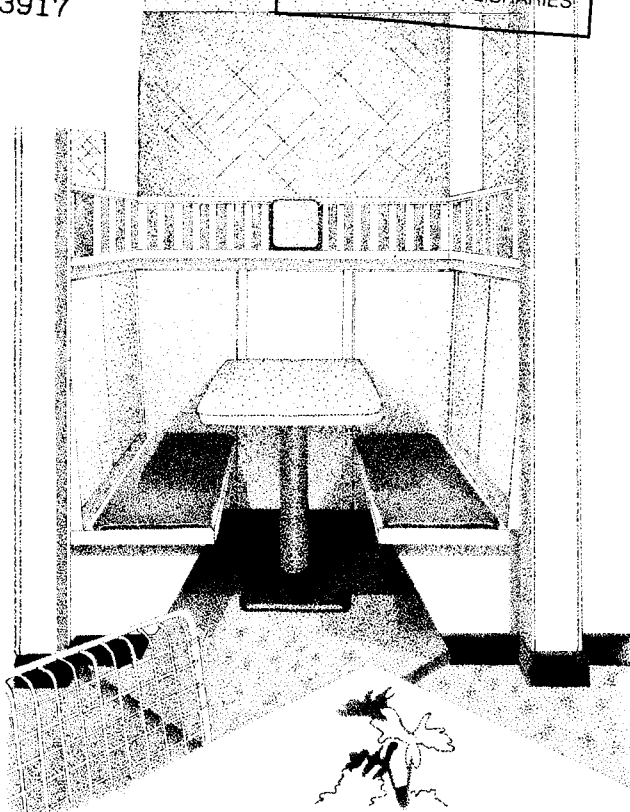
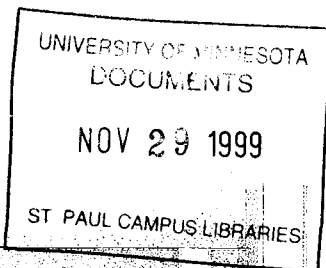


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What determines the success of a restaurant? According to one prominent restaurant designer, the determining factor is not the food but the interior of the restaurant. "A restaurant should be an experience," he states. "It is a place to see and be seen, not just a place to eat."

Whether you agree with this concept or not, the fact is that many customers do consider the ambiance of the restaurant—the interior appearance, service, and how the food is served—as important as the food itself.

Consequently, this publication focuses on the visual and functional design of restaurants, factors that strongly affect customer reactions. It does not discuss management, economics, the "back of the house" (the kitchen and other service areas), or food (other than presentation and surroundings), although these factors are also of great importance in operating a restaurant.

Restaurants Up Front

Harold H. Alexander

It's Your Responsibility

As a restaurant owner or manager, you make decisions each and every day that affect the ambiance and function of your restaurant. You are the one who approves ideas, purchases, replacements, and payments. Whether you rely on an interior designer specializing in restaurant design, the sales personnel of your equipment supplier, a local architect, the decorator next door, or Aunt Tillie, the final design decisions must always rest on *your* shoulders.

Even if you have professional design assistance, it is prudent to be very familiar with the basic elements of design so that you can knowledgeably discuss the features of your restaurant. It is also your responsibility to maintain and control your restaurant's ambiance and function and to be actively involved whenever there are changes, large or small. To do otherwise indicates loss of control and poor business practice.

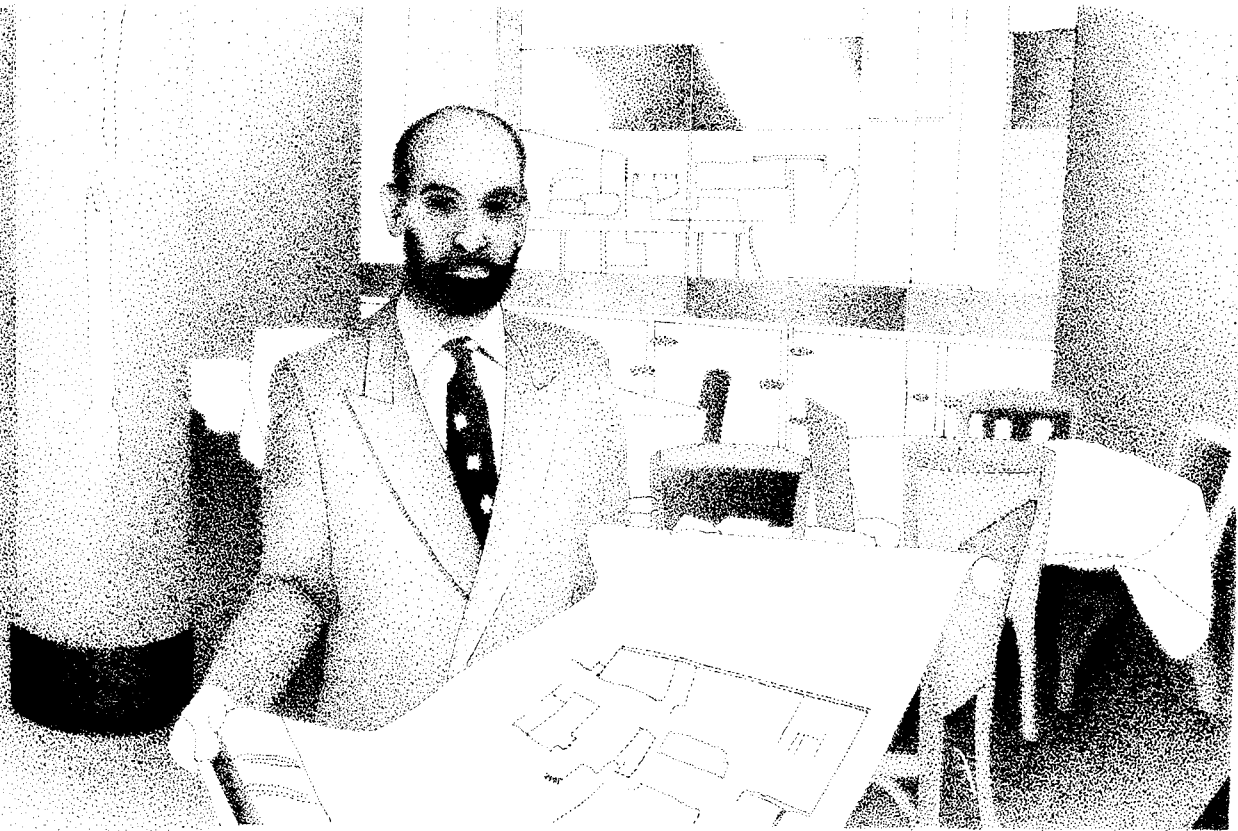
Important factors to consider when designing a restaurant include color and light, textures and patterns, space and layout, and style or type of restaurant.

Color and Light

Our senses—taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight—affect us in many ways. Not only do they impart a physical sensation, but there is often an accompanying emotional or aesthetic experience. For example, if you touch something hot, you feel not only the physical warmth but also perhaps a sense of comfort—or of discomfort.

Of all the senses, sight is the most important, even in a restaurant, where a major goal is for the customer to taste and smell the food served. Eighty percent or more of all impressions are acquired through one's eyes. We are greatly affected by the visual appearance of ourselves and others, of our surroundings, and of our food. The old food service saying that "people eat with their eyes" continues to be true.

The appearance of food on a plate can be significantly altered by light and color. So can the appearance of the restaurant. Indeed, the light and color in a restaurant can



even make one's dinner companion look different. Consequently, it is very important to create a restaurant atmosphere that enhances the color and appearance of both the food and the diners.

How light and color create effects. Without light there can be no color. Humans see color because of the absorption and reflection of light waves—the color that the eye sees is composed of the colored light rays reflected from the surface. Moreover, the color of an object changes in different kinds of light. For example, in a white light (which contains all the colors of the rainbow or spectrum), an apple will look red—all the colors except red are absorbed and only the color red is reflected back into the eye. But if the light does not contain any red rays (such as a green or blue light), then no red rays can be reflected and the apple will appear gray or even black. If all the rays are red, then the apple will appear very light or even white.

Strong red or blue lights, often seen in supper clubs and cocktail lounges and in other restaurants during the Christmas season, will cause images to vibrate and become indistinct. If no other light rays are available, the appearance of food may be affected. For example, if a rare steak and a green salad are served in a dining room illuminated with only red neon and candles in dark red holders, the salad greens may appear an unappetizing dark gray or black and the rare steak may look whitish.

Human eyes, minds, and palates are sensitive to any change from accepted color norms—milk is expected to be white, lettuce green, and coffee brown. Studies have been done in which the color of food was changed. For example, in one study steak was colored whitish-gray, celery pink, lettuce blue (the least liked food color, by the way), peas black, and milk red. The diners served this meal lost their appetites and some became violently ill. Therefore, always be alert to how light can affect food appearance.

Types of light sources. Because of these possibly unappetizing effects, a light source that is color-balanced is generally preferred. However, there are certain settings where the color balance can vary somewhat to add interest or warmth to a restaurant's interior space. Here are some examples:

For a warm effect, use warm white fluorescent or incandescent light sources, and introduce pinks, reds, peaches, and corals in the tablecloths, wall coverings, and other decorations to provide direct and reflected light that has an abundance of red/orange rays, the color of skin tone. Customer and service personnel appearance will be improved. There are many foods that fall in the red/orange range—meats, many fruits, non-green vegetables—and their color will also be enhanced.

The more common cool white fluorescent light sources, which contain an abundance of green and blue light rays, create a cool effect. While the light from cool white fluores-

cents does not enhance skin tones or foods in the red/orange range, it does brighten the color of green vegetables, salads, and blue and green furnishings. Interiors illuminated with cool white fluorescent lighting will appear much colder to customers and employees than an interior lighted with warm white fluorescent or incandescent light sources.

Location of light sources. In many supermarkets special light sources are used over different areas, for example, lights with more red rays are used above meat cases, greenish lights are used over lettuces, and specially balanced fluorescent lights are used for enhancing all colors. Often the location of different departments can easily be determined by the color of the light emanating from the ceiling. The same conditions should be considered for lighting above a restaurant's buffet table or salad bar.

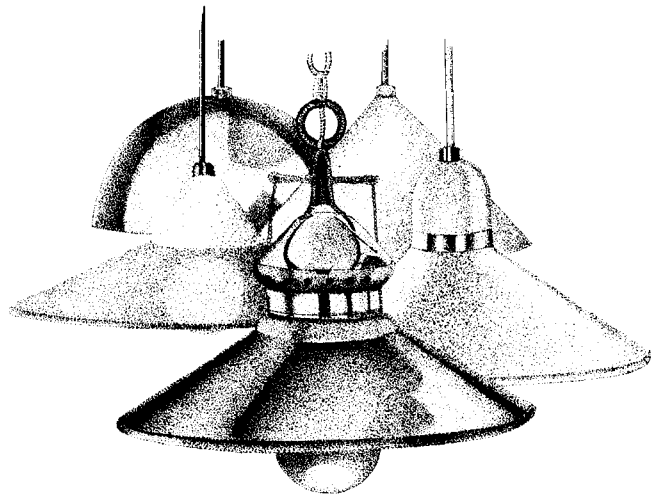
Downlights (spotlights directed straight down) are frequently used in restaurants, sometimes with unflattering results. When used without additional sidelights, strong shadows are created on diners' faces, accenting all lines and wrinkles. Reflecting surfaces on walls and light tablecloths will help soften shadows. If downlights are used without other light sources, the tables will seem like pools of bright light surrounded by dark, shadowy spaces. The strong contrast between the brightly lighted, reflective tables and tableware and the dark spaces beyond can cause eye fatigue.

Amount of light. The amount of light will also affect sight and actions. Extremely bright interiors will cause diners to eat faster (and talk faster and louder), while lower light levels will slow them down (and also cause them to talk softly). Consequently, low light levels are not encountered in fast food outlets nor do we usually find expensive restaurants brightly lit. When incandescent light sources are dimmed by a rheostat, their color will become more yellow, taking on the coloration of candlelight.

The colors you choose for the surroundings will also affect the appearance of food and diners. In this case, it is not the abundance of a certain light ray, but contrast. For example, it has been reported that "a lettuce salad on a green plate can be smaller than one on a plate of another color, but not look it."

Effect of color on food appearance. Since restaurants frequently display food in special cases, in buffets, and in salad bars, it is important that food items be enhanced and presented in the best possible setting. Light-colored dishes that hold food are preferred by most people. The effect of cleanliness imparted by white or near white is undoubtedly a factor. Darker service dishes are acceptable, particularly when combined with white or with white tablecloths.

Turquoise and blue backgrounds and fixtures will make meats and red foods look brighter. Lavender and brownish dishes detract from food colors. Brown dishes, especially, make food hard to see because many of our foods are brownish (this is the same concept as the green salad plate, but it creates a negative reaction). In a dark restaurant, it



may be especially hard to pour coffee into a dark cup without an overflow or a partially filled cup. Dark dishes enhance only light-colored foods. Also, dark dishes show water spots more.

Effect of color on restaurant appearance. An interior space painted light, dull blue will appear more spacious than one painted dark, bright red. This is a simple example of how spatial effects can be created by the use of hue (the name of a color), value (the lightness or darkness of a color) and intensity (the brightness or dullness of a color).

Hue. Different colors can affect the apparent size of an object or space. Certain colors seem to advance or come nearer than others. Reds, oranges, and yellows seem to advance while greens, blues, and violets seem to recede. Consequently, if a restaurant or retail food service business interior is painted red it will appear to be smaller than if it were painted blue.

Value. The lightness and darkness of walls, floors, tables, and dishes can also affect how we react to a restaurant space. Light walls will give the illusion of a larger and more airy interior than if the walls are dark. Therefore, if a more spacious atmosphere is desired, use lighter colors in the space, but if you want a more intimate space, paint the walls darker. Adjusting the light levels can often accomplish the same effect. A brightly lit space will appear larger than one in which the lights are dimmed.

By contrasting or minimizing the values of objects and backgrounds, certain architectural and furniture details can be emphasized or reduced. For example, if there are structural elements that are necessary but unsightly, such as plumbing pipes, paint them to match the wall and they will virtually disappear. However, if important furniture display pieces exist, let them contrast with their backgrounds for greater importance.

Intensity. The intensity of a color also affects visual space. Bright colors will seem to draw objects and surfaces nearer while dull, grayish colors will visually expand the space.

Visual temperature. Restaurant and food purveyors should remember that certain colors suggest different temperatures. The reds, oranges, and yellows are called the warm hues. Greens, blues, and violets are the cool hues. Consequently, the visual temperature of an interior, display area, or even a food item can be affected by the surrounding color. Although the greens of lettuce would theoretically be enhanced if surrounded by a bright red background, the temperature of the red would certainly negate the coolness implied by the lettuce. The actual temperature of interior spaces may not differ, but if one room is basically red or brown and another green or blue, the green/blue room will seem cooler—a consideration when determining heating and air conditioning requirements. In greenhouse dining spaces, for example, to counter the visual warmth of excessive sunlight, consider introducing blues and greens into the decor.

“Fashion” colors. Although color is very important in a restaurant, the use of “fashion” colors, that is, colors following current clothing trends such as mauve, pale peach, or, earlier favorites, olive green and gold, should be avoided for major surfaces and equipment. Fashion is fleeting. When purchasing long-lasting (and expensive) items, such as carpeting, wall surfaces, upholstery, and china it is strongly recommended that you choose less temporary fashion colors. Introduce the current color favorites in more expendable items such as flowers, napery, and other accessories.

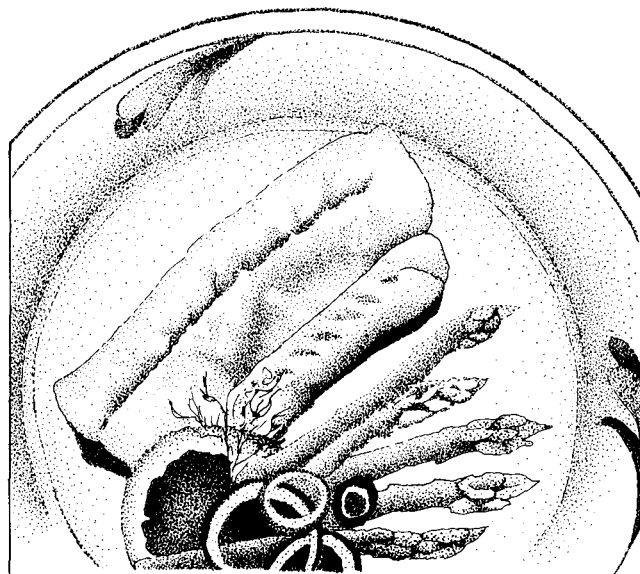
Textures and Patterns

Surface textures (rough and/or smooth) and patterns (printed surface designs) are often afterthoughts when designing a restaurant or other food service facility. However, they can serve the owner/manager and the customer well—or poorly.

Textures and patterns help create a mood. If all surfaces are hard and smooth, regardless of the colors used, the effect will often be cold and uninviting, especially if the area is brightly lit. A restaurant must not only be clean—it must look clean. Textures and patterns can significantly affect visual cleanliness—the impression of cleanliness that your customers see.

Patterns. A patterned surface can camouflage objects upon it. Thus richly patterned china can detract from the image of the food. Tablecloths and wall and floor coverings, on the other hand, may benefit from a patterned surface. Patterned floor coverings, especially, will hide accidents, stains and spills, but should not replace proper maintenance. For safety, avoid patterned hard and soft floor coverings that appear three-dimensional or when the pattern may conceal steps and other surface irregularities.

Texture of floors. A rough or heavily textured surface such as carpet, regardless of its pattern, will be harder to clean than a smooth surface such as quarry tile, vinyl, wood, or



smooth concrete, but it will not show soil as much. A rough surface will also appear darker than a smooth one, because of the shades and shadows of the texture.

A smooth-surfaced floor may become slick and cause accidents, especially if water or grease are allowed to remain on it. Some nonceramic tiles, such as rubber or synthetic plastic, may be adversely affected by grease tracked in from the kitchen, so, when selecting hard surface floor coverings, be particularly careful to select materials that grease and oils will not deteriorate.

Carpeting should not have thick padding under it in a restaurant setting. Not only will a thick pad absorb spilled liquids, but walking and moving chairs will be more difficult, for both the diners and the service personnel.

Effects of texture on sound. When considering texture, consider also the inherent sound-deadening and reflective qualities of surfaces. Hard, smooth surfaces reflect sounds; rough and soft ones absorb them. A softer surface will reduce the noise and breakage of dropped dishes and glassware—but will make it harder to clean up the breakage. Perhaps your restaurant is too noisy (or too quiet). Changing some of the surface textures can alter sound levels. Incidentally, higher noise levels are more acceptable today; diners consider noise an indication of a restaurant's popularity.

Space and Layout

First impressions are important. This is particularly true when customers enter a restaurant. So be sure that there is adequate space available in the area where customers wait to be seated. While the customer waiting area does not produce direct income, this space can allow customers to wait in comfortable surroundings, thus reducing “walkaways”.

Frequently a bar or cocktail lounge can serve as customer waiting space. Such an arrangement does offer additional income potential.

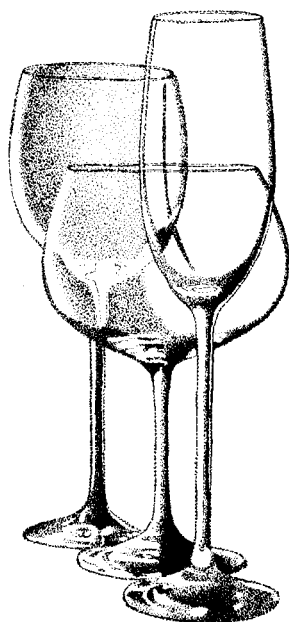
The number of diners that can be accommodated in a given space is always a primary consideration. Whether to use "two-top" or "four-top", round or rectangular, tables, as well as the type and kind of chairs, must be decided for each individual space and type of restaurant.

Plan on several table-chair configurations to accommodate different size groups as well as different types of dining, for example, lunch vs. dinner. Project and plan ways of adapting and combining chairs and tables as seating needs change. Otherwise, initial traffic patterns may be altered in ways that inhibit or even prohibit customer movement as well as efficient service. Regardless of meal or seating arrangements, retain easy access to and egress from the kitchen and wait stations.

The type of restaurant will help determine distances and spaces between tables, chairs, and diners, but there are some general observations and "rules" that should be remembered:

Chairs. Armchairs take up more space than chairs without arms. Avoid chairs with legs that protrude beyond the chair seats; chair legs should be fairly vertical to lessen the chance of tripping over them. Be especially selective with stackable chairs; they often have legs that cant considerably. Chairs should be sturdy, but not so heavy that they cannot be shifted easily.

Tables should be solid and untippable. Although many restaurant tables have pedestal bases (one center support), these must be heavily weighted for stability. If your customers include senior citizens or people with disabilities, consider tables with four legs.



Allow a minimum of 24 inches for each seated diner; up to 30 inches is better. Also allow about 16 to 18 inches in front of each diner for the place setting. Too narrow or too shallow tables can cause unnecessary accidents and crowded conditions.

Space between tables. Minimum space around each table varies. Allow a minimum of 24 inches behind a seated guest, or 36 to 42 inches between the edge of the table and the wall or other physical obstruction to permit limited access and circulation. A space of 48 inches between the table and the wall is necessary if there is more than minimal movement behind the seated diner. Between diners seated at adjacent tables allow at least 24 inches. Wider aisles should be established for major service personnel movement; allow at least 50 to 54 inches. A minimum of 72 inches is needed if an aisle is used by many diners, such as one approaching a salad or buffet table. Larger spaces will usually be desired in "tablecloth dining" establishments.

Chair seat/table top ratio is very important. Chair seats vary from 15 to 18 inches in height and dining tables are from 26 to 30 inches high. Use lower table heights for lower chair seats. Measure when seated in upholstered chairs to allow for spring depression. It is better to have tables a little too low than too high for diner comfort. However, be sure the chair arms and the person's fingers can be accommodated under the table apron and that there is enough room for diners' legs.

Handicap access is required. Even the smallest differences in floor level must be ramped for wheelchair access. This includes entrances, the dining area, restrooms, and emergency exits. If a diner is confined to a wheelchair, or uses crutches or a walker, space at and approaching the table must be larger. Space requirements for disabled guests vary but here are a few typical measurements:

Wheelchairs are 25 inches wide and 42 inches deep. At a table a wheelchair will extend back about 30 inches (the back of the chair of the average diner is about 18 to 20 inches from the table edge). A complete turnaround requires 63 inches.

Walkers are 28 inches wide. Guests on crutches need a 4 by 4 foot space for a crutch swing and a space 36 inches wide when standing.

The cane of a blind person extends in front about 32 inches when the person is walking. An absolute minimum width of 30 inches is required when the blind person has a seeing eye dog.

Type of clientele. The type and age of your diners will also affect spatial arrangements in a food service establishment. Older diners will probably require somewhat wider spaces to navigate between tables as they are frequently not quite as agile as younger individuals and cannot maneuver as easily in narrow spaces. They also find it more difficult to slide into booths or to move heavy chairs. Chair seats

should be slightly higher and firmer. Brighter light levels will also be appreciated.

"Business lunchers" will appreciate more space at the table and between tables. Since diners tend to move their chairs back as a meal continues, longer than average meals will cause spaces between tables to be reduced, possibly making service difficult. Sound and visual privacy is also a consideration that should not be ignored. If serious and private discussions are frequently held, sound-deadening surfaces or background music ("white sound") should be installed. However, sound levels should not be so high that customers cannot converse in normal or slightly below normal voices. To reduce laundry problems, provide small notepads for business diners.

Some diners wish to be seen; therefore, they prefer the "power seats". The most important power seats are those with backs to the wall so the diner can observe who enters, leaves, etc. Their companions, sitting with backs to the rest of the dining area, are at a disadvantage—unless there is a mirrored back wall; *then* the power seat importance shifts.

Takeout services. Many restaurants have discovered that box lunches and other takeout food services are economically desirable. Additional income is generated with no increased space, equipment, or service personnel. However, space will have to be provided for takeout customers waiting to pick up orders as well as for patrons waiting to be seated at tables. The takeout service should be easily identified for both types of customers. Space should be made available to display fresh foods available for takeout—enhancing the perception of quality for both on-site and takeout dining.

Restrooms. Adequate space should be provided for easily accessible restrooms. Restrooms should be well lighted, well ventilated, and scrupulously clean. Handicap safety features are a must. Large mirrors, shelves for purses, and hooks for coats should be available. If a restroom is used by more than one person at a time, privacy partitions with closable doors are needed.

Style or Type of Restaurant

"What kind of restaurant do you want?" This question is usually asked first in planning a restaurant's design. And it is a very important question. But the physical, functional, and psychological or emotional aspects of restaurant design must be considered before the "decoration." The basics of functional space planning and customer comfort and responses, regardless of style, must govern the long-term investment.

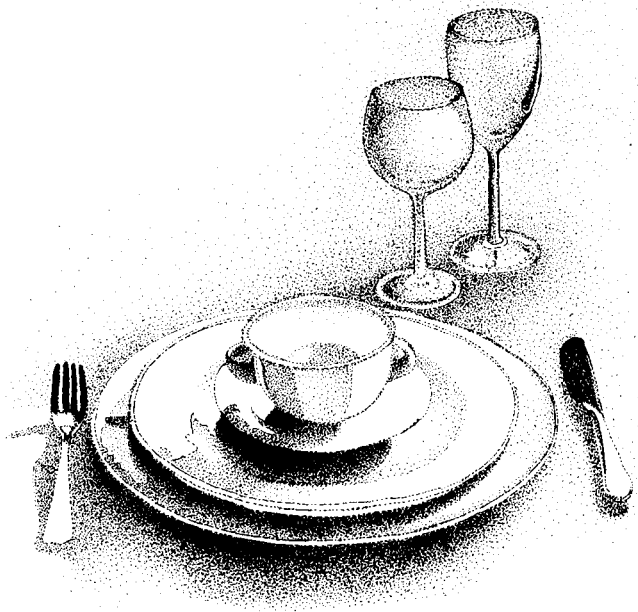
If you want a restaurant where diners linger over their food, in all likelihood a more traditional and luxurious ambiance will be desirable, colors will be more muted, lighting will be subdued, and sound levels lower. Better china, glassware, napery and other table accessories will be used.

If your restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and late suppers, it may be desirable to be able to alter the appearance of the dining space as well as the menu and service. For example, brighter lighting, sunlight streaming through clean windows, more informal china, and livelier color combinations would be appropriate for breakfast and lunches rather than for dinners and late-night suppers. Adjusted lighting, closed draperies, the addition of tablecloths, flowers, candles, and quiet background music appropriate to the theme and clientele of the restaurant can change the ambiance and increase the intimacy of a dining space without much effort or expense. Since restaurants are often compared to theaters, their interiors and food service can and should be somewhat dramatic, especially at night.

There is a wide variety of styles in restaurants today. The ubiquitous dark wood/red/brass/exposed brick/nostalgic memento-filled dining room is being replaced by lighter, more lively interiors. The popular beruffled, country look is also giving way to more sophisticated styles, often acquiring European and ethnic characteristics to reflect wider and varied menus. Regionalism in design is increasing. Restaurant interiors are reflecting a "sense of place" through the selection of interior colors, materials, and themes related to local history. There is an increase in the number of authentic historic recreations and restored interiors.

Wood tones are generally lighter; polished blond oak is replacing brown-black stained rough sawed oak. Lighting is less subdued but still dramatic. Colors are brighter and cleaner. Neutrals such as gray, beige, and many whites and off-whites are much in evidence. Surfaces that look like or





actually are polished stone are very popular. Recent prize-winning restaurant interiors, even when based upon historic styles, show bright, clean colors, an airier atmosphere, and a lighthearted approach to design.

By more fully understanding and paying attention to these basic design components—light, color, texture, pattern, space, layout, and style—you will be better able to control the ambiance and function of your restaurant, and perhaps create not only a restaurant but also an “experience.”

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Resort Interiors (CD-FO-3630)

Credits

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