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## Freese Architecture

## THE CROWN JEWEL OF TULSA

*Designer Brian Freese Proudly Opens New Japanese Steakhouse Zanmai*



## NO COMPROMISE

Yielding an environment worthy of chef Masanobu Terauchi's elegant dishes was no easy task. To accomplish this goal, Freese worked closely with architectural engineering firm Richards and Associates. Balancing the checkbooks, R&A owner Eron Richards says, was key in Zanmai's success: "It was a fight to maintain the important architectural elements within the allotted money," he recalls. "There was one point in the project where there were tasks of reducing the front entry stair elements...I fought to maintain this element as originally designed."

Brian Freese remembers the exact moment at which he wanted to become an architect. Seven years old and on family vacation

in Mexico City, his nose was pressed against the glass of a taxicab when a house appeared as if in a vision: an otherworldly

blend of steel and glass, towering over a running creek. The image, Freese says—seared in his young memory—following him all the way to grade school French class, where he spoke passionately of the cottage as though it were his own (the assignment called for students to present their homes to the class). When the teacher, amazed, asked him about his supposed place of residency, he broke down. "I felt really ashamed because I knew I told a lie," he recalls. "I sat down and started crying."

Listening to Freese tell this story today, it's apparent that the experience left quite the lasting impression. His latest project, the Japanese steak-

house Zanmai, proudly resides at the intersection of panache and utility—a dazzling presence in Tulsa, Oklahoma's downtown arts district. Positioned on the top of a hill and offering a breathtaking view of the city's skyline, the restaurant stands as a lighthouse, providing what Freese describes as a "conversation" with the area's surrounding elements. Each and every aspect of Zanmai presents a formidable exercise in balance, from its eclectic menu (a mix of classic Americana and traditional Japanese) to the charred wood that holds the building together—as striking as the structure that first inspired its designer, all those years ago.

—John Taylor

## A TEAM EFFORT

Having all parties engaged from square one was instrumental in the design process. "R&A got involved early," Richards explains, "providing engineering input and also involved with architectural input and design critique. In-depth early collaboration rarely occurs on projects." Zanmai boldly stands out in Tulsa's downtown area, and it's not difficult to see why—its minimalist, structural steel design produces "a light and airy feel to the building," lending the restaurant a sleek yet inviting elegance.

