

Behind the Bar (Part I)

I stroll up to the bar of a local restaurant after a long day of work. I am in a town far, far away from home with no where that I need to be at this particular moment, so I decide to have a drink and catch up on my “me” time. As I sit down, and begin to make myself comfortable, I decide that I will have a Martini. No, make that a frozen margarita. I mean a beer – what do they have on tap? Perhaps a mojito would hit the spot. So many choices and so little space. While efficient use of available space is at a premium in all areas of foodservice facilities, this is particularly the case in a bar. Believe it or not, bars frequently offer a menu that is larger than the food menu, and typically in a much smaller space. In this first part of a two- part series on bars, we will look at some of the features for good bar design.

Start at the Station

Typical bar designs feature cocktail stations, also called jockey boxes by many industry veterans. In my experience, I try to start with a typical station, and then modify the station based on the needs of the operation. This station consists of three basic components, in a specific order. Starting from the left, there is a drain board, a cocktail station in the center, and a liquor step display at the right. This station is set up for a right-handed bartender, as a large majority of people are right-handed. This station can easily be reversed to accommodate a left handed bartender, if desired.

The drain board is designed to hold glasses. These drain board units, when twenty-four inches wide, can also be ordered standard with glass rack slides below the top for additional storage. Next, I like to use a very specific style of cocktail station that features two separate compartments – one for ice and the other for mixers and/or wine storage on ice. The more common industry practice is to use an ice bin with a single compartment and to store the mixers in bottle racks that sit down in the ice. I choose an alternate configuration for two key reasons. First, the provision of separate compartments reduces the risk of

contamination of the ice below. There is less likelihood for spills onto the ice when the mixers have their own storage compartment. Second, access to the ice is much easier, as the juice and mixer containers do not block the ice. In most installations, unlike the one of which I am a proponent, a bottle rack is used for these containers and set down into the ice. These containers also sit lower in the bin compartment and are not as much of an obstacle for the bartender.

Continuing with the ice bin's design, I am a strong proponent of a built-in cold plate. This cold plate is designed to chill the soda syrup that will be used in the soda gun, located just above the ice bin in a typical configuration, so that it is at a desirable temperature when served. These cold plates are available as a separate component and can be added afterwards as a separate piece, but are harder to clean and often present challenges to sanitation efforts. Some jurisdictions' local health codes require a built-in cold plate. On the front face of this ice bin, I typically install a speed rail for easy access of the most common liquor bottles. I prefer to use a shallow ice bin, so that when the speed rail is added to the front, it will line up with the depth of the adjacent equipment. Due to the speed and quantity of movement in a bar area, it is important to eliminate any obstacles sticking out into the aisle, as they can be both inconvenient and hazardous to those tending bar.

As a final piece of this typical station, I include a step liquor display unit on the far right side. These units offer tiered storage of liquor bottles and can be ordered in a variety of widths, depending on the space available and storage requirements for the particular bar concept. This station will allow the right-handed bartender to reach for the glass with the left hand and scoop ice or mix drinks by accessing liquor with the right hand ... all while maintaining eye contact with the customer. The flow and movement should be smooth, resulting in more efficient service and better profits for the establishment.

Other Pieces of the Puzzle

There are, of course, a number of other components that must be included to support the bar. Listed below are just some of the possibilities:

- Three or Four Compartment Bar Sink: The three compartments allow bar utensils to be washed, rinsed, and sanitized. I prefer a fourth compartment where possible for the dumping of excess liquids, and to keep from reducing the strength of the wash solution in the first compartment. In some jurisdictions, the four compartment sink is required.
- Soiled Glassware: Consider whether soiled glasses are going to be washed in a centralized ware washing area or at the bar. If they are to be washed at the bar, consider the how to separate soiled glasses being returned from drinks ready to be served to the guest.
- Glass Washer: Whether a high temp door-type or a rotary glass washer, these units can help speed up the ware washing process behind the bar and allow the bartenders to concentrate on making drinks. Some jurisdictions will allow the use of a glass washer in place of a three compartment bar sink.
- Hand Sink: Simply a requirement. More than one may be required to ensure that all bartenders have easy, unobstructed access to a hand sink. Try to look for one with a built-in soap and towel dispenser.
- Blender Station: The traditional stations are extremely valuable when a dump sink is added. Frozen drink machines that use prepared mixes require special attention in the design of the bar.
- Refrigeration: Used for beverage and sometimes food storage. Coolers are available with both vertical and horizontal access, depending on the requirement. Sizing should allow for required stock, as well as back up.
- Beer Taps and/or Beer System: These systems require a significant amount of planning. There are a number of configuration options.

- Filler Panels: Often included to close spaces and gaps between equipment in the bar, the use of fillers can improve sanitation.
- Waste Receptacles: Often overlooked, a sufficient number of waste receptacles should be provided and strategically located for easy access.