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Sauce, Rojo restaurants coming to West End

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Arizona restaurateurs Michael McDermott and Jason Merritt plan to open a pair of restaurants at the Shops of West End lifestyle center in St. Louis Park this summer.

The first restaurant, called Sauce, will serve traditional northern Italian fare and gourmet pizza. The fast-casual eatery also will offer beer and wine.

McDermott and Merritt will operate Sauce under a licensing agreement with Fox Restaurants Concepts, the Scottsdale, Ari.-based company that developed the concept. The chain currently has nine locations, all in Arizona.

The Sauce location at West End is slated to open June 21, pending final city approvals.

Meanwhile, the other restaurant, Rojo Mexican Grill & Tequila Bar, features an upscale Mexican grill concept. Developed by McDermott and Merritt, it will serve lunch and dinner, offering "creative 'Nuevo' Mexican interpretations," as well as a full bar with more than 50 brands of tequila.

The restaurant will feature Mexican masonry, red upholstery and warm, wood-toned décor. It also will have an outdoor patio area.

It is scheduled to open in August.

Rojo and Sauce will be located at the corner of 16th Street and West End Boulevard, between the popular Cooper and Crave restaurants. Other tenants at the Shops of West End include a Rainbow Foods grocery store, the 14-screen Kerasotes ShowPlace Icon Theatres and the recently opened Toby Keith's I Love This Bar & Grill.

McDermott and Merritt are no strangers to the restaurant business. McDermott founded Kona Grill, and his father was Marno McDermott, the successful Twin Cities restaurateur who co-founded the Chi-Chi's Mexican restaurant chain. Merritt formerly served as Kona Grill's chief operating officer.

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