

Behind the Bar (Part II)

In the last installment, we discussed the “typical” bartender’s station and some of the common equipment included in a bar facility. Now that you have a good grasp on these components, it is time to put them to good use. In this installment, we are going to discuss some of the global issues related to bar design.

Taking Shape

When I have a blank page to work with, I am forced to endure an internal struggle when it comes to the configuration of the bar. The creative side of me wants nothing but curves, weird angles, and unique configurations in order to make a design statement. My practical side, however, knows that the bar equipment currently available is square or rectangular, and does not fit as well in oddly shaped spaces – it is the old square peg, round hole dilemma. In the end, balancing both of these objectives is essential.

All things being equal, I would prefer to see a bar with as much uninterrupted linear footage as possible. Even with such an objective, the bar can still feature creative elements. Angles other than ninety-degree angles, and creatively shaped bar tops with straight bar die walls would allow for the equipment to be set flush against the wall. That said, when an opportunity arises to make a design statement by using a round or creatively shaped bar configuration ... by all means, go for it. Regardless of the final configuration, be sure to allow for a sufficient aisle way – typically a minimum of 3’-0”. I have seen numerous installations with 30” aisles, 24” aisles, and less, however this is typically due to poor planning.

At Your Service

It is always a good idea to develop a dedicated station and pick-up area for the servers, so they can pick-up and drop-off their drinks without disturbing guests who might be sitting at or near the bar. In high volume or upscale markets, a

separate service bar located out of view from the guest may be justified. There are some equipment components that, when used, are capable of improving the speed and function of the service bar. When speed and output is a concern, a pass-through ice bin can be used to allow servers to ice their own glasses and retrieve their own non-alcoholic drinks.

In another example, the inclusion of a drain pan and perforated top, recessed into the counter top or part of shelving at the pick-up station, will keep the area clean and ensure proper presentation of the drinks being assembled. Typically, there is a significant amount of excess liquid and spilling that occurs. The perforated drain pan tops allow the excess liquids to drain away, eliminating the need for the bar tender to constantly wipe down the counter or empty the rubber bar mats which are often used.

The location and orientation of the service bar should be carefully considered so as not to interrupt the guests' experience. When possible, an adjacent support area may provide additional benefit to the servers. This support area could include ice, secured liquor storage, glass storage, bussing stations, non-alcoholic beverage equipment, and other comparable items.

Storage

Storage in the bar area is always a challenge and is quite often overlooked altogether. Frequently, designers and owners will underestimate the number and types of glasses or liquor they will need to store and have access to in the bar area. The use of drain boards within the bar equipment line up, either with or without glass rack slides below, can provide a significant amount of storage. However, the space that these drain boards occupy is extremely valuable space. So where else can these items be stored? Think vertical.

To maximize the storage space available in a bar, one must consider ways to use all of the space within the area, both below and above the counter top. A soffit or overhead cabinet structure can provide significant storage space. In addition, the area above the back bar counter offers a significant amount of storage potential. These storage opportunities should be looked at as design

opportunities as well. Through the creative use of materials, lighting, and unique configurations, these storage areas can be functional while enhancing the design and aesthetics of the space. They provide an incredible palette for any designer, and can be developed to fit any theme or quality level.

Merchandising

Particularly in a bar, proper merchandising can enhance sales and profits. Some of the merchandising methods that can be used include iced beer on display, the use of glass doors on back bar coolers, the placement and style of beer taps, and eye catching back bar displays, just to name a few. The back bar displays, in particular, can enhance sales and assist the operator with any desired selling efforts.

When the bar configuration does not include a back bar, it is worth considering the addition of a central island which would serve as a back bar. This island can display the liquor storage, beer taps, and glass ware, as well as other items, in an attractive manner, thereby increasing sales through merchandising. Alcoholic beverages within full view of the guest increase the suggestive selling efforts and increase sales.