

Restaurant Construction Companies Near Me: Code Compliance—Retrofit or Build New in San Juan

Opening a restaurant in San Juan is as much about culinary vision as it is about navigating code compliance. Between resilient construction needs in a hurricane-prone region, seismic considerations, strict life-safety and health standards, and a layered permitting process, the decision to retrofit an existing space or build new carries significant implications for cost, schedule, operations, and risk. Whether you're searching for restaurant construction companies near me, evaluating restaurant general contractors near me, or comparing multi family construction companies san juan that also deliver commercial projects, the right partner will guide you through code compliance from the first sketch to your opening [construction companies Puerto Rico](#) service.

What Code Compliance Really Means in San Juan San Juan adheres to building standards rooted in the International Building Code with Puerto Rico-specific amendments, along with NEC for electrical and NFPA for fire protection. You'll also work with the Puerto Rico Department of Health on food service permits, the Oficina de Gerencia de Permisos (OGPe) through the Single Business Portal for building permits, and often local municipal reviews. A qualified team—think commercial restaurant contractors who know the market—will help integrate:

- Structural and wind design for hurricane resilience and seismic loads
- Fire and life safety (sprinklers per NFPA 13 where required, alarms per NFPA 72, hood suppression per NFPA 96)
- Electrical systems and emergency power considerations per NEC
- Plumbing and grease waste management with correctly sized interceptors
- Kitchen ventilation, make-up air, and outdoor air per mechanical codes
- Accessibility under ADA Title III and local requirements
- Health and sanitary standards for food prep, dishwashing, and storage
- Flood zone and coastal compliance, including elevation, dry/wet floodproofing, and materials

Retrofit vs. New Build: What's Different? San Juan's commercial cores—Condado, Santurce, Hato Rey, and Old San Juan—offer many existing shells ideal for a retrofit. New ground-up builds are more common in developing corridors or larger mixed-use sites. The decision often comes down to [restaurant renovation contractor Puerto Rico](#) four drivers.

1) Schedule and Permitting

- **Retrofit:** In a properly zoned space with a previous food service CO, you may streamline change-of-use reviews and focus on alterations. Expect discovery during demolition that can add time.
- **New Build:** A more predictable sequence but longer overall duration, with full site reviews for utilities, stormwater, egress, parking, and environmental checks.

2) Cost and Scope Certainty



- **Retrofit:** Lower base cost if existing utilities, structure, and MEP capacity align with a commercial kitchen's needs. Hidden defects—undersized electrical service, corroded sanitary lines, or inadequate slab depths for grease lines—can push budgets.
- **New Build:** Higher upfront cost but clearer scope definition and long-term performance. Energy efficiency and maintenance savings often justify the delta.

3) Performance and Brand Experience

- Retrofit: Character-rich buildings in Old San Juan can elevate brand. But integrating modern hoods, shafts, and make-up air into tight or historic envelopes can be challenging.
- New Build: Full control over adjacencies, back-of-house ergonomics, and customer flow, plus easier integration of outdoor dining, curbside pick-up lanes, and EV-ready parking.

4) Risk and Resilience

- Retrofit: Existing structures may predate current wind, seismic, or flood standards. Upgrades can be surgical or extensive. A due diligence survey is essential.
- New Build: Designed from the ground up for current codes, resiliency, and insurability, often a requirement for lenders and national franchisors.

Key Technical Considerations Before You Decide

- Utility Capacity: Restaurants are power- and water-intensive. Confirm available electrical service (often 400–800A for full kitchens), gas supply, and water pressure. Commercial construction san juan teams will coordinate with PREPA/LUMA and PRASA for upgrades.
- Hood and Exhaust Routing: Rooftop or alleyway discharge must meet code and neighborhood constraints. Historical districts may limit roof penetrations—restaurant builders near me with local experience can propose compliant alternatives.
- Grease Interceptor: Verify whether an external interceptor is required by PRASA and local ordinance. Interior interceptors demand slab trenching and structural review.
- Egress and Occupancy: Assembly occupancies trigger strict egress widths, exit signage, emergency lighting, and sometimes sprinkler thresholds. Commercial restaurant contractors can run occupant load calcs early to avoid surprises.
- Flood and Coastal Zones: In low-lying areas, specify moisture-resistant materials below design flood elevation, elevate sensitive equipment, and consider backflow prevention.
- Accessibility: Door clearances, restroom layouts, counter heights, and seating dispersion must meet ADA and Puerto Rico standards; retrofits can be constrained but must achieve compliance to the maximum extent feasible.

The Due Diligence Roadmap Before signing a lease or purchasing land, assemble a team—architect, MEP engineer, and restaurant contractors near me—who can deliver a fast-turn feasibility package:

- Code and Zoning Scan: Confirm use, parking, outdoor dining, signage allowances, and alcohol service requirements.
- Existing Conditions Survey: Laser measure, scan for structure and slab thickness, camera-scope sanitary lines.
- MEP Assessment: Verify panel sizes, transformer availability, water line diameters, and gas meter capacity.
- Structural and Envelope Review: Wind and seismic checks, roof loading for hoods/condensers, water intrusion risks.
- Budget and Phasing: Classify costs as must-have code items vs. Brand enhancements, then phase work to protect opening dates.

Selecting the Right Partner in San Juan Not all builders are interchangeable. Look for general contractors puerto rico with hospitality portfolios and a known track record with OGP and health department approvals. Many hotel renovation company teams and a seasoned hotel renovation contractor have transferable expertise in phasing, occupied renovations, and FF&E coordination that benefits restaurants, especially in mixed-use hotels and resort

properties. Similarly, multi family construction companies san juan that execute mixed-use podiums often bring sophisticated MEP coordination and schedule control.

When evaluating restaurant construction companies near me or restaurant general contractors near me, ask for:

- Recent San Juan restaurant or food hall projects, with references
- Sample permit sets and timelines from OGPe submissions
- Experience with NFPA 96 hoods, duct shafts, and rooftop terminations in dense neighborhoods
- Proven vendor network for grease interceptors, walk-ins, and specialized kitchen equipment
- A clear preconstruction process: cost modeling, value engineering, and lead-time strategies for long-lead gear
- Safety record and hurricane readiness plans during construction

Budgeting Smart: Where Retrofits Win—and Lose

- Wins: Leveraging existing structure and MEP stubs; adopting prior kitchen footprints; reusing grease lines where compliant; façade refreshes instead of full replacements.
- Risks: Undersized electrical or make-up air; hidden water damage; historic review delays; limited egress solutions that cap seat counts and revenue.

Budgeting Smart: Where New Builds Shine

- Wins: Optimized BOH flow for labor efficiency; energy strategies (high-efficiency RTUs, demand-control ventilation); integrated outdoor dining and stormwater solutions; clean compliance path.
- Risks: Longer entitlement lead time; sitework surprises; higher carrying costs before revenue.

Timeline Tactics

- Run parallel tracks: design development while beginning permit pre-consultations.
- Lock critical equipment early: hoods, fans, RTUs, switchgear, walk-ins.
- Prefabricate where feasible: duct sections, restroom pods in larger programs.
- Plan inspections upfront: fire alarm and hood suppression often gate final CO.

The Bottom Line If your target location already hosted food service, retrofit can be the fastest path to opening—provided early surveys confirm capacity and code compliance. For branded experiences demanding specific adjacencies, outdoor seating, or best-in-class energy performance, a new build may deliver better long-term value. Either way, partnering with commercial construction san juan specialists—be they dedicated restaurant builders near me or versatile commercial restaurant contractors—will de-risk the journey and keep you focused on hospitality rather than headaches.

Questions and Answers

Q1: How early should I involve a contractor in San Juan? A: Engage a contractor during site selection. Experienced general contractors puerto rico can price-test options, flag code pitfalls, and advise on OGPe timelines before you commit to a lease.

Q2: What's the most common surprise in retrofits? A: Undersized electrical service and inadequate kitchen exhaust paths. A quick load calc and exhaust routing study by restaurant construction companies near me can save weeks and major change orders.

Q3: Do I always need a grease interceptor? A: Nearly all full-service kitchens do. Requirements and sizing vary; coordinate with PRASA and your engineer. Commercial restaurant contractors will plan for slab trenching or

exterior placement as needed.

Q4: Can hotel-focused builders help with restaurants? A: Yes. A hotel renovation company or hotel renovation contractor often excels at phasing, coordination, and life-safety upgrades—skills directly applicable to restaurants, especially those in hospitality settings.

Q5: Is new build always slower than retrofit? A: Typically, but not always. If a retrofit triggers major structural and MEP upgrades or historic reviews, a ground-up schedule managed by experienced commercial construction san juan teams can be competitive.