WHY YES, I SPEAK BLUE PRINT!

The concept for your new restaurant has been bouncing around in your head for years. You knew what you wanted to do; you were just waiting for the right opportunity. Four months ago, you finally began the logistical planning effort to make this dream of yours a reality. The lease is signed, the financing is taken care of, and you are excited, amazed, and a little petrified that this project is actually happening.

After you hired your design team, they conducted an interview with you to try and obtain as much information regarding your goals and objectives as possible. As you get in your car, preparing to leave for a meeting with your design team, you are anxious to see what creative solutions they have come up with. You cut the usual meet and greet ritual short because you simply can't wait to review the plans for your upcoming project.

Next thing you know, you are staring at a rather large roll of plans, with a bunch of different symbols that you don't recognize. While the design team is helpful in answering all of your questions, you just feel uncomfortable with the information. After all, you are not a designer. You have never studied or produced a set of plans. In fact you hated everything art-related that you ever took in school. Then it hits you! Your design team is waiting for *your* approval and a sign-off before they can proceed. Knowing full well that this requested signature means you are taking responsibility for the information on the drawings, despite the fact that you are not real sure what the drawings really say, your heart starts pounding and your palms become increasingly damp. With a little preparation, this situation could have been avoided.

<u>Design is a Language</u>

Think of design, and the documents associated with the design process, as a language. Simply put, the design documents are nothing more than a communication tool to make sure that the facility is constructed in the manner desired. If there were a more efficient way to communicate these directions to

the contractors that build the facility, there would be no need for plans. To date, however, it is still the most efficient method.

Like any language, a little studying can go a long way. Fortunately, design is a language that is fairly intuitive and not that difficult to learn. There aren't many crazy rules like we have with, say, the English language. We don't have silent lines, like silent K's. Rather, the principles are the same and apply to most documents, whether produced by an architect, interior designer, landscape designer, or mechanical engineer. Following is a brief introduction to some of the most prevalent concepts used to read drawings.

What is a Plan?

Imagine cutting the building horizontally, 48 inches above the floor and looking in from above after the top is removed. That, in a nutshell, is a floor plan. The lines that you see drawn represent objects that would be visible from above, once the top is removed. You may notice that the lines vary in type; some are solid, some are dotted, and others are dashed in various patterns. This variation in line types help designers distinguish objects form one another.

To explain this concept, let's look at a desk with a trash can below and a ceiling mounted desk light above. Once the horizontal cut is made at 48 inches above the floor and the top of the building is removed, the desk will clearly be visible. So the desk's lines are solid. The trash can, while we know it is there, would not be visible under the desk. To indicate the presence of the trash can, we would show it on our drawings using a dashed line. This let's us know that is there even though it is *under* the table. Now, let's look at the desk light. It is above the 48 inch-high cut, and would theoretically be removed with the top of the building. Much like the trash can, however, we still want to let the plan reader know that the light is there. As a result, a different line type is used to indicate items that are *above* the cut line.

Scale

Plans are created on paper. While the paper is often large in size, the fact is that your restaurant, no matter how small, would not fit on this piece of paper in scale that is life-size, or *one to one* as we say in the design world. So, we are forced to shrink it down, proportionally, to fit it on paper. To use some industry jargon, the building is *scaled* down. Once the appropriate size is selected for the drawing of your facility, the drawing will be issued at a scale such as ¼ inch equals one foot (expressed as ¼"=1'-0"). In essence, this means that every ¼ inch on the drawing is equal to one foot in real life. There are a number of other scales that can be used, but they are all based on the same concept.

During your review of a set of drawings, determining distances and sizes will be important. You might want to know the length of a particular counter, or the width of the aisles in your dining room. If your drawings have been prepared to scale, you will need to use an object called a *scale* (a special measuring device that looks like a ruler) for measuring.

Plan Reading Tips

It simply isn't possible to convey all of the skills required to master plan reading in this column. However, it is my hope that the information above and below will be useful in your next plan reading effort. Here are some additional plan reading tips:

- Check the scale of the drawing. Look for the scale on the title block or check a common door.
- Read the notes! They are there for a reason and usually contain important information.
- Refer to the legend to help you decipher the symbols on the plan.
- Feet and inches are expressed as: (') feet and (") inches.
- A plan is a method of communication. If you are unsure of what the drawing is trying to convey, ask the author.
- Mistakes can occur on plans. If something doesn't seem correct, question it. Use your common sense.