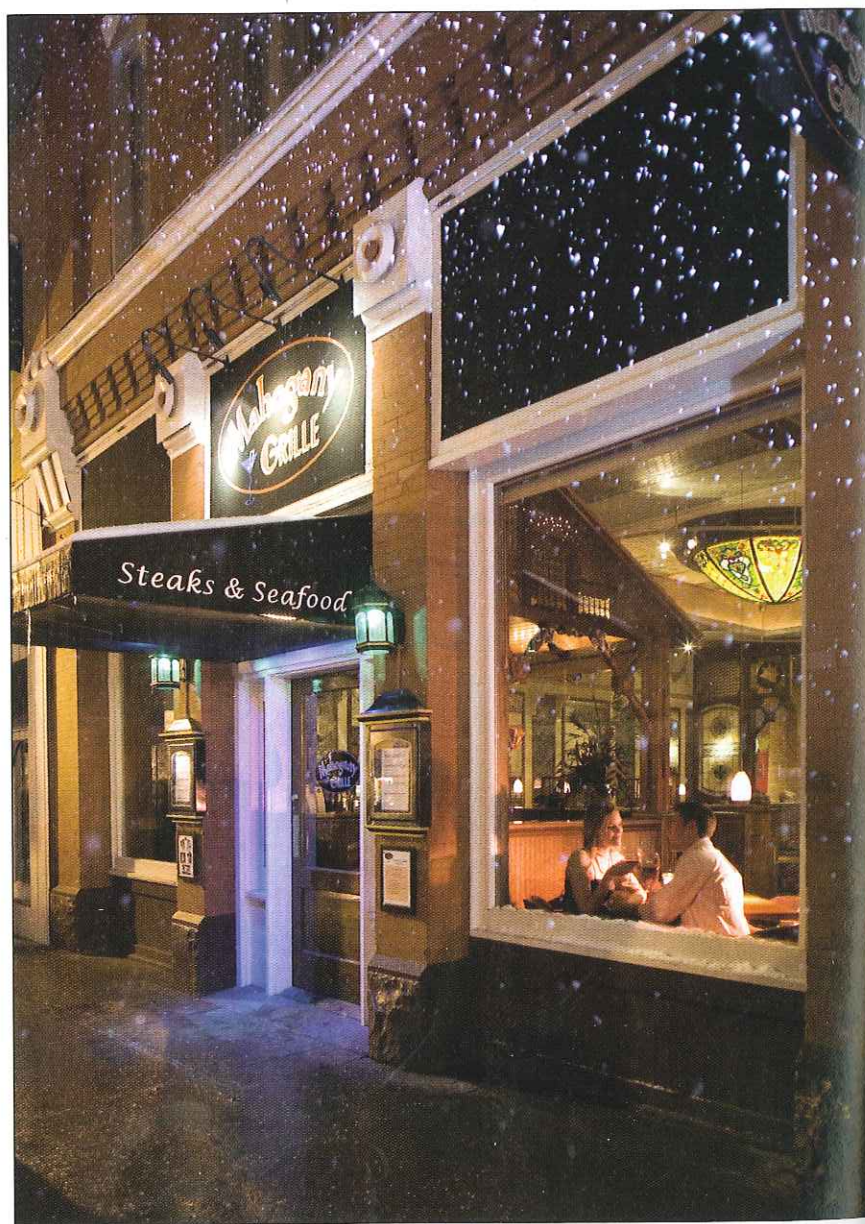
"We had a real problem with drafts," admits Rod Barker, owner of the Strater Hotel and Mahogany Grille.

In January 2007, Barker found a solution. He installed two new windows with electrically heated glass at the front of the restaurant.

The goal of the project was clear: to eliminate the chilly air and cold drafts caused by the front windows. Barker was originally skeptical that heated glass could solve both problems, but he soon realized his new windows were a complete success.

"Initially, I wasn't sure the heated windows would produce enough benefits to make it worthwhile, but it definitely has," he says.

The Mahogany Grille was the first restaurant in North America to adopt



Problem: Customers dining at the Mahogany Grille in Durango, Colorado, were avoiding window seating because of cold air and drafts.

Solution: New windows with heated glass were installed.

heated glass technology for windows. Installation was completed in a single morning before the restaurant opened, so the project did not have any effect on normal business hours.

In addition to keeping customers warm, heated glass offers the added benefit of condensation control. The Mahogany Grille's front windows will never fog up or frost over while the heat is on, so guests will always experience a clear view through the glass.

Today, patrons no longer shy away from the restaurant's front windows. In fact, the most requested seat in the house is Table 10, right next to the heated glass.

"Our new windows really turned that around," says Barker. "We've taken a negative and turned it into a positive. Our customers are eager to sit near the window and enjoy the view."

Not only are the Mahogany Grille's patrons thrilled with the change, but so is the staff. The restaurant's hostess station is located directly behind one of the two heated windows. The location was previously very chilly, leading to many complaints from the shivering hostesses, who typically wear short-sleeved or sleeveless dresses.

Now, all complaints have disappeared. The staff even takes pride in showing off the windows to new customers, who have typically never before seen heated glass technology.

Heated glass radiates warmth uniformly across its entire surface with precise control. Yet, the glass remains perfectly transparent, without any distortion or discoloration.

To accomplish this, an invisible metallic coating is bonded to the glass during the manufacturing process. The coating generates heat when subjected to an electrical current. The current is supplied by two buss bars located on opposite sides of the glass. In a heated window unit, the buss bars and wiring are located within the frame. Ordinary framing materials are used, so the window always matches the décor.

Operating the Mahogany Grille's heated windows is a one-step process. When employees turn on the lights to the restaurant, they also flip on the heated glass with an ordinary wall switch. "Can you train someone to use a light switch?" jokes Barker. "It's that simple."

In addition to the on/off switch, a control unit is hidden behind a small wall panel. Floor managers can use the controller to raise or lower the temperature of the glass as desired. Based on the controller setting, glass temperature can range from 70° F to 105° F.


Since the Mahogany Grille is in a historic building, originally built in 1887, replacing the windows was a delicate task. The retrofit project could not alter the authentic period appearance of the window or building. Adding fans, motors or duct work was not an option. Fortunately, all electrical components of heated glass were hidden within the window frame. There was no change in the appearance of the building, inside or out.

Preliminary independent testing indicates that a building's overall energy consumption is reduced when heated windows are installed. This is because the building's traditional heating system is not constantly struggling against chills and drafts created by cold windows. Advanced testing is currently underway to verify the exact energy savings. Rod Barker, for one, is already convinced.

"If we didn't have heated windows, we'd have to turn up the heat to the entire restaurant," he says.

Twelve months after installing heated windows at the Mahogany Grille, Barker says it was a wise investment for the restaurant. Eliminating the uncomfortably cold area near the windows has increased the floor space available to customers for dining (and thus the revenue potential for the restaurant). The problem of cold drafts and cold customers has disappeared.

According to Barker, his heated

windows have performed exactly as promised. "The glass has been perfect," he says. "Everything has gone beautifully, and we haven't even had to think about it. Any new restaurant in a cold climate would be crazy not to plan for it and get it done." 

George Usinowicz is architectural representative for Thermique Technologies, a company with UL® approval to provide heated glass technology for architectural windows. Usinowicz has 35 years of experience in the construction industry, including 28 years specializing in architectural glass and frame systems. He can be reached at georgeu@thermique.com.