


SETTING THE

SCENE



The way that your venue looks makes immediate statements about your offer, your standards and your approach to hospitality. It's important to get it right

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The pages of Pub & Bar are full of stories about operators refurbishing, renovating and transforming sites, from new acquisitions to established venues in need of a bit of TLC. In this fast-paced industry, it is unthinkable to stand still, and operators need to be thinking about what message their venues are sending out to customers – from the external branding and features that bring people through the front door to the environment in which they experience the on-trade.

Layout

Making wholesale structural changes to a venue is an expensive undertaking, but operators should think about the way that their space is being utilised and work out ways to improve it if they can. This can take the form of re-orchestrating seating areas to fit as many covers in as possible (without it feeling too overcrowded) or moving the bar to allow for a more welcoming first impression. But operators should also think about the flow of customers and staff, the ease of access to the kitchen, and the positioning of toilets.

“Customers must have unimpeded access to the bar and service staff need a simple and short journey from the kitchen to the dining tables,” advises Chris Blacklock, head of property at Star Pubs & Bars. “Dining and family areas should ideally be located next to the garden. The bar should have its own stretch ➔

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of counter. High tables, where men congregate, shouldn't be located where they'll act as intimidating barriers to others approaching the bar or accessing the loos.”

While the layout of your venue needs due consideration from an operational perspective, the actual design of the interior and exterior is also important from a more aesthetic point of view. The way that a pub or bar looks has an immediate impact on people's preconceptions and expectations of the experience that they will have there. It is therefore essential to set the correct tone, one that both complements your own offer and the building itself, but also understands the message that you are sending out and the customer base to whom you are talking.

“You've got to take your time and get to know the building, its history, the local area, the local customer demographic,” says Tom Peake, director at Three Cheers Pub Co. “We start from scratch with each new site – you have to respect the pub and avoid the cookie cutter approach. Once you have an understanding of all this you'll be developing a vision for the look and feel of the pub. There's a lot to consider, but once you've gotten your head around all the moving parts then the décor should flow from that.”

In many cases, it is the external design that is most important, as this is what every single passer-by will see, and therefore what is most effectively transmitting your offer to the public and bringing them inside. Branding and signage, flowers and brickwork, but also external furniture all need to be considered if operators are to make the desired impact on passers-by and draw customers inside.

External areas are also essential for creating a space where customers will want to spend the sunnier moments of the year.

“An eye-catching outdoor seating area is the perfect way for bars and pubs to encourage passers-by to choose their venue over their competitors during the summer months, and it is therefore vital that any outdoor furniture is in line with current trends along with being both well maintained and clean,” says Heather Beattie, brand manager for Nisbets Plc.

Furniture

As the saying goes, you don't get a second chance to make a first impression, and when it comes to pubs and bars, it is the way that it looks from the outside that will make that first impression. If the design is eye-catching and welcoming then it is more likely to entice customers inside. However, once customers are inside, operators need to understand that the furniture and décor inside will continue to make a statement about the type of offer inside, providing a lure or a turn-off to customers and influencing how enjoyable – and therefore how lengthy and regular – their experience will be.

“Simply put, create a place where you the licensee would want to spend time,” says Amy Hutchings, divisional director at Red Mist Leisure. “If you are a passionate publican and understand the customers' journey, you will know what makes a pub feel warm and inviting, along with any nostalgia you are trying to create with elements you are passionate about.”

For all the importance of style, however, operators must not lose sight of functionality. Ultimately, a comfortable chair is as crucial to increasing

FURNITURE ADVICE

Top tips from Catering Design Group

- **Be wise to the customer journey:** An operator's identity should be reflected every step of the way – from the moment your customer walks through the door, right through to the furniture they sit on and the presentation of every dish.
- **It's all about zoning:** A good designer will always use the pub or bar space to an operator's advantage, creating interest, while cleverly directing customers around the bar area. The design and layout of the furniture has a big part to play in achieving this.
- **Mix it up:** By using a combination of fixed seating and enclosed booths alongside individual pieces of furniture, pub and bar operators can create different pockets within the space. Combining perching stools, benches and sharing tables for larger groups can create a more relaxed and informal environment, while also giving customers greater choice.
- **Keep it timeless:** Good quality furniture that's built to last can be a high cost investment. While operators want to remain 'on-trend', it's important that your selections are timeless and won't date as new trends emerge.
- **Added comfort:** Don't forget soft furnishings, such as cushions or throws on selected pieces of furniture to add extra comfort and style. Their sound absorbing qualities can really help with the acoustics too.
- **The art of design:** Some furniture styles are pieces of art in their own right. For example, uniquely-shaped and carved woods or metals can be used to make interesting coffee tables or shelving, creating a focal point within your space.
- **Light it up:** Lighting can make or break the mood of your venue. Today there is an abundance of choice and operators need to think carefully. Think about incorporating lighting within the furniture to create interest and a different feel within your pub or bar.



linger-time as an appealing drinks list or a tempting menu. Customers will spend most of their time in your venue sat in one of your chairs, perhaps at one of your tables. If the seat is uncomfortable, creaking or unstable they will start to fidget and look elsewhere.

“When you’re choosing furniture, customers are significantly influenced by the quality of finish because they are in intimate contact with it throughout their visit,” says Jan Dammis, head of international sales at Go In. “It’s all about look and feel, and getting it right will help create a positive impression of your overall offering.”


Maintenance

The lifetime of a theme or a venue before it needs a refresh is a conversation with varied conclusions depending on the style and location of the business discussed. However, regardless of whether you are thinking of considering a change in approach or not, the lifetime of a piece of furniture is not simply dependent on trends – it is dependent on its quality. Tables, stools and chairs ultimately may become

rickety, cushions and sofas will eventually become ragged, and wallpaper and floors can get stained. These ultimately are the stresses and strains placed on commercial equipment.

However, a venue with tired furniture will put more customers off than a venue with a design that divides opinion. Regardless of the direction chosen, operators need to look for durability when purchasing furniture. In addition, they must ensure that they are training staff to look after furniture and other customer-facing equipment properly, and that they are swift to replace anything that cannot be fixed and dragging the quality of the offer down.

“Maintaining and improving our pubs is key to ensuring competitive advantage, so we do not shy away from spending money on replacing any furniture or décor that is no longer in good, clean condition,” comments Hutchings. “Our pub managers have autonomy over the upkeep of their sites and are responsible for making sure they always look in their best condition, which ensures there is always someone on the ground looking at the pub and making sure they see it as the customer and their first impression.”

The pub and bar sector has never been more diverse and this begins with the way in which they are designed and decorated. The layout and furniture in your site will have a huge impact on customers, showcasing what kind of venue you are offering and what kind of standards you and your team maintain. Selecting a style that fits your profile and customer base, working out a layout that blends efficiency with charm, and choosing furniture that matches your outlook without sacrificing comfort, quality or durability are the first steps towards creating a space that is inviting and encourages return visits. 

DESIGNER DESIGNS

What styles are currently in vogue?

- **Brew-house:** “The ‘brew-house’ style is back in fashion for 2017, thanks in part to the surge in popularity of craft breweries,” says Jan Dammis, head of international sales at Go In. “Look for new interpretations of the classic rustic style, making it possible to create a cosy ambience that isn’t stuffy or conventional.”
- **Authentic:** “‘Authentic’ bars, which use reclaimed stripped-back materials and furniture to create a look associated with craft are at the cutting edge of pub design,” says Chris Blacklock, head of property at Star Pubs & Bars. “Elements of this deconstructed, worn, dilapidated look are now being adopted in mainstream pub design and retail. We’re seeing pubs move from a slick, clinical design to a more eclectic look.”
- **Industrial:** “The ‘industrial style’ is still on-trend for 2017,” notes Dammis. “Industrial-style furniture is both contemporary and practical, but it also tells a story through its appearance while taking customers back to old workshops, factories or studios - feeling raw and cool, yet cosy. Swivel or three-legged stools, chairs in a factory style and tables with solid wooden tops and metal frames are all part of this look.”
- **Sociability:** “I see pubs embracing change in the traditional décor, previously very masculine, dark and quite old school in design, renovations are producing brighter more optimistic, go-ahead spaces,” says Amy Hutchings, divisional director at Red Mist Leisure. “I have really noticed food preparation becoming far more visual over the last couple of years and this isn’t changing anytime soon. People want to see how things are prepared and how things are cooked and how fresh it is.”

Images provided by the Catering Design Group

