

A well-designed restaurant interior makes all the difference, writes
Izze Hugo

Dine



Cuvée Restaurant
at Simonsig Estate,
Stellenbosch.



Design

Gone are the days when a restaurant's main attraction was its food. Nowadays restaurateurs have to employ a more holistic approach. With the global economic meltdown, purse strings are being tightened and a growing number of patrons expect their dining outings to provide both nourishment and entertainment. But just how important is a well-designed interior in the grand scale of things and how does it influence a restaurant's popularity and profitability?

'Design plays an important role in the success of a restaurant as it draws customers in to experience the atmosphere,' says Amit Raz, owner of popular Cape Town eatery, Masala Dosa. 'Nonetheless, the real measure of success goes hand in hand with the quality of the service and product.' Kirsten Zschokke, chef and owner of Miss K' Food Café in Green Point concurs: 'The interior design is the palate on which you will display your food. It's also the first impression before they taste the food, so it's very important.'

Food and theatre

Pioneering New York restaurateur, Warner LeRoy once noted, way back in 1976, that a restaurant is a kind of living fantasy in which diners are the most important members of the cast. He understood the importance of concept and design and its power to fill seats and equated restaurants to theatre productions. When LeRoy died in 2001, an article by renowned restaurant and wine critic, Eric Asimov, in the New York Times, described him as having 'a wizard's touch, waving a stylish and expensive wand to transform the

mundane into fantasy.' This is why LeRoy's famous culinary endeavor, Tavern on the Green, became one of the top-grossing restaurants in the country 'despite,' said Asimov, 'its mediocre food'.

These days, concept restaurants are springing up everywhere, and with so many eating establishments competing for space in a saturated industry, restaurateurs are pulling out all the stops. At a price, you can dine in tree-houses (Okinawa, Japan), churches (Ontario, Canada) and 'haunted' jail cells (Tokyo). One restaurant in Beijing, even offers diners the unique opportunity to dine in the dark.

The current trend is definitely destination restaurants, agrees Jacques Erasmus from Koncept Design and Architecture. 'It doesn't matter in which milieu you are trading – it's all about creating an experience and delivering great service and a good product on the table.' Jacques and business partner, Neil Stemmet, have years of experience in the hospitality industry and are responsible for designing swish culinary havens like Cuvée at Simonsig Wine Estate in Stellenbosch.

'Eating out is a lifestyle experience, and the word experience is what people want when going to a restaurant,' reiterates Dee de Kock, interior, lighting and furniture designer at Motto. 'Patrons look at the entire picture and this is what they use to interpret what a restaurant is like,' explains Erasmus. 'The key to successful design is based on the golden thread that runs through the entire establishment.' To compliment this belief, the Koncept team offers a holistic approach to restaurant design which includes set-up, interior design, menu planning, kitchen design, staff training, marketing and guardianship. Even after the restaurant has opened its doors, they are still available to assist.

Research, and then some

As much as you might be enamored with a certain design style or concept, it doesn't mean your customer base will warm to it. It's important to decide on a target market first and then do your homework.

Zschokke recommends doing research before consulting with a designer. 'Take photos of things you like and start a scrapbook and slowly build on it to help you formulate your idea – look through magazines, keep your eyes and ears open and try gather as much information as possible.'

Also, keep abreast of current trends. There are many trends out there and it's important to focus on those that fit your target market and

Don't forget the ceiling

Ceilings are often underutilised by restaurateurs, even though they have endless design potential. A new trend in the USA sees designers carrying selected design themes and motifs heavenward, and to great effect.

Hip Indian eatery, Masala Dosa, is one restaurant incorporating this elevated canvass. If you happen to look up upon entering the bathroom, you'll be surprised to find a life-sized, three-dimensional cow gazing back at you. Says Raz, 'The first time I walked into the space, I looked up and the first image that came into my head was a holy cow. It was hard to find the right cow, but I was lucky to discover one on a windowsill in an artist's studio. The reaction has been appreciative and it has become a popular must-see feature in Long Street (Cape Town)'.

CUVÉE'S NEW INTERIOR

According to Ross Hobbs, director of marketing and sales at Simonsig Wine Estate, the opening of Cuvée and the refurbishment of their tasting room by Konzept Design, led to a significant increase in visitors and wine sales. 'If I have ever been in doubt (about the role interior design plays in ensuring the profitability and popularity of a brand) I'm now convinced,' says Hobbs. 'Almost overnight, Cuvée's amazing interior has elevated Simonsig to its rightful place as one of South Africa's most desirable wine brands'.

Salt in Cape Town

Salt in Cape Town is a good example of a restaurant where the boundary between indoors and outdoors is blurred, thanks to floor-to-ceiling glass windows which invite in the many moods of the sea.



Salt Restaurant in Bantry Bay, Cape Town.

concept. 'One design trend at the moment is understated simplicity; designing an establishment that is timeless, that can be around for the next twenty to thirty years,' says Erasmus.

According to a survey of more than 1 600 professional chefs (all members of the American Culinary Federation), one of the top restaurant kitchen trends for 2009 will be the employment of environmentally-friendly equipment and practices, reports America's National Restaurant Association. The survey also reveals that most chefs believe the best way to save money in the kitchen is through sustainable practices. Lisa de Beer, owner of IN-DE-GO Interior Architecture and Design, agrees. 'Another trend,' she adds, 'is that patrons are increasingly doing business on the move, with restaurants providing Wi-Fi hot spots, laptop plug-in points and even small "boardroom" facilities.' Other trends to consider include show kitchens, communal tables, counter dining, bistros and one-night-only underground restaurants staged in nightclubs, artist's studios and old wine cellars (the latter being very popular in Paris).

Setting a mood

Good lighting is crucial. 'Lighting is everything in a restaurant,' says De Kock. 'It creates the ambiance. If the lighting is incorrect, all the interior effects are lost. The first thing to decide when designing a restaurant is what you want to achieve,' she says. 'For example, do you want a romantic evening venue or a funky daytime vibe? The mood is very important, and this ultimately sets the tone for the evening – a bit like setting the stage before a play.'

'Clever thought needs to be given to seating and lighting, so that one doesn't have a light that blinds a partner or creates an unpleasant reflection in a mirror. Once the mood has been achieved, you can use accent lighting (like table

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Signal Restaurant at the Cape Grace Hotel.



Cuvée at Simonsig Estate, Stellenbosch.

DineDesign

lamps or wall lights) to add to it,' she explains. 'I always believe it should be possible to dim every light. Ambiance is everything!'

More good advice

In *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Starting Your Own Restaurant* (Alpha Books, 2001), authors Howard Cannon and Brian Tarcy highlight the importance of creating a smooth traffic flow – this includes the flow between the kitchen and the dining room as well as between the tables themselves: 'No one wants a waiter's behind hanging over your table every time the table next to you is served,' they write.

According to De Beer, it's also important to take into account the amount of space and seats required to reach your target turnover as well as the atmosphere required to reach it. For example, do you want your customers to linger longer or do you prefer a fast table turnover to increase sales? Also consider your kitchen and restroom to seating space ratio. Colours are crucial as well: 'Fast food outlets often use "fast colours" like reds and oranges. Stark, white interiors work well in summer, and cosy, warm interiors appeal in winter months,' she says. 'A plush upmarket interior can make patrons feel important, while casual dining with a homey feel can make them frequent a place more often because it feels like a home away from home.'

Try and 'get away from over-designed formulas; design an interior that is fresh, unique, stylish and homely and don't compromise on chairs, tables, linen, crockery and cutlery,' says Stemmet. Raz advises aspiring restaurateurs to use good designers and remember that your design should be sensitive (and suited) to the environment in which it is situated. 'Most importantly,' he says, 'make sure that your finishes are conducive to heavy traffic.'

'Context and memory play powerful roles in all the truly great meals in one's life,' wrote celebrity chef, Anthony Bourdain in his book, *A Cook's Tour*: If Bourdain is to be believed, the interior of a restaurant plays a pivotal part in establishing a culinary context and heightening patrons' experience. Shakespeare was right – 'all the world is a stage' – and restaurants, even more so. That's why the secret to running a successful restaurant is putting on one hell of a show. 🎯

Kathi Weixelbaumer

BALDUCCI'S LAUNCHES ITALIAN CHIC IN AFRICA

When you walk into Balducci's at the V&A Waterfront, the clean, understated formality creates an immediate sense of well-being. The crisp white linen, racks of sparkling wine glasses, the comfortable sight of a well-used pizza oven and the gracious waiters make you relaxed and eager to have the experience of eating here.

Balducci's has created a new, unrivalled menu of contemporary dishes that reflect the most traditional elements of food and culinary styles – one that food critics worldwide would define as being relaxed and restorative while also modern and affordable.

There is something deeply satisfying about sitting in Balducci's, looking out across the harbour, breathing the aromas of a fresh plate of pasta de mer – an intoxicating medley of fresh local mussels, black tiger prawns, calamari and line fish topped with an African-style arrabiata sauce. Or perhaps sample the African game Bolognese, ostrich lasagne, melanzane alla Parmigiana, slow-cooked oxtail or braised duck shepherd's pie. Balducci's special dessert of amaretti biscuits in liqueur with almond flakes, mascarpone and chocolate chips and their extensive wine list lure guests to this fine establishment over and over again.

Smart start

The Hilton Durban and Hilton Sandton have introduced a revolutionary innovation in hotel dining with the Hilton Breakfast. The new dining concept is an international phenomenon that is changing the way guests choose to start their day.

The Hilton Breakfast offers guests a unique dining experience where meals are colour-coded for quick and easy identification of their nutritional benefits. 'Choosing the right breakfast is key to ensuring an effective, productive day,' says Gerhard Patzer, general manager of the Hilton Durban.

The Hilton Breakfast colour-coded guide helps guests select the breakfast that suits their nutritional requirements. Five colours are used to indicate low fat and low calorie, high energy, high fibre, low cholesterol and Big Time, which stands for 'the works'.

The Hilton Durban serves breakfast in the Rainbow Terrace while breakfast at the Hilton Sandton is served in the Tradewinds Restaurant. Both hotels offer this service from Monday to Friday from 6am until 10:30am and Saturdays and Sundays from 6:30am until 11am.

'The Hilton attracts a certain level of business guests throughout the year and this new dining concept allows these travellers to manage their diets according to their specific needs,' says Axel Hauser, general manager of the Hilton Sandton. 'The Hilton breakfast is not only popular among the guests staying at the hotel; we have also noticed an influx of outside diners joining us before they head off to work in the mornings,' concludes Hauser.

Cape Quarter is cooking

Enhancing the already well-established and popular eateries on the cobbled piazza, Chenin Restaurant Wine Bar provides its own special offering to the clientele who frequent the Cape Quarter in De Waterkant, Cape Town.

Delicious brasserie-style dishes with a twist come from the kitchen managed by new chef Daniel Heyns, whose stints at Royal Sechaba in Stellenbosch, Die Boer, 0932 in Green Point and Zevenwacht have shaped his menu. Using seasonal ingredients, Heyns takes a dish and makes it his own. Some items on the menu will change daily to accommodate the freshest produce. Simply satisfying is the underlying philosophy.

Chenin is already the local wine merchants' favourite haunt and many of Cape Town's top wine writers are regular visitors who are enjoying a taste of Cape Quarter's new kid on the piazza.

Open for lunch and dinner from 11am until late, Chenin operates seven days a week.

Vanilla Restaurant located at the new Cape Quarter extension, is the R7-million brainchild of local restaurateur Nigel Newhouse.

Owner of the successful Tuscany Beach Restaurant situated on Camps Bay's platinum beachfront, Newhouse, together with his wife Maxine and chef son Simon, are set to open a world-class dining experience in line with the favourite culinary hot-spots found around the globe.

Consulting on the project is chef Matthew Gordon of Haute Cabrière Restaurant and the French Connection Bistro, both located in South Africa's culinary capital, Franschhoek. Newhouse and Gordon have appointed Evan Coosner as executive chef. He has worked with top South African chefs Reuben Riffel of Reuben's and Mike Bassett of Ginja. Breakfast, lunch and fine dining dinner menus will take inspiration from around the globe, pandering to both sophisticated local and international audiences.

Architecture and interior design are in the cutting-edge hands of father and daughter duo Nico and Phia van der Meulen. All is hush-hush at their Johannesburg offices regarding Vanilla's 'look', but expect an ultra-modern design focusing on the Vanilla orchid, its connotations, origins and properties. Tongues will be wagging once the project is complete!

Kathea and Newmarket International in southern Africa

Newmarket International Inc – a leading specialist in sales and catering solutions for the hospitality industry, has signed a reseller agreement with Kathea Communications, a prominent technology solution provider in southern Africa.

'There is no doubt the upcoming FIFA Soccer World Cup in October 2010 has presented the local hospitality sector with numerous opportunities – one of which is the demand for groups to hold events and meetings. Hospitality organisations with a clearly defined strategy to capture the groups and meetings business, will need to implement a technology solution to execute the strategy,' says Craig Macdonald, business unit manager for hospitality at Kathea. 'Our partnership with Newmarket International is well suited to address this demand. Newmarket International's experience with the global hospitality and entertainment sector focuses on delivering solutions that enable hotels to automate their sales and catering processes, streamline operations and increase revenues.'

According to Rachael Young, director of sales at Newmarket International, the agreement to partner with Kathea was a strategic move on many levels. Both companies have a deep understanding of the hospitality marketplace and place an important emphasis on customer satisfaction. The result is providing solutions to hospitality organisations that will drive revenue, improve profitability and reduce costs.

'The risk of missing revenue opportunities for profitable groups and meetings is significant. At the same time, this sector is dealing with ongoing challenges that include connecting disparate sales, operations, and management systems; distributing and responding to sales leads and tracking results; maximising utilisation of meeting space and resources and of course, allocating marketing and distribution channel investments correctly – none of which can be managed without the correct solution in place,' adds Young.

concept design and architecture

FORTIS HOTELWARE

During the five years since inception, Fortis Hotelware has established itself as one of the leading hospitality and foodservice trade suppliers in the field.

The Fortis brand is synonymous with quality, innovation, style, reliability and value, and carries a large inventory in order to service the trade professionally. The ranges are comprehensive and address industry requirements from fast service outlets to prestige 6-star hotels.

Fortis Hotelware's objective is to offer quality tabletop solutions, backed by a committed team and with exemplary service. Their extensive range includes:

- **Crockery:** The Fortis flagship ranges, namely Prima Vitrified Hotelware, Classic New Bone and DA ranges are supported by exclusively offering leading brands such as Rosenthal (Germany) and Churchill (UK).
- **Glassware:** The renowned Rocco Bormioli (Italy) and Anchor Hocking (USA) HoReCa ranges include crystal, standard and tempered glass.
- **Cutlery:** Fortis's own brand 18/0 and 18/10 plus the superb Pintinox (Italy) ranges of high polish 18/10 European cutlery.
- **Full and extended Signature and Accents ranges,** which include larger buffet lines as well as a host of display solutions.
- **Tablemats:** Prestigious Chilewich (USA) ranges in beautiful colours, textures and finishes.

Simonsig wine tasting room.

