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**DAS Architects and Designers**  
**expand J. Seward Johnson's incredible restaurant Rat's**

**Hamilton, NJ—DAS Architects and Designers** has recently completed more one-of-a-kind work at the remarkable **Rat's** restaurant, located at 16 Fairgrounds Road at the **Grounds for Sculpture**, a world-renowned sculpture park and museum founded by sculptor J. Seward Johnson, Jr. DAS Principals **Susan M. Davidson**, IDC and **David A. Schultz**, AIA created the original design for Rat's in 2000, and returned in 2002 to further embellish the uncommonly named, unusually located—and undoubtedly over-the-top—destination for dining, art and entertainment.

“When Mr. Johnson invited us to expand Rat's, we understood that he truly views his restaurant as a work of art—in progress! We honestly didn't know how much more opulent the facilities could become,” says Davidson, who has worked on inventive restaurant designs including the Philadelphia renovations of prestigious Le Bec-Fin and the creation of futuristic Morimoto, “But DAS specializes in taking on impossible projects. Rat's may just be our most ambitious accomplishment to date.”

In 1992, distinguished philanthropist and artist J. Seward Johnson, Jr. established the non-profit Grounds for Sculpture, a lush, beautifully landscaped, 22-acre park featuring 160 contemporary outdoor sculptures. In 1999, Johnson hired DAS to design Rat's as an extension of the park and to create it in the style of Claude Monet's famed home at Giverny, replete with a lily pond and bridge reminiscent of Monet's “Water Lilies” and “Japanese Bridge” paintings.

With a mandate to create the “most beautiful restaurant on the East Coast,” DAS set to work. They chose salvaged antique wood to use for wood-beamed ceilings and wide plank floors. They designed ceiling-high windows, commissioned the crafting of antiqued cherry tables and wheat back dining room chairs, and employed antique French limestone for flooring to coordinate with gigantic limestone fireplaces. When finished, the firm had created a two-story, 100-seat restaurant featuring four dining rooms, three lounge areas, a private wine-tasting room and a 55-seat terrace and outdoor dance pavilion overlooking the park.

The interior, elegant but rustic, decorated in a French country palette of reds, golds and blues, astounded the restaurant's guests. But Mr. Johnson wanted to take his spectacular restaurant beyond astounding.



The first change DAS made was in the kitchen. They added a custom-made, one-of-a-kind Bonnet range from France, which includes a double rotisserie and a computer-programmable combinée oven that was so large, that the kitchen had to be built around the new centerpiece. The cobalt blue range inspired Davidson and Schultz to install hand-painted decorative French tiles for all of the wall surfaces, which are further embellished with hand painted Moroccan tile accent walls. The hand fired floor tiles are arranged in hexagonal inlay patterns.

A private in-kitchen dining room, for which DAS commissioned renowned woodworker Fab Dubrunfau to make a walnut French chef's table, seats 12 to 14 guests and includes a side serving unit. This area, affectionately referred to as the "Rat Hole" by Mr. Johnson, offers diners the opportunity to enjoy privacy while viewing the chefs at work in the kitchen.



DAS also worked a complete renovation on the bar area, named Kabul Kafe. To create an exotic Mid Eastern feel, the designers imported mats, printed brocades and silks from Afghanistan and the Middle East for use in wall hangings, curtains and exotically patch-worked slipcovers. Light fixtures made

of decorative metalwork, glass and animal skins hang over the bar and lounge areas. Hand-polished beads imported from Afghanistan made of exotic yellow stones, glass and metal, adorn the windows. The designers also created a large, mattress-like area from Afghan rugs, where guests will be able to lean on handmade pillows while enjoying cocktails at the fireplace. The café's artwork includes an elegant work of calligraphy that tells the history of the Kabul Kafé and the famed National Geographic photograph of the girl from Afghanistan.

The café opens to the park via a new, arched wooden trellis flanking the terrace and connecting to the dance pavilion. When DAS's team of craftsmen created the trellis from antique long leaf yellow pine, they incorporated a curved clear glass, which protects guests from rain and allows a beautiful view of the sky above. Inspired by Thai architecture, the trellis enables Rat's to extend its outdoor dining season.



The final grand addition comes in the form of Rat's new gallery and gift shop, collectively named "Toad Hall," and adjoining the entrance to the restaurant. The shop offers a luxurious setting with red velvet walls and lush custom carpeting, where guests can shop for a diverse collection of handmade jewelry, housewares and gifts. The gallery portion, where sculpture is for sale, offers a pristine backdrop for showing the artwork.

Rat's is part of a European style village that also houses two non-profit art organizations, The Atlantic Foundation and the International Sculpture Center and three apartments for visiting artists. The village sits upon a circular, stone-bordered driveway, marked with custom-made street lamps and sculpture. Its stucco exterior is painted a striking shade of salmon with vibrant Provence blue accents on the deep window frames.

Located on the site of the former New Jersey State Fairgrounds, Grounds for Sculpture's permanent collection is complimented by year-round indoor exhibitions displayed in beautifully restored Fairgrounds buildings that date from the 1920's. New pieces are regularly installed throughout the grounds.

Johnson, who is well known for his life-size bronze sculptures of people, exhibits his work internationally. Some of his recent sculptures, inspired by great paintings from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Impressionists, can be viewed in the park. “Viewing art should be enjoyable and appealing to the senses, the way it was originally intended. The experience shouldn’t be academic or intimidating,” says Johnson, who is widely recognized for his work in supporting the arts and furthering the cause of public sculpture.

Grounds For Sculpture is also renowned for its arboretum-like environment that incorporates natural woodlands, marshes and ponds. The park features over 2,000 trees representing more than 100 species from Norway to Korea. A map with a self-guided tree tour is available.

Grounds For Sculpture is open to the public, Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am to 9 pm. The Museum Building and Shop are open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am to 4 pm. Group and student tours are available. For more information, please call 609.586.0616 or visit the website, [www.groundsfor Sculpture.org](http://www.groundsfor Sculpture.org)

Rat’s is open Tuesday through Sunday. Lunch is served: Tuesday through Friday, 12 noon to 2 pm. Dinner is served: Tuesday through Thursday, 5 to 10 pm; Friday and Saturday, 5 to 11 pm; Sunday, 4 to 8 pm. In the spring, the restaurant will be open for lunch on Saturdays and brunch on Sundays. Special evenings of music, poetry and art will be scheduled throughout the year. For reservations or more information, please call 609.584.7800 or visit the website, [www.ratsrestaurant.org](http://www.ratsrestaurant.org).

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