

A Mission to Build the Brand

In the restaurant market, branding is a critical asset. This is especially true for restaurant chains. Here, building construction is heavily connected to the brand identity, even as local variations are permitted.

For MISSION BBQ (<https://mission-bbq.com/>), the brand is reflected in their buildings (such as the corrugated metal awnings), in their people (they like to hire vets), and in their practices (such as standing for the national anthem at noon each day). MISSION BBQ, headquartered in Glen Burnie, Maryland, was founded on September 11, 2011. Their message is one of patriotism, service to those who serve or have served, and close relationships with first responders. And, let's not forget the barbeque!



The Gainesville, Virginia location highlights several aspects of MISSION BBQ branding.

Each grand opening for a new location includes patriotic fanfare and VIP events. Their branded military vehicle typically makes it these grand openings and has even served as a backdrop for military weddings. They have even christened a military style boat, named Sea Brisket.

As of this writing, MISSION BBQ was in nearly 70 locations in 15 states, all east of the Mississippi. Each ribbon cutting ceremony also brings out one or both company founders, Bill Krause and Stephen "Newt" Newton.

Another key player in the ribbon cutting ceremony is the distinctive entrance system. No matter how small or how large the location, the entrance system takes on an appearance of wood and the doors always offer the trademark external pulls constructed of black gas pipe mounted at a characteristic angle with elbow ends. If the elbows and tops of the pipe get a little worn through use, well, that simply contributes to the brand image.



Distinctive doors are the silent members of MISSION BBQ grand openings, such as this one in Gambrills, Maryland.

Behind the branding, of course, are serious doors and hardware designed for heavy traffic—another trademark of MISSION BBQ.

For all but a few of the early MISSION BBQ locations, the doors are actually aluminum monumental or stile and rail doors. Here, the Special-Lite SL-15 has been the go-to product. The doors feature full lites of 1" clear Low-E and tempered glass and a powder coated "Wood Expressions" finish.

The doors are paired with Hager Companies hardware including 4500 series rim exit devices with surface vertical rods (often less bottom rods), Roton continuous hinges, 5100 series closers, as well as strikes, and door protection plates.

Mitch Pipgrass, of Mitchell Sales & Associates (<http://www.mitchellsales.net/>), represents both Hager Companies and Special-Lite in Maryland, Virginia, and the nation's capital. He brought these two product lines together for MISSION BBQ. "This client, like most others I have worked with, wanted a comprehensive solution to their entrance-related challenges," Mitch says. He continues: "So I offered them both the functionality and the look they needed. A significant component of that functionality is robustness. They want it to look right, for sure. But they need flawless performance out of the entrance system so they can focus on what really matters—serving their customers."

Alan Hamm Architects (<http://alanhamm.com/>), of Kensington, Maryland, is the firm of record for MISSION BBQ. Kevin Lorei is a senior architect with the firm. "We've dealt with a variety of buildings for this client," he explains. "Some are new construction from the ground up while others repurpose existing structures."

A typical MISSION BBQ location offers 3,500 to 4,200 square feet of floor space. Within the space, a 100+-capacity dining room is the centerpiece and is always decorated in patriotic flare. Another component is a full service kitchen area with open service line. A separate food preparation and catering area is common in most locations. Outdoor patio dining is available in all new construction locations and for renovated sites when space permits. Average construction time across all projects is about 12 weeks.

The variation of geography and building type, can challenge the architect. "Still," says Kevin Lorei, "we achieve the intended branding through some common elements. Among these are the chosen doors and custom, gas pipe pulls."

He continues: “Early on, we had been using wood doors but we had challenges with warping and maintenance issues due to the heavy traffic these doors experience. We then discovered the more resilient doors of Special-Lite in an American Cherry wood grain finish that fulfills our initial design intent. They look great and hold up well to the heavy use.”



Wherever space permits, an outdoor dining patio is created with its own branding characteristics.

Speaking of those unique external pulls, Mr. Lorei explains: “From the corrugated metal awnings, to the door color and pulls, and patio construction materials, we sought honest, hard-working materials that reflect the clientele of MISSION BBQ. It’s a rustic, hands-on image. And the aesthetics of the openings contribute to that image.”

According to Linda Dotterer, Brand Ambassador for MISSION BBQ, it was the research done by their founders that led to the entire customer experience as well as the decor of their restaurants.

“Before we opened our first restaurant, our founders traveled extensively to barbeque hotspots across the country,” she says. “They sought out the masters of barbeque. Along the way they also noted elements of decor that led to an unpretentious dining experience. In particular, they noted the fusion of metal, wood, and concrete. You see plenty of these elements in our restaurants today.”



“As a chain,” Linda continues, “we can’t replicate every feeling of the mom and pop barbeque. But we use these elements to strive for an authentic barbeque experience. You see it in our on-site smoker from Ole Hickory Pits. You see it in our metal food trays with food served on butcher block paper. And beyond the gas pipe door pulls, you see that same look in our railings and in our paper towel dispensers!”

Special-Lite doors on Hager hardware swing wide during opening day festivities in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Many building products can contribute to the desired brand image of restaurants. Logoed signage may be the most noticeable. However, the entrance system offers numerous ways for the restaurant owner to create the desired customer experience. After all, it can provide choices in material, color, finishes, lites, and hardware to help establish and reinforce the brand.

MISSION BBQ is on a mission to build their brand. For them, the chosen doors are leading the charge.



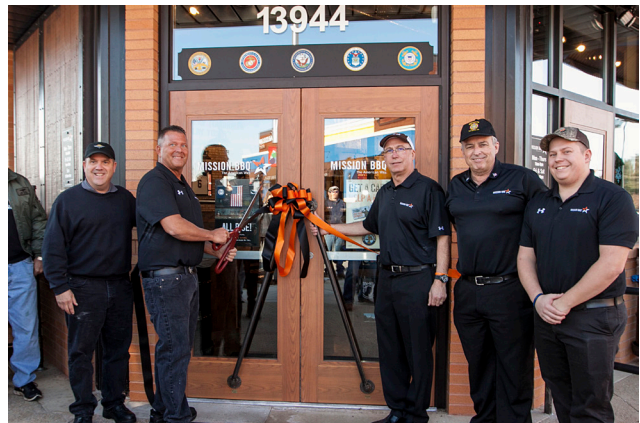
Rockville, MD



Dover, DE



Clarksville, TN



Gainesville, VA

For more information or to locate the Special-Lite representative for your area, visit www.special-lite.com.



Special-Lite, Inc.
860 South Williams Street, Decatur, Michigan 49045
Ph: 800.821.6531 • Fx: 800.423.7610 • www.special-lite.com