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**9 Steps To Maximize Your Interior Design
and Space** By Diane Chiasson

Many restaurant and food-service operators might think that customers will visit their establishment simply because the food is good. But they are mistaken. The interior design and space of an operation is equally important in bringing in new and returning customers, as well as adding to the overall dining experience.

Making a first impression is crucial in business, and the only way to make a good first impression with your operation is not so much through your food, but what your customers see as soon as they walk through the door.

Interior design is an integral part of the overall success of a restaurant or any other type of foodservice operation, and must never be overlooked. You need to consider where you want to create a "WOW" effect for your customers while they are eating in your operation, and if your design and layout convey that experience.

Also, you have to consider how your restaurant flows for service and staff, and whether or not your kitchen and workstations are ergonomically designed to bring out the best in your staff.

There are several things to consider when embarking on a change in interior design that I could write hundreds of books on the subject. But here are a few quick and easy pointers that will help you, whether or not you are getting ready to build a new operation from scratch, or if you are thinking of making some simple changes to your space.

Establish a solid vision and plan

First and foremost, before you begin anything, you must have a goal and a plan. Assess both your short-term and your long-term goals. Your final vision must strongly convey your brand, yet must also address the needs and tastes of your customers. Don't be afraid to appeal to your clearly-identified target market.

The elements of a successful restaurant design that need to compliment each other include the space layout and flow, theme, materials, colors, lighting, graphic design, signage and artwork, along with menus, linens, uniforms, dishes, cutlery and even napkins.

Tip: Always remember that electricity and plumbing should be done first!

Too many cooks spoil the broth

Once you have decided to take on a renovation, you will get valuable design input from your staff, your family members and your friends. While you may get a lot of good and useful advice from them, it is essential that one person take

the lead to create a single vision. Otherwise, you will end up with a mishmash of ideas, which will ultimately increase your design costs and create a space that could have been better.

Stay away from design fads

Fads are called fads because they come and go. Your customers may get tired of them quickly. Always keep in mind that customers want to go to a restaurant that is welcoming, inviting and friendly - and they want to be comfortable! This rule applies to everything including your color selection, your furniture, and your cutlery and crockery. Many items may look cool, but are they practical?

Incorporate your brand in your design

Establishing a brand is marketing's golden rule. How does your restaurant's identity differentiate itself from your competitor's? What do you want your customers to think of when they hear your name?

Once you have a brand, you need to incorporate your brand image into all aspects of your restaurant. Keep in mind that the colors you choose for your brand must also be integrated into the interior design of your restaurant. For the outside of your restaurant, get an awning with your name and brand on it to draw your customers in. Remember that people feel a certain sense of comfort when they see something familiar.

Create a color board

In order to bring your vision together, it's essential to see how all the colors and textures you have chosen work with each other. Use a story/color board to attach your tear sheets, finishes, fabric swatches, photos, design sketches, clippings, paint chips and photos. This will be your roadmap to making decisions about what to buy and use. Paint 3" by 3" wood panels with your colors and work around your space from dark spots to nearby windows to see how your colors work in different situations.

Pick your best colors

Colors stir our emotions, change our moods and touch our hearts. People look and feel their best when warm colors surround them. Studies have shown that warm colors such as orange, yellow and red have been known to attract attention and stimulate appetites.

Casual, more informal restaurants tend to use more colors and brighter hues, while upscale restaurants use fewer colors, but opt for different textures and patterns to create richness.

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