



Revamp and revitalise

25

New lighting can revitalise a dreary room—as long as it's appropriate to the clientele.

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Whether it's a quick lick of colour or a full refurbishment, here are 10 stress-free tips to revitalise your restaurant

1. Time to change

Cuisine is paramount when it comes to running a restaurant, but eye-catching decor is a close second. "To create a great experience, pay attention to detail—from the moment people arrive to when they leave," says Matt Clarke, interior designer of Technics Hospitality Consultants.

Take a fresh look at your interior—is the colour scheme dated, are chairs rickety, is the bathroom woeful? It might be time to invest in new elements, such as an inviting bar or private function room.

"All elements are essential to producing the right total design solution," says Jeffery Copolov, interior design director of Bates Smart architect firm, whose works include Melbourne's Rockpool Bar & Grill. "Attention to detail is important in all areas—often in places you can't see, such as acoustic resolution and background music which creates ambience."

2. Design philosophy

Rather than going willy-nilly—adding a new banquette seat here, a couple of pendant lights there—it's essential to sum up the feel of your restaurant or cafe. Is it casual or formal, upmarket or cheap-and-cheery; does it specialise in Australian modern cuisine or ethnic fare?

"Simple descriptive terms can be all it takes," says architect Paul Burnham who de-

signed WA's Must Margeret River and Il Lido. "Words such as 'understated', 'relaxed', 'glamorous', 'flamboyant' or 'an assault on the senses' all evoke immediate imagery."

Next, it's important to know your clientele and their desires. There's no point in designing an upmarket restaurant when the suburb is full of young families and uni students. "Studying other restaurants and looking at trends is time well spent," says Clarke.

3. Quick fix

Minor renovations may be completed without shutting down or inconveniencing patrons. A fresh coat of paint can have a big impact for little expense but as Copolov suggests, it's



Better to choose a colour palette that won't date says Jeffrey Copolov of Bates Smart architects.

important to choose a timeless colour scheme. "Palettes that are avant-garde tend to date quickly due to their distinct 'date stamping'," he says.

New lighting can revitalise a dreary room. An endless range of contemporary pendants and opulent chandeliers are on the market, giving an up-to-the-minute look. And don't forget to incorporate dimmer switches to add intimacy throughout the evening.

Replacing worn-out soft furnishing can also freshen up a space. "Upholsteries and carpet suffer from wear and tear and staining over time," says Copolov. Re-upholstering is often more expensive than buying new furniture, so it's worth comparing different costs.

4. Budget breakdown

No matter whether your renovation is large or small, it's all about planning and doing your homework. Once you've established the extent of your renovation, it's time to start gathering quotes and working out a budget. If you're including a full kitchen upgrade, be prepared for the extra cost of appliances and other equipment.

Talk to your builder, architect or designer, and begin compiling a spreadsheet of all costs. Compare price on big-ticket items like new appliances, carpet, structural work, plumbing and rewiring. And it's also a good idea to include the cost of furniture, fixtures and fees until you have a pretty clear idea of the total cost for the entire job.

5. Hire a specialist

For small jobs, a builder is cheaper than an architect but that becomes a false economy when undertaking a major refurbishment. "The architect should definitely make life easier," says Brisbane architect Tim Stewart who designed Victoria Park Functions and Iceworks Restaurant and Bar.

"If you take some of the responsibilities on yourself, you may be holding up the process. We can advise on planning and designing, dealing with council, suggesting furniture and furnishings, and offering creative and functional layouts that give a restaurant a real 'wow' factor."

6. Check rules and regulations

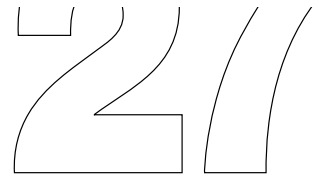
The best place to start sorting out the red tape is at your local council. Regulations change from state to state and from council to council but they will be able to help you with the forms and requirements you need to get started.

You may also have to deal with heritage issues, the police department, fire department and Australian Standards. It's also imperative that all forms are lodged and requirements are met well before the renovation begins.

7. Good timing

To avoid a full closure of the restaurant, staging the refurbishment over time appeals to all parties—restaurateurs, staff and loyal customers. The Iceworks Restaurant, which recently won an Australian Institute of Architect award, was built in stages. "As the customer base grew so did the establishment," explains Tim Stewart. "It was a great way to manage capital outlay and maximise revenue."

Despite the best intentions, a refurbishment may be so dis-



ruptive, it could send customers scurrying. In this case, it's best to close down and hit all the works at the same time. "If closing is the only option, keep loyal patrons informed of your plans," say Copolov.

8. Easy access

A well-designed layout ensures good traffic flow and prevents waitstaff from running marathons. A popular option is locating back-of-house functions in the centre of the building, rather than to the rear. An open window adds a theatrical effect, allowing patrons to watch the masters at work.

Flexibility in layout is another consideration. "Closable rooms are convenient devices to create a hierarchy of space within a venue and give some control over seating," says Paul Burnham. "The division and personalisation of space is more critical in larger venues with large volume spaces. Always picture those first customers walking into a 400 seat venue—don't allow them to feel like forlorn soles alone in some vast hangar.

"Control the natural progression of space filling within a venue and make it work for the operator and the customers. Ascertain the first area filled and the worst seat in the house, then try to close the gap between the two."

9. Devil is in the detail

A signature piece, such as a floor-to-ceiling wine wall or dra-

matic chandeliers, can make a huge impact. "They can be great, as long as they work within the overall design narrative," says Melbourne-based architect Adam Dettrick, whose recent work, MoVida Aqui, was shortlisted in the Australian Interior Design Awards. "It should tell a story about the identity of the restaurant. The key to longevity is sticking to this story, and not being distracted by fashion."

When it comes to selecting new furniture, there's much more on offer than the traditional table-and-chairs scenario. Consider various configurations, with a mix of dining chairs, stools, banquettes, armchairs and ottomans. "Varying the types of furniture adds character to a space, and can also provide important operational flexibility for the restaurant," explains Dettrick.

10. Finishing touches

A new flashy interior is just part of the package when renovating a restaurant or cafe—it's also important to reinforce its identity. A logo, uniforms, signage, menu and menu boards all need to tie in with the new look.

For the final touch, it may be worth revamping the restaurant's website and informing patrons with the latest updates by social networking—this will help get a buzz as the renovation is in the final stages. And if you have any spare change left after the refurbishment, it's worth announcing a grand re-opening event, inviting customers, local businesspeople and media. ○