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The Importance of a Comprehensive Design Plan

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“Form follows function.”

That ages-old adage advises us to pay attention to the way something works, or doesn't work, before considering how it looks. All too often, however, restaurateurs concern themselves with the aesthetics of their dining concepts with no regard to how spaces work for — and sometimes against — them.

Just as restaurateurs need strong business plans to woo investors, they also need to develop comprehensive design plans for their restaurants before a single brick is laid or door is hung.

A solid design plan is one of the most important investments that can be made in the foodservice industry. The returns can be significant — not only does it simplify the construction process on the front end, a good design plan allows a restaurant to operate more efficiently and enjoyably for both patrons and staff.

The central element of a restaurant's design is function and flow for both staff and patrons. Each space in the restaurant must be assigned a specific purpose and the plan must outline how each of those spaces interacts with the others.

It is particularly important to pay attention to key work areas for staff, such as wait stations and dish drops. These are often treated as afterthoughts and end up crammed into a restaurant's odd, distant corners — or



worse, in plain sight of patrons. The placement of wait stations must be carefully considered and strategically located to allow for easy access and maximized use.

Additionally, restroom placement is a significant and frequently neglected consideration. Traditionally, restrooms are located in or near a restaurant's bar area or entrance, but that's not a hard and fast rule. Some restaurateurs prefer having restrooms close to private dining areas to better handle large groups; others like to have facilities near the back of the restaurant to capitalize on the visualize energy created people walking through the dining area.

A strong comprehensive design plan also recognizes that restaurants have more than one point of revenue, including bars, patios, open and private dining rooms and to-go areas. Just as a sensible financial plan includes a well-diversified portfolio, a good design plan incorporates multiple areas that serve complimentary purposes and take into account changing weather con-

ditions and customer preferences.

For example, in the heat of a Texas summer when temperatures frequently exceed the century mark at dusk, patio dining isn't an option for most people. A smart design plan will offer innovative ways to compensate for potentially lost space by, for example, closing in the patio with retractable doors and extending some sort of air conditioning to the previously open area. In contrast, in Miami's tropical climate, where café-style patio seating is the norm, restaurants go to great lengths to make even their innermost tables feel like they are outdoors.

Only once the functional needs of the restaurant are met, should design elements be introduced for overall feel, look and positive energy of the space. Every well-traveled person has been to a restaurant where it was obvious that an interior designer created the “look” more to pad his own portfolio and to be published in the latest design journal than to serve the functional needs of the restaurant. Those establishments, while visually stunning, are often crippled by the lack of attention that was placed on making them workable spaces. In other words, they look great in the pages of *Architectural Digest*, but aren't enjoyable to patrons and staff.



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