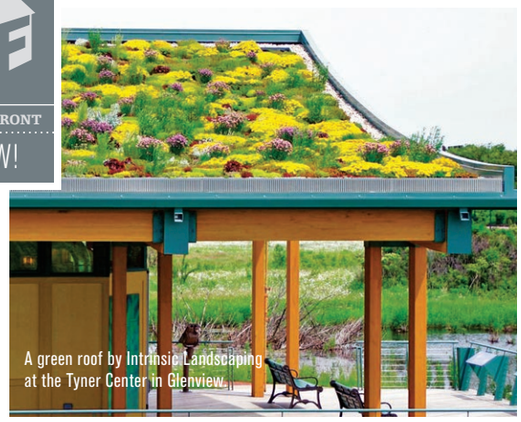

A green roof by Intrinsic Landscaping at the Tyner Center in Glenview.

Raise Da Roof!

Greening a roof seems like a simple eco improvement to execute. Not so. "You can't just put material on a roof without confirming the roof can hold it, which involves a structural engineer," says Kurt Horvath, president of Glenview-based Intrinsic Landscaping—the firm known for high-profile, high-style, large-scale projects that have made Chicago a leader in the green-roof movement nationally (think CTA headquarters, the Merchandise Mart, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, Francis W. Parker School and more). But they're also "the go-to guys for residential," says fc Studio co-owner Julie Fisher, now that she's worked her network for the best source to design and install a green roof for the firm's latest Wicker Park rehab. Her activist client "was really specific about the plant materials. The building had landmark constraints, and the client wanted to use native Illinois prairie plants. They were the only firm who could address all the issues," says Fisher. That may explain why Intrinsic's residential work is "growing quickly, despite the economy," acknowledges Horvath. *Intrinsic Landscaping, 847.391.9266, intrinsiclandscaping.com.* ***–L.S.***

WINED AND DESIGNED Why settle for boring old wine decanters when you can serve from a carafe modeled after the human heart? Bordeaux-bred sculptor Etienne Meneau has raised the everyday decanter to high art with handmade, limited-edition pieces that go for upwards of $3,000 a pop. It's all about the look: "It's not an oenological instrument," says Meneau. "It's a sculpture that can be used as a carafe. Shape comes first, function second." Sizes range from 7 to 25 inches. *Email etiennemeneau@free.fr.* ***–Kate Parham***

BOTTLE ROCKS! *At right:* The Petit Coeur decanter and the Carafe No. 2 (*far right*).

Bare Naked Tables

So where's all the white linen? Gone! Some of Chicago's hottest restaurants (Province, The Bristol, Mado, Publican and others) are ditching the yardage and leaving tables in the buff. And no, we're not talking exposed particleboard. With the nude dining 'tude, restaurant designers are now putting a premium on drop-dead materials and finishes. At The Bristol, four-inch-thick cedar tables are all stained in slightly different colors for a wabi-sabi ode to nature, while at Province, chef/owner Randy Zweiban opted for cork tables and wood frames. "It helps with the sound, and it gives it this clean, modern feel," he says. And over at Urban Belly, salvaged wooden plants from Indonesian ships and Chinese Elmwood tables make a can't-miss design statement. The eco silver lining to the new trend? The massive water and energy savings that come from not using linens. ***–A.A.M.***

SWANK PLANKS *From top:* The communal table at Publican; reclaimed wood at Mana; cork tops at Province; wood on every surface at Avec.

Inside the Modern Wing Shop at the Art Institute of Chicago.

The Bearable Lightness of... Shopping

With a building designed by superstar architect Renzo Piano and hallways filled with iconic works of contemporary art, the Art Institute of Chicago knew a generic gift shop would be no way to cap off the visitor experience. Enter award-winning retail designer Charles Sparks, an Art Institute alum who was hired to create a merchandise space that would blend seamlessly into the architecture. "Renzo has developed very refined details that bring a sense of lightness to everything he does," Sparks says. "We tried to promote a feeling of the 'comfortably modern.'" Sparks hoped to follow Piano's example in the retail shop by creating clarity of space and a soft, tonal effect. "A sense of lightness comes from visually anchoring the casework to the flooring material. And the casework on the perimeters blends with the light finishes of the walls," says Sparks. The outdoors come inside by way of a window wall that grants visitors an expansive view of Millennium Park to the north. "In a cultural institution, the shops become another way to reinforce the message of the institution," says Sparks. "One must get it right." ***–C.C.***

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