

# ESR™

*Ideas and Insights for Full-Service Restaurants*

Best Beverage Programs

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## PRIX-FIXE PERFECTION

Naomi Pomeroy, winner of James Beard Best Chef Northwest, changes the Beast menu weekly.

**FSR**

SEPTEMBER 2014

# Restaurant

# SMARTS

## Design Elements

Diners are increasingly selecting restaurants based on the overall experience, with the setting and seating as much a factor as food and service.

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ALL RESTAURANTS ARE TRYING TO TELL A STORY, ACCORDING TO TESSER DESIGN DIRECTOR BRENT WHITE, AND HIS ROLE IS TO HELP HIGHLIGHT WHAT MAKES EACH RESTAURANT STORY UNIQUE.

TESSER

# The Engine Driving Restaurant Design

Millennials seek authenticity in food and beverage, but that mentality expands to furniture and interiors, as well. *By Terah Shelton Harris*

Restaurant design trends come and go, pushing beyond sculptural accents or geometric fixtures. Last year, communal tables were all the rage. Before that, the Edison bulb had its time to shine. This year, inspired by the revitalization of urban areas, industrial-inspired looks continue to grow.

Today, a restaurant's interior is often as evaluated as its food, facilitated by the rise of social media, review websites, and countless food blogs that let customers view photos of the restaurant's interior and food before they've even stepped foot inside a venue.

"Restaurant owners and operators

realize guests want a dining experience beyond just great food and service," says Christian McAuley, owner of Imagine Tile. "This can be accomplished with unique design elements to create an interactive and engaging environment."

Design trends are also being driven by community-oriented and environmentally conscious Millennials, who show a growing desire for ethnic and regional authenticity.

## The Rise of the Millennials

Born anywhere from 1978 to 2000, Millennials are the largest population demographic the U.S. has ever seen.

According to Barron's, this group, sometimes dubbed Generation Y, total 86 million, making them 7 percent larger than the Baby Boomer generation.

Industry experts project Millennials will become the strongest brand and consumer influencers since the Baby Boomer generation. According to the United Nation's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, by the year 2030, Millennials will outnumber non-Millennials by 22 million, and their influence on the restaurant industry, and restaurant design, cannot be ignored.

According to Technomic's report, "Understanding the Foodservice Atti-

## Finishing Touches

Design elements that are often overlooked, such as tile accents on the walls, tables, and floors or the flowers on the table, enhance the experience. Imagine Tile has spent the last decade creating and



producing commercially rated ceramic tiles and works directly with architects and designers to reproduce textures, patterns, photos, illustrations, and even three-dimensional images into tiles. Patented glazing technology allows it to print images on the tile, which are designed specifically for high-traffic indoor and outdoor use.

“Our products create themed environments and offer customization capabilities, which are not common in the tile industry,” says Christian McAuley, owner of Imagine Tile. “We help brands reinforce their marketing messages and brand story through the tile. A custom tile border or a unique floor can add color and flair that reflects the brand’s personality.”

Similarly, table accents like flowers can reinforce a restaurant brand and personalize the dining experience. Shelley Rosen, founder of Chicago’s Luxe Bloom, a subscription-based business that supplies preserved Ecuadorian flowers for restaurants, spas, and luxury retailers, says consumers have more resources at their fingertips to help them select the dine-out experience that is exactly what they want it to be.

“The customer can search the menus in advance and they can also see what the décor looks like in advance—the customer is really empowered now, which has made the restaurateur elevate her game,” Rosen says. Luxe Bloom flowers are preserved using sugar water, which helps them last up to three months. The preserved flowers, which require no upkeep, elevate the dining experience with an elegant finishing touch on the table.

Traditional Italian restaurants often use red roses as a symbol of elegance and romance. So it is fitting that one of Luxe Bloom’s clients, Rosebud Restaurants, a Chicago-based restaurant group, procures Luxe Bloom’s signature rose for its tables.

“Centro’s Executive Chef Joe Farina seeks to achieve a traditional experience with the finest Italian menu and experience,” Rosen explains. “Luxe Bloom is saving the restaurant time and money without compromising the beauty the owner seeks to deliver.” ■

tudes & Behaviors of Millennials,” 41 percent of Millennials purchase food away from home at least twice a week.

“Millennials are starting to shift the focus of restaurants and [influence] what’s going on,” says Brad Belletto, CEO of Vision360. “They are very health-conscious and a little bit more environmentally correct than past generations, so those are driving elements.”

According to research by the Center for Culinary Development, Millennials value authenticity above almost all else, something Belletto has witnessed firsthand.

“When I’m out with Millennials who work in the company, the first thing they gravitate toward are the recycled elements, like railroad ties that someone turned into a seat,” he says. “It really stems from their lifestyle and even some of their eating habits.”

Belletto says Vision360 aims to help restaurateurs understand their current clientele with a focus on designing for the future. Recently, a client of Vision360, who owned a restaurant situated in the same space for 17 years, decided to relocate to a trendier, up-and-coming part of town.

“For this client, our focus on design is to help him understand who his new diners are going to be,” Belletto says. “That’s driven by our research and our understanding of Millennials.”

### Themes as Design Elements

Themes or motifs are highly recommended by design experts, who say a strong theme has the potential to turn a restaurant into a destination. Aligning a restaurant’s theme with burgeoning trends, helps create an experience that entices and delights customers.

“Theming plays a major role in the design aspect. It can be subtle or dramatic and in-your-face,” says Terry Collins, president of Themed Environments and Effects. “In my discussions with developers, they’re interested in doing things differently and creating things to stand out, rather than looking like just another restaurant.”

McAuley at Imagine Tile says when

people decide to spend the time and money to eat at a restaurant, they want to feel immersed in the experience.

“It’s not enough to have a delicious meal,” McAuley explains. “Consumers expect the restaurant design to complement, or even enhance, the food itself, and our custom capabilities help them achieve just that.”

At Themed Environments and Effects, Collins says designs involve creating an atmosphere, and the company has designed tropical restaurants, African-themed restaurants, and oldies restaurants.

“[The restaurant] can become a must-see attraction in its community,” Collins says. “When I design a restaurant, my intention is to make it different in a memorable way that will beg customers to return over and over.”

In some instances, the design alone can generate word-of-mouth marketing.

“As I said, a themed facility can be subtle in nature, or it can go to the other extreme,” he adds. “Some restaurants are being adventurous and leaping into new uncharted territory, while others aren’t so much.”

**Authenticity**

According to Brent White, design director at Tesser, all restaurants are trying

to tell a story through their food, beverage, and design, and they can create more authenticity through the use of real design materials.

“Customers are more savvy than they used to be, and the things they touch have to feel real,” White says. “They’re looking for real materials and spaces that are built on a genuine story. If a restaurant has a unique story or something special about its food, then our task is to highlight that specific element or piece of the restaurant that’s different and capitalize on it.”

Restaurants are also emphasizing simplicity and comfort in a way that appeals to customers.

For example, from a design standpoint, Collins says some dining areas are created to give guests privacy. On the other hand, a different location may dictate that the seating be closer together to serve more guests.

“Ten years ago, a restaurant may have wanted to make everything in all of its locations identical,” White says. “It was smart from a financial standpoint, but a lot of our partners today are looking for a system that they can apply to a variety of units that makes each one feel just a little bit unique and localized.”

Collins says a full-service restaurant with a distinctive atmosphere is more

likely to stand out in a pool of giants in the restaurant business—and this encourages visits from Millennials, who are looking for compelling places to dine out at least a couple of times each week.

“Branding identity is a big piece of what we emphasize, and you can have one restaurant and still be a brand,” says Brad Belletto of Vision360. “People would have argued with that years ago, but now people will drive across town if you have the right brand.”

While much is made of restaurants that tell a story and provide an unmatched, worthy experience for the consumer, some experts say a restaurant can do even more.

Dana Zipser, director of business development and marketing for Tesser, says restaurants should provide a level of personalization for each location, something that connects with the consumer beyond the story. “The whole idea around this authenticity and transparency factor is that people should be able to identify and understand a restaurant’s message easily,” Zipser says. “Then, they’ll tell their friends.”

Of course, the authenticity has to be genuine. “If you’re not the real deal, they’ll go and blast it out to their friends. Information is getting out there quicker than ever,” Zipser concludes. ■



THE INDIVIDUALITY OF BRAND MESSAGING IS CLEARLY CONVEYED THROUGHOUT THE DESIGN MOTIFS AT HOWARD WANG’S UPTOWN CHINA BRASSERIE, CHILI’S GRILL & BAR, AND PANDA INN.

HOWARD WANG’S / CHILI’S / PANDA INN