



FULL PLATE

With a healthy appetite for BOXX hardware, elite | studio e takes the food service design industry by storm. *By John Vondrak*

It only takes a few clicks of a television remote to realize that America is enamored, if not slightly obsessed, with food. From celebrity chefs, cooking shows, and competitions, to entire networks dedicated to the subject, Americans want to know more about what they eat, what they should eat, and how it should be prepared. But it goes deeper. Preparing and serving food is work, so what should that workshop look like? Going further, who creates the environments that transform the idea of foodservice and simply “grabbing a bite to eat” into a practical and pleasant experience? Look no further than **elite | studio e**, a company with two divisions that designs, develops, and delivers one solution.

In 2000, **elite**, based in Farmingdale, New York, was founded to provide foodservice industry clients (with minimal to zero downtime) a complete, managed turnkey venue refresh. From design team/build team coordination to equipment purchasing/installation and site supervision, **elite** handles all aspects of project management. Over time, however, the firm noticed that the foodservice industry was in dire need of a sole source design and consulting firm that extended beyond traditional foodservice expertise. That's why **studio e** was established, to create concept design, programming, marketing, graphical presentations, and more. **elite | studio e** clients include the likes of Google, American Express, Mercedes-Benz, Johns Hopkins University, The Houston Space Center, and other high profile corporations and institutions.

elite | studio e Associate Director of Marketing, Marcy Weiss, a ten-year marketing and public relations professional, explains that regardless of the client or the uniqueness of a project, the firm lives up to the ideal of making food service design visions a reality. "When our team sits with a client, they get a feel for what their vision is for the space," says Weiss. "We want to understand the needs of the customer, how their space is utilized, how many people are using that space, a feel for overall needs and wants. After that, we'll brainstorm."

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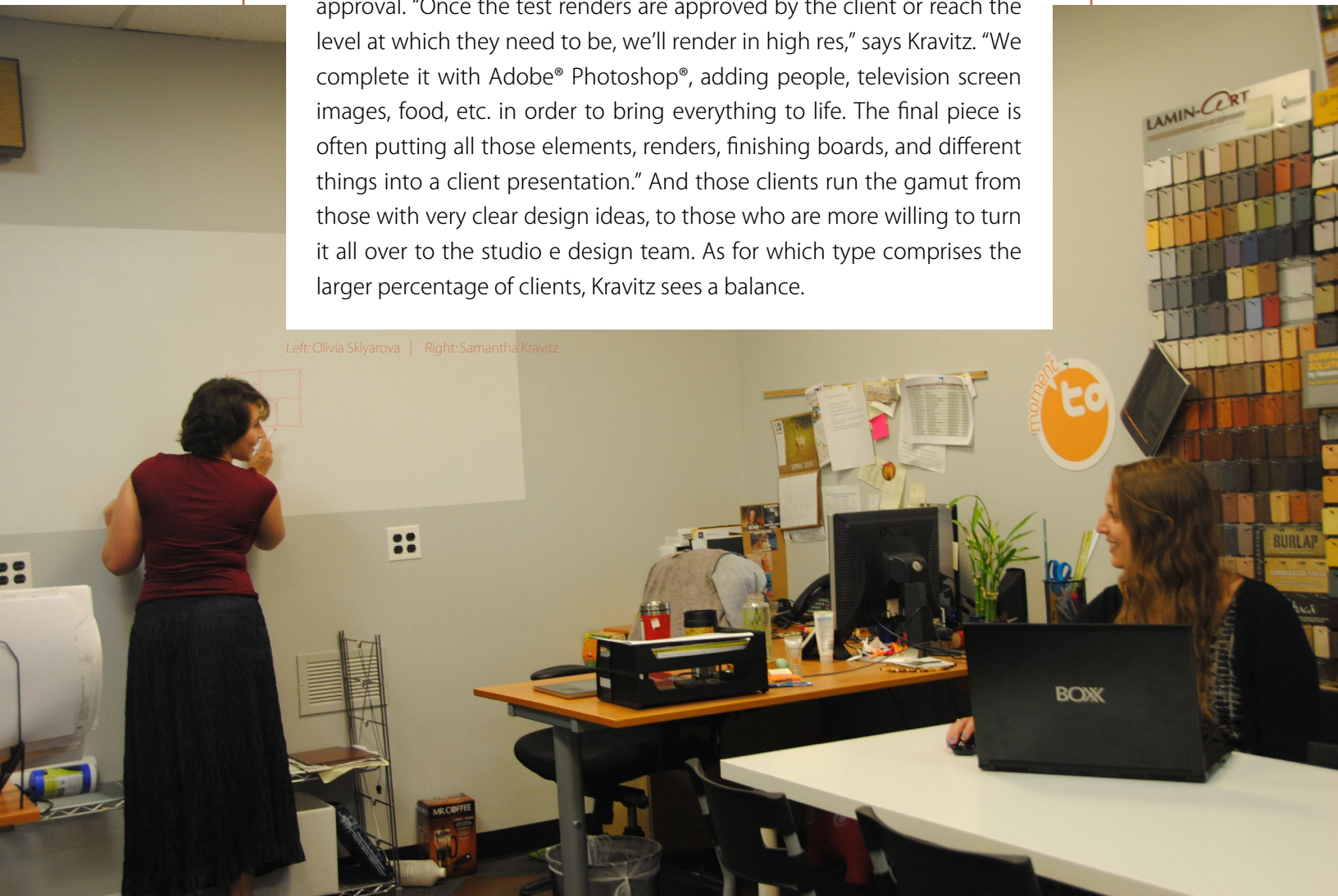


BRAINSTORMING

elite | studio e's design process begins with brainstorming, as well as a thorough review of any research. Sometimes the client will provide existing conditions in Autodesk® Revit®, while other times, **studio e** designers receive a pdf. "We actually have a white board wall and we project that image onto the wall and draw it out—our thoughts, directly on the wall," says associate director of creative design Samantha Kravitz, LEED GA, Allied ASID. "Sometimes, if that step isn't required as much, we go right into Revit and kind of play around with it so we can determine a good flow. Once that is established, we'll start modeling them as components and get everything into 3D."

In most instances, (and with the assistance of Olivia Sklyarova, LEED GA, an interior designer skilled in Autodesk® 3ds Max® and Revit modeling), the team creates the conceptual design, sketches an overall layout, and creates the flow of the space. Working in 3ds Max, Sklyarova takes the original Revit model and goes to work. "I assess lighting and materials to make sure that everything has linked up correctly," she says. "Then we begin the process of fixing it." They model the space three dimensionally, adding lighting, finishes, and any additional details prior to producing test renderings which are sent back and forth on the way to client approval. "Once the test renders are approved by the client or reach the level at which they need to be, we'll render in high res," says Kravitz. "We complete it with Adobe® Photoshop®, adding people, television screen images, food, etc. in order to bring everything to life. The final piece is often putting all those elements, renders, finishing boards, and different things into a client presentation." And those clients run the gamut from those with very clear design ideas, to those who are more willing to turn it all over to the studio e design team. As for which type comprises the larger percentage of clients, Kravitz sees a balance.

Left: Olivia Sklyarova | Right: Samantha Kravitz





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“I think it’s a good combination of both,” she says. “It really depends on the client, the project, and there are a lot of factors that determine that. We’ve had clients that come to us with a very clear vision, down to the uniforms the employees will be wearing or colors and logos. If that’s the case, it tends to dictate what we do in terms of our design development. Other times, we get more of a blank slate and the client doesn’t know what they want. They may know what stations they want to include and the food that will be served, but they leave it completely up to us to figure out how it is we lay it out so that the space functions the best that it could for that application.” As for which type of client she prefers, Kravitz is diplomatic. “It really depends,” she says. “Sometimes, I like it when they have a clear vision, because it makes it a little bit easier in terms of back and forth feedback and comments, and that helps speed up the process for a quick turnaround. It’s really helpful for the client to know what they want, because if they can relay that to us clearly, then it’s easier and smoother to have that direction.”

But what about those “blank slate” clients? Creative freedom is always enticing, as it provides greater opportunity to explore and express new concepts and designs, yet, Kravitz reminds me, there can occasionally be some cons along with the pros. “Sometimes the client will just hand it over and say, ‘Do whatever you think’ and we’ll create a whole layout and send it over and they love it,” she says. “Or sometimes they may have comments, add a whole new station, or decide to change it completely. It depends. Every project is completely different, which makes every day different. It’s great because no two days are the same. We’re never working on the same project. It really varies. We handle all kinds of clients and all kinds of projects.”



FOOD FORWARD

Kravitz adds that the menu also holds significant influence over design decisions because in their renderings, Kravitz and Sklyarova showcase what the client wants. At present, the “food forward” trend, where diners not only want fresh produce, but also want the preparation of their meal to happen right in front of them. “They don’t want to have their kitchen behind closed doors,” says Kravitz, “so we need to portray that within a photorealistic rendering so when their clients and users see it, they think fresh, local, appetizing food which will, in turn, help sell the café. It all comes into play.”

Our discussion of the menu’s influence naturally segues into celebrity chefs and television cooking programs and whether or not that has led to a boom in **elite | studio e’s** business. Kravitz insists that is indeed the case and offered a recent example. “We actually had a project where the client wanted to create a kitchen stadium like the one on *Top Chef*, *Iron Chef*, and all those kinds of shows where the students and the staff themselves can compete,” she says.

“We’ve done this mostly at universities where students can actually come and watch these competitions while they eat their lunch or dinner, providing a level of entertainment within the dining hall in order to draw people in.”

Weiss says that the fact this is trending on college campuses is of no surprise. She cites a recent food magazine report which concluded that 53% of millennials will enter the workforce by year’s end and the quality of the food they consume is of great importance to them. “Those just graduating college are very much affected by what’s going on in the world and they want transparency and instantaneousness in food processing,” she says. “So we’re actually starting to see that trickle into corporate decisions in business, healthcare, and other industries. These young people are moving from higher education into the facilities, so companies want to meet the needs of that generation.”

CHALLENGES

But before they could tackle the foodservice needs of a new generation, **elite | studio e** first had to confront the challenges of its design workflow. They were primarily a Dell shop, although Kravitz says that in terms of brand loyalty, **elite** was not exclusive. “We were never really strictly anything,” she says. “Everyone kind of had a different system. The sales people work on (Micro-soft) Surface Pros, so they are out and about with their small and easily mobile workstations, the food service designers in-house have desktop computers and they’re always at their desks using those. So we were not set to one brand. It was always kind of based on the need for that department, but as the interior design department grew, our workstations just weren’t suitable for the work we were doing.”

According to Kravitz, hardware problems were most pronounced when working in Autodesk applications. “When we were using the Dell Precision workstations, we would run into problems with really large Revit files or large 3ds Max files where the computers just couldn’t handle the scale,” she recalls. “They were slow moving within the file and saving could take up to ten minutes. Rendering took even longer. Any time I tried rendering on the Dells, I would have to leave rendering over the weekend because it took so long to complete.” Kravitz says, due to Revit’s cloud-rendering capability, she often tried walkthroughs in the application, but with the Dell systems’ lack of performance the outcome was frustration. “I’d start it at the end of the day on Friday and when I came back on Monday, there was always some error and it would cancel,” she says. “Something always happened and it didn’t complete.”

This is where the story takes an unusual turn. In most instances, it is the workstation user, the creative professional who longs to work on a BOXX system only to face an uphill climb against IT or management entrenched with using a mass-produced, commodity workstations. But in **elite | studio e**’s BOXX conversion story, it was actually Executive Vice President and IT head Joshua Mass who first proposed BOXX. Although it was prior to her arrival at the firm, Sklyarova knows the story well. “Back in 2013, as a result of the Dells freezing, Joshua was reading a blog comparing workstations,” she says. “He stumbled upon BOXX and ended up reaching out to (BOXX AEC performance specialist) Michael Walls.”

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Kravitz says that the hiring of Sklyarova's hiring was the real catalyst behind Joshua's search for a better workstation. "When we hired Olivia," she recalls, we needed to purchase a professional workstation for her because her expertise is 3ds Max with modeling and detailing and all those elements that make a file really big and difficult to manage on a Dell workstation. I think that's what prompted him to do a little research and begin looking at other options."

They selected an overclocked, six-core, Intel® Core™ i7 [BOXX workstation](#) with an NVIDIA Quadro K2000 graphics card and when Sklyarova went to work on her new system, it didn't take long for her to understand the BOXX advantage. "The main difference is that overall workflow has been improved," she says. "We just work continuously throughout the day without having to stop and wait for programs to process or load. We no longer have issues with the programs crashing, so we don't lose any work and we don't lose any time redoing that lost work. The BOXX really does the thinking for the software, so we don't have to do that. In terms of time saved and deadlines met, it's been a huge help. We're much more productive on it, able to get work done faster, and meet our deadlines with no issues. In terms of our productivity, it's really been a great help."

When pressed to cite an example illustrating the value of the BOXX workstation, Kravitz points specifically to projects where the team needs to link models with an architect's model. "Very often, the architect will have the entire building modeled, so they have the whole building core and it may be a Manhattan skyscraper," she says. "In that piece, the model is just tremendous in size. We have our food service plans as part of the architect's full drawing, so in those situations, I don't think the Dell could even handle maneuvering through that model. Our workflow has been improved significantly with no more worrying about constantly saving, creating backups and things like that. The BOXX system handles our software applications so much better. Now we have five interior designers using BOXX workstations and whenever a food service designer is up for a new system, we're considering replacing theirs with a BOXX as well."

Workstations: APEXX

Featuring high performance dual or single processor (Intel® or AMD) workstations for design, visualization, and motion media workflows. The APEXX line are the fastest workstations in the world featuring groundbreaking multi-GPU systems, safe overclocking, and custom configurations designed to accelerate your workflow.





Left: Samantha Kravitz | Right: Olivia Sklyarova



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-OLIVIA SKLYAROVA

Where the initial workstation was a desktop model, four additional purchases have been mobile workstations. **elite | studio e** chose [GoBOXX 15 SLM](#), the compact, ultra-thin, high performance mobile workstations featuring an Intel® Core™ i7 and professional NVIDIA Quadro K2100M graphics. “The laptops have been a great help especially when we do these brainstorming sessions where we draw on the wall in the conference room,” says Kravitz. “Sometimes we'll take our computers with us, which was helpful this past winter with all the snow storms. It allowed us to disconnect and take work home. When I do go out into the field or to the jobsite, I definitely bring it. It just depends on the situation if I actually open it up and do some work while I'm there.”

elite | studio e has also added a [renderBOXX](#), the dedicated rendering module designed to power the most demanding 3D graphics and animation workflows. “We use the renderBOXX while working in Max,” says Sklyarova. “We want to render, but also want to keep working. renderBOXX doesn't disturb our workflow and we can keep making changes and keep fixing the image before final resolution. Originally, without it, we would have to use our workstation and it would disrupt everything. We couldn't do any other work. Everything would have to be shut down and if you didn't do that, any task would move super slowly. renderBOXX has really helped.”

According to the designers, legendary [BOXX Technical Support](#) has been a bonus as well. “Sometimes, when I would send renderings to the renderBOXX, the materials would get lost or just wouldn't go through, so there was some type of malfunction. I corresponded with BOXX Tech Support and they were very helpful trying to assist me. When they couldn't do anything on their end, they contacted the software company and worked directly with them to solve the problem I was having. Turns out, it was the program that was having issues.”

GoBOXX SLM



renderBOXX



BROADENING HORIZONS

When discussing the future of **elite | studio e**, it's obvious that the firm has been growing tremendously in terms of their interior design team and in the variety of food service designs they produce. After many years of construction experience in healthcare, education, corporate, hospitality, and other industries, they have further broadened their horizons by recently completing a build inside of a museum, *The California Academy of Sciences*. "The museums are something we have never done in the past," says Kravitz. "And now with colleges where food service contracts go up for bid, we do design work for the whole campus. The BOXX systems have really helped us take on that workload, expand our modeling capabilities, and enable us to create more detailed renderings. Our renderings were something we completely outsourced just three years ago and we didn't do very much in house. Now we're doing almost all of it in house. We only outsource when the workload exceeds. The more we grow, the more staff we will need, and the BOXX systems have been the go-to computers for our new design hires."

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Established in 2000, elite | studio e provides comprehensive design consulting services with an emphasis on planning within all segments of the foodservice industry, such as health care, education and corporate dining. They have built an infrastructure of specialists including construction project managers, equipment planners, interior designers and marketing professionals. Contact them at 631.420.9400 or www.elitestudioe.com.

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