

Restaurant Renovation Getting Your Front of House in Order



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Where do I start?

There are many reasons customers make repeat visits to your restaurant. Chief among them are quality, personable service, and the ability to earn rewards.

Your food needs to impress.

Your service needs to impress.

Guests need to feel like they're getting a great value for the money they spend.

All these reasons and more will drive a restaurant customer back into your arms time after time. But there is one other thing that is certain to drive them away: a disappointing dining room experience.

Managers and employees may look at their restaurant's dining room and think of it as simply the front of house, the other half to their workplace, and secondary to the heart of the operation: the kitchen.

But the truth is, your dining room is the only space in your restaurant that they experience

when sitting down to eat. On the surface, it doesn't matter to them how fancy or new or efficient your back of house may be (although they certainly will indirectly care about the effects of all of those factors in how they impact the food they receive).

What matters — and what should concern the savvy restaurateur — is that while they wait for their entrée or dessert to arrive, they are looking around at the seating. At the fixtures, walls, and floors. Aware of the sound. And likely visiting the bathroom.

Will they like what they see and hear?

Renovations to your front of house can be anywhere from a touch-up to a full-scale tear-down, with financing needs running the gamut. In the following five chapters, we break down the five most prevalent areas for improvement to your front of house — improvements that could make or break the customer experience — starting with the most intimate of all: **your seating**.



Chapter

Seating

Seating may seem like a paltry concern at first glance, but the comfort — or lack thereof — of your guest over the course of an hour or more can make or break their experience of your restaurant. Every table, chair, booth, and bar stool you need to answer the following three questions:

1. Is it comfortable?
2. Is it durable?
3. Does it fit my brand?

Is it comfortable?

This cannot be overstated: chairs need to fit your average AND non-average sized customer. Will a person at 300 pounds be as comfortable — and supported — in

your chair or bar stool as someone at 100 pounds? Will a customer at the height of 6'5" have room for their long legs when seated at a full table? Will the feet of someone at 4'9" touch the floor (or stool bar) when seated on your chair?

What shape you're your chair seat take? Completely flat chair seats can be really uncomfortable if you sit for a whole meal, but curved ones are designed to take the strain off. It's difficult to account for everyone's comfort, true. But planning for the widest possible range of body types in your customer base will help minimize complaints and maximize return visits.

There is, however, a balancing act to be maintained between the comfort of your guest and the ability to maximize your

dining room space. It is true that the sturdier (and roomier) a chair or table is constructed, the more comfortable it is likely to be. But if you fill your front of house with 10 extra large chairs instead of 15 medium to large seats, you are robbing yourself of potential business every shift.

Keep in mind that comfort isn't always just a subjective standard. Businesses open to the public have a legal obligation, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, to comply with certain standards of accessibility for their patrons.¹ ADA compliance may dictate that the tables you choose need to accommodate wheelchairs without hindrance.

Consider carefully how table legs and angles could interfere with wheelchairs or make sitting down difficult for patrons assisted by crutches or braces. Test out chair lengths and table height in combination with a wheelchair to determine how your guests will share the space available underneath the table. Will a wheelchair slide underneath the tabletop comfortably? Are your other chairs so deep that one guest's knees will end up bumping against the wheel or legs of a disabled patron?

Is it durable?

It's important to consider longevity when deciding on your furnishings. Chairs, in particular, are a purchase you'd like to avoid making more often than you would plan a full remodel of your space. Part of making sure that's achievable is not just caring for your furniture over time, but purchasing chairs that are easily cared for.



Is the fabric on your seat and seat back stain resistant? Or should you look for all wooden chairs with a varnish that will wipe clean and can be regularly sanitized with a quick pass? Leather is an expensive, but highly durable option that combines comfort with ease to maintain. Upholstered seats can give your customers some extra cushion, but may wear and fray over time.

More modern, sustainable options are available for restaurants as well, something that may be particularly attractive to establishments that highlight their concern for the environment and farm-to-table practices. Bamboo is a highly durable material that is very easy to recycle into furniture, for instance. We've even seen seats made from recycled automobile seat belts — easily cleaned and environmentally responsible!

Another factor to consider is storage and how easily items you purchase can be moved around your restaurant. Staff frequently need to reconfigure settings to accommodate groups of many sizes, and your tables need to be able to take frequent

moves. This is where the risk of a wobbly leg or awkwardly attached leaf can become a potential danger.

Any furniture you purchase for your restaurant should also be able to slide easily across your flooring — with minimal physical effort and quickly without disruption. No one wants to be sitting down to a quiet dinner only to have servers struggling with a new table and chair combination six feet away. If your staff members belong to a union, the union may have regulations about the size and weight of the items members may move (and in some places, furniture may not be able to be moved without union involvement). Check maximum weight restrictions with your local union rep to be sure you're complying with any applicable rules.

Don't forget, too, to consider how extra chairs and tables will be stored when not in use. Can they stack efficiently in a storage room? Or do they all have to be out in your front of house all the time?



Your customer is looking for a cohesive experience.

Does it fit my brand?

Ultimately, it's just as important that your restaurant seating represents your brand (and not just your individual taste) appropriately. Your customer is looking for a cohesive experience where everything from your menu and glassware to your lighting and wall decorations works together. Fortunately, there are more styles and designs of restaurant seating than you can even imagine, and many of them get at the very root of ambiance and can help you set a reinforce the atmosphere you're hoping to achieve.

Some restaurant designs are now opening up to conversational gathering styles (couches around low tables), as well as long communal tables with benches. If your menu focuses on family-style dining or shared plates, this type of furniture will only accent that experience for your customers. But be wary of eliminating more intimate space altogether, particularly if your party size is generally smaller or older. Not every diner wants to be seated in close quarters or have to slide past a stranger. Table and chair arrangements, like all other aspects of your physical space, need to be practical for your guests.

What about booths? They're generally comfortable for all sorts of customers and easily cleaned, the privacy afforded by the semi-enclosed space is fantastic from an ambiance perspective, and they don't take up much more space than a traditional table and chair setting.

But you may run into trouble when hosting very large or very small parties. The typical 4-6 seat booth can be very restrictive to your flexibility to reset and combine, leaving you with limitations on the table turns — and profit — you can make. Parties of six or more may end up waiting longer, while parties of two are taking up the same amount of space four patrons would otherwise.

So while booths might seem like a clear choice for your restaurant, it's important to install booths very judiciously, if at all.

But can I afford it?

There's no other way to say this: chairs are extremely expensive, even at wholesale. And the price difference between one style and another can be vast. Is there a value difference between a \$200 and \$500 chair? Yes, very likely. It's not just perception of name brand or look that drives the cost of these items. You get what you pay for in long term durability and relative comfort.

The question becomes, where do you draw the line on a limited budget? This is often where cash-flow friendly funding options can provide relief, and not just for seating options, but for a bevy of renovation necessities throughout the course of your project.

Next up: open your eyes to the possibilities of **lighting** and what it takes to make sure your guest experience is in its top form.



Chairs are extremely expensive, but remember **you get what you pay for** in long term durability and relative comfort.



Chapter

Lighting

So much of a restaurant operator's focus is put into designing the menu, the seating, the decorations... but how much of that ends up sabotaged if the guests can barely see any of it?

Lighting is an aspect of restaurant design that can be easily overlooked by even the most seasoned of owners or managers. How much of a dining experience gets ruined because "an intimate atmosphere" is really just too dark? Or what if a restaurant is too bright for the style of establishment? It can definitely kill the mood of a restaurant to send your guests home with headaches.

Whether you're seeing complaints about lighting in your online customer reviews or outfitting your restaurant for the very first time, the choice of how to light your space

can be overwhelming. But with so many bulb and fixture options out on the market today, you can easily customize your lighting to fit your restaurant's specific needs. Just as long as you know what to aim for — and what to avoid — these little details can make the difference between an environment that welcomes guests back and one that scares them away.

When are you open?

The time of day you're open for service can be a touchstone for how you approach lighting your restaurant. If you open in the late afternoon and only serve dinner, sticking to a low intensity, softer light for atmosphere is key.



All light bulbs have a “color temperature,” or a specific shade of white light.



Warm Temperature
(golden/yellow tones)



Cool Temperature
(white/blue tones)

If you’re primarily a breakfast/brunch place, bright lighting can help set the mood for the day and give customers the light they need to read their newspaper with their morning coffee. Lunch can be similar, with lighting that’s comfortable for the day crowd, but still vivid enough to encourage table turnover. You want customers to enjoy themselves, but not necessarily spend all afternoon at a table sipping water and reading a novel after finishing their lunch.

If you’re opening a breakfast or lunch restaurant for the first time, consider a location with large windows to take advantage of natural light in the mornings. When you serve the bulk of your customers during the day, windows can do half the work of lighting (and perhaps even cut electricity costs) compared to restaurants with less natural light.

However, even restaurants with expansive windows will need to be prepared with accent lighting for cloudy or stormy days, as well as with shading for super bright days.

The Color of Your Light

All light bulbs have a “color temperature,” or a specific shade of white light. Warmer orange and golden tones can be found in one kind of bulb (generally tungsten-based) whereas you might prefer the crisp white from another bulb. What kind of restaurant do you have? Fast food and fast casual might want a brighter, crisp white to create a faster pace environment and more of a daytime feeling. Fine dining could have warmer colors for a more refined atmosphere.

Family restaurants can go somewhere in the middle – brighter than formal dining, but not as bright as fast food. No matter what color lighting you choose, be sure to view your food underneath it before committing to a restaurant full of bulbs. You’d hate to outfit all of your fixtures with bulbs that make your main course look sickly or otherwise unattractive.

Don't Go Too Dim

A mistake many operators of formal dining establishments make is keeping their restaurant too dark. You can certainly to create a mood with your evening lighting, but be careful not to do it at the expense of visibility – and not just visibility at the tables, but throughout the entire dining room.

Dramatic atmosphere is important, but your guests still want to be able to see the menu. This is particularly important if your regular clientele is middle-aged or older. Ultimately, lighting that gets in the way of guests being able to order will not result in a positive dining experience. Which leads us to ...



Focus on Functionality

Yes, style is a big part of decorating your restaurant. You want all the elements of your dining area design to be cohesive with each other, and that includes the lighting. However, it can be easy to stumble when focusing on how a potential lighting

fixture looks instead of how a fixture makes everything else look. Make sure whatever fixtures and bulb styles you choose are just as practical as they are stylish. It does no good to get a light bulb with the right brightness and color only to have your fixtures darken the room or seem radically out of place for your brand.

Electricity can account for nearly 1/4 of a restaurant's energy costs.

Energy Efficiency

Electricity is a huge part of a restaurant's utility bills. It can account for nearly 1/4 of a restaurant's energy costs.² Conventional incandescent bulbs and halogen lamps can also generate a lot of heat. This can not only make your guests and employees uncomfortable, but will also increase your air conditioning and electricity use to compensate.

With that in mind, investing in energy efficient bulbs for your lighting can be a great way to trim down that utility bill. LED lights are an option for both the front and back of the house. They do cost more upfront than conventional bulbs, but they last much longer, saving you money in the long run.

Check Out Restaurants Doing It Right

A good exercise for any business owner is to keep an eye on trends and successes in their industry and local area. The next time you're dining out at a restaurant (especially one similar to your own), pay attention to the lighting. Does it create the appropriate mood? Does it add to the dining experience or does it detract from it?

More than that, when you find yourself eating in a restaurant that has great lighting, how is it set up? Where are the light sources installed? What sort of color do the bulbs generate? Make note of these details so you can incorporate them into your own restaurant.

Reach Out to Peers

We've often noted how reaching out to your fellow local restaurateurs for networking and knowledge-sharing can bring a whole new level of insight to how your approach handling your financial challenges. The same can apply to advice on any renovation or FF&E decision. Connect with nearby restaurant owners, especially ones with long careers in the restaurant industry, and ask about how they've handled lighting issues.

It's very possible that they've gone through the same struggles you have with lighting their own restaurant and came up with the solution. They may even have a great referral for wholesale fixtures that can save you money. At the very least, simply chatting with your peers can help bring some frame of reference to your lighting options, and open up possibilities you may not have thought of on your own — and just about lighting.

When overseeing a renovation of your front of house, one has to ask: what about the **floors and walls?**





Chapter

Walls and Floors

It may seem perfunctory to say so, but both flooring and walls are crucial elements to any restaurant's interior design. They're the base upon which all other aspects of your restaurant's design is built. The good news is that you have numerous options when it comes to paint, wallpaper, and flooring. The bad news is... you have numerous options. How can you possibly decide? By looking at your dining room's needs and focusing on function, durability, and cohesive design, you can pare down those options to get to the right choices for your space.

Glossy or matte paint?

There are many different styles of paint on the market, ranging in price from pretty reasonable to designer-style expensive. (Ask a manager in your local hardware

store's paint department about how price compares with quality. They know the product better than anyone.)

Generally, restaurant owners should look for some kind of gloss finish in their paint. Not only is matte paint not very durable against moisture, it's also very difficult to clean. And being able to clean your walls is a must for high traffic, restaurant dining rooms. High-gloss paints lie on the other side of the spectrum: they're very durable and easy to clean, but their shininess also tends to reveal smudges, dirt, and fingerprints.

Meeting somewhere in the middle could strike the right balance. A satin or semi-gloss paint offers that crucial protection from moisture and is relatively easy to clean, but isn't so shiny that it shows every smudge.

The Color Question

Your wall color is going to be a big part of your paint choice. After all, the color of your dining room can have a huge impact on your overall visual design and your restaurant concept. While the most common rule is to go with a wall color (or colors) that fits with your restaurant's overall esthetic, there is some color theory you can look to when choosing.

For instance, if your restaurant is generally fast-paced with quick table turnover or "order and go," the color yellow brings energetic vibes to the space. Reds can also be used that way, but you might want to add it as a detail color rather than overwhelming the room. Green is connected to nature, healthiness, and relaxation, but restaurants tend to avoid blues and purples since they've shown to decrease appetites in studies. And of course, there are neutral colors like whites, light greys, and beiges, which can make smaller spaces seem larger.



It's All in the Details

Your wall design doesn't have to mean painting a room one color and being done with it. Take the overall theme and tone you'd like to set with your restaurant menu and apply that to the walls. If you want a bold, daring atmosphere, consider painting one accent wall a bright color to make it pop. If you would like a homey, casual feel to your soup-and-sandwich place, think about using whiteboard/blackboard paint.



Your employees can then take a section of wall on which to write specials — maybe even doodle some original art. Just be careful about where you seat customers in relation to the wall — it's easy to get covered in chalk dust if brushing against it. If you are considering special trim or paint techniques, however, hire a professional painter. They can go over texturing wall details and ensure that more complicated techniques are properly completed.



Wallpaper Options

If you don't want to paint your walls, wallpaper is a viable option for restaurants. There are some unique, high-end wallpaper products out there that can bring a distinct look to your business. When looking for appropriate wallpaper, make sure you can clean it easily.

Also make sure the trendy wallpaper design that just "speaks to you" still fits the rest of your interior design concept and will stand the test of time — at least until your next remodel. Keep an eye out for what others are saying online about the product, too. If others have had problems with peelings or if it ends up difficult to clean, you'll want to know that upfront.

Flooring

Believe it or not, concrete is a viable choice for your restaurant floors – it's paintable and is often what's already there when you lease or buy the building. But concrete can also raise significant safety concerns. Not only can a staff member or guest get seriously injured if they fall on concrete, but a concrete floor can be very rough on servers and bussers' feet after a full shift. If your flooring puts strain on your employees' bodies, that will affect their morale over time, along with their work performance.

Carpet is another option, especially since its softer cushioning solves the problems of a hard concrete floor. But carpet is also more challenging to keep clean in a dining room with lots of foot traffic and the potential for spills every shift. If you do choose carpet, make sure to look into medium to dark colors and dense fiber carpets. Be prepared to include vacuuming as part of the regular staff cleaning procedure and to get the carpet professionally cleaned at least twice a year.

Carpet tiles are also a good choice for some restaurants (and commercial spaces in general). They give you the option of having carpet without as much risk from stains. Since each piece is easily removed, you can just replace the tile where spillage happened rather than having to rip out

the whole carpet — or paying for expensive stain removal/cleaning. Your other option is to put down underlayment – cushioning under hard flooring – and then install your choice of hardwood, laminate, or vinyl.

The underlayment can absorb some of the vibrations from people walking, offers some sound control, and of course makes it easier for your staff to comfortably be on their feet throughout their shift.

Do-It-Yourself ... or Not

Like with all updates to your restaurant, the question of when to do the work yourself or when to hire professionals will come up when you're planning to change up your walls and flooring.

Do you have experience painting rooms or putting up wallpaper? Have you put up wallpaper for a space as big as your dining room before? What is the internet saying about the specific type of flooring you're looking for – is it feasible for laypeople to complete on their own? Can you efficiently get the work done yourself without causing major upheaval to your restaurant's regular schedule?

If you're hesitant about any of those questions, you might want to consider hiring professionals to do the job for you. After all, it's better to do it right the first time, rather than waste time and resources doing the job on your own and come away dissatisfied.

One aspect where walls and floors start to get even more complicated is covered in our next chapter: the ins and outs of **soundproofing**.



It's better to
**do it right the
first time** than
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Chapter

Soundproofing

Your restaurant is bustling. The dining room is full of people laughing and talking. Servers are moving through your space, taking and delivering orders. By all appearances, business is booming. There's a palpable energy customers can feel the second they walk through the door. So why isn't everyone smiling?

It's noise. Your restaurant is just too loud.

Controlling the volume of your restaurant space isn't just about turning down the music. It's about controlling reverberation between floor and ceiling (and wall to wall) so that normally acceptable levels of noise don't get amplified to uncomfortable levels. If your space has a lot of bare, hard

surfaces, echoing can quickly take low levels of sound produced by conversation, footsteps, or background music and create a massive explosion of sound — making your restaurant difficult to enjoy.

Even summertime open air restaurants have this issue. Yes, they have the benefit of one less surface to bounce noise, and one very large area through which sound can escape. However, seal that release valve when weather turns cooler, and suddenly your restaurant — known for its pleasant atmosphere and great overall experience — can become taxing for diners of all ages.

Why soundproof?

Does loud noise make your restaurant feel fuller? Certainly. Even a half-empty dining room can give the impression of success if it has that positive sense of bustling energy. But you need to find the right balance between making your restaurant feel busy and your guests being able to hear their companion (or server) across a small table.

Spending money upfront on an acoustic expert to soundproof your restaurant may seem like an extraneous expense among many more quantifiable ones, like smallwares and technology, but the return on investment could be sustainable clientele.

The return on investment for soundproofing your restaurant could be sustainable clientele.

Kiri Eschelle, Regional Sales Manager at Rewards Network — and former restaurant and record label owner — describes not investing in acoustic remedies at the outset as a big mistake. "Every single time I walk into a restaurant, especially if it's got a good amount of people in it, I immediately ask myself, what's the ambient noise like? What's the reverberation sounding like in the

restaurant? How comfortable is it to have a conversation? Is that not the intent of the restaurant? Do they want it to be ear-blisteringly loud?



"Some people may not even be conscious of it from a customer perspective of what was it that didn't quite fit with them?" Eschelle explains. "Because when you're thinking about a restaurant, it's 'What's it look like? What's it taste like? What's it feel like?' When they're thinking about food, they may not be thinking about 'What does it sound like?'"

And that disconnect could make return visits questionable after an otherwise perfect evening. In fact, a Zagat Boston Restaurants survey found that rather than service or price, the number one irritant encountered when dining out is restaurant noise level. Over 70 percent of those surveyed claim to avoid restaurants that they consider too loud.³

Noise Level	This is...	Decible Range	Similar Volume
Moderate	too quiet.	50-60 db	Falling rain.
Loud	where you want to be.	70-80 db	Alarm clocks, vacuum cleaners.
Very Loud	where most restaurants are.	90-110 db	Jackhammers, sporting events.
Uncomfortable	damaging to hearing within 30 seconds	120 db	Jet plane take-off, rock concert

So, what’s “too loud”? The American Academy of Audiology has a scale for acceptable noise level for people with normal hearing that places most restaurants nationwide in a decibel level much higher than recommended to prevent discomfort — and customer dissatisfaction.⁴

But it’s not just about your customers, whose hard won return visit you’re risking. The health of your employees needs to factor into the noise level of your establishment as well. Unlike guests, who infrequently spend an hour or so in your restaurant, your front of house staff are likely experiencing high levels of persistent sound for up to eight hours at a stretch if service is consistently busy.

And even when hearing loss — temporary or permanent — isn’t a factor, quality of performance can be affected by noise level. Your server’s primary responsibility is to be

attentive and responsive to your guests’ needs. If the environment of your restaurant makes hearing their requests correctly (and on the first try) difficult, the experience your customers walk away with will likely not be remembered fondly.

Hiring a soundproofing contractor to come into your space, evaluate your needs, and provide a plan for remedying excessive noise levels is the best way to ensure a positive dining experience for your guests and employees alike.

Here are a few things experts recommend considering when working to control sound in your restaurant space:

Wall Panels

Acoustic sound-absorbing panels installed on walls and ceilings are a soundproofing expert’s first go-to, and will be the most

effective solution to dim down ambient noise in your front of house. But just because they're functional doesn't mean these panels can't contribute to your restaurant's overall ambiance.

Acoustic panels can often be painted or otherwise disguised to match the aesthetic of your restaurant. If your decor is traditional, having murals or other images painted on the panels can contribute to the story you're telling with your food.



If you're looking for a stark, clean atmosphere in your dining room, simple black, white, or muted color fields painted across the panels can blend them into the environment or provide an interesting focus to the room. Don't be afraid to get creative! Just remember to keep your brand at the forefront of any decision.

Ceiling Options

Generally, acoustic drop ceilings both provide a great reduction in ambient noise and disguise unsightly wiring, plumbing, or drywall that could distract from a pleasant dining experience. But not every space is going to feel natural with that style of standard ceiling paneling.

Fabric ceiling sails can give a more modern or high end impression to your dining room depending on the color, material, and style of draping. Acoustically rated tin panels are available for vintage inspired spaces. These modern tin panels provide far more protection against reverberation than their original counterparts at the previous turn of the century.

In the past, "popcorn" ceilings were sprayed with textured material — which would then be painted over — mitigate echoing. We'd suggest avoiding this treatment since it tends to collect dust and cobwebs.





Background music provides **the perfect amount** of white noise that is pleasant for a dining environment.

Quick Fixes

While we hesitate to recommend guerrilla DIY soundproofing if the decibel level in your restaurant is high (leave those complex renovations to the pros), there are things you can do to make slight adjustments to diminish echo between bare walls, hardwood floors, and tall or reverberative ceilings. Adding absorptive material to your dining room in the form of canvas paintings, large plants, or other porous objects can keep noise from bouncing interminably.

Once upon a time, many restaurants solved this problem by decorating with carpet, thick drapery, and fabric chairs, but that style will likely not reflect the contemporary atmosphere most restaurants today are looking for. On top of that, all of those materials stain easily, absorb smell as well as they do sound, and can end up looking worn long before wood, glass, or fiberglass.

Soundproofing your restaurant isn't about needing to hear a pin drop (or easily overhearing that couple at the next table). If your soundproofing efforts go too far in quieting the din of your dining room, there's an easy remedy.

Background music provides the perfect amount of white noise that is pleasant for a dining environment, and can be customized to fit your clientele or even adjusted by time of day or event, as necessary. It's about providing that right level of comfort so that noise is the last thing on your guests' minds, and their overall experience with you drives them to return again and again.

There's one last stop in your front of house to review before we go, and it's more important than you think. Nothing ruins a nice evening like a terribly maintained or designed restaurant **bathroom**. In our last chapter, we have some ideas on how to ensure you're not flushing away all of your customers' good will.



Chapter

Bathrooms

It's easy to overlook them as a particularly crucial element to your business, but your restaurant's restrooms can play an important part in its success. A poorly maintained or dirty looking restroom can be a major turn-off in the guest experience. A survey recently conducted by SCA Tissue North America found that nearly one out of three people said they would refuse to come back to a restaurant with a dirty restroom.⁵

Yes, not keeping your restroom up to the same standards as the rest of your restaurant can have serious consequences. Whether it's a broken lock on one of the stall doors, dingy floor tiles, an outdated looking sink area, or peeling wallpaper, renovating your restrooms can mean the difference between a satisfied guest and one you'll never see

again. Renovations take time, resources, and energy, but working smart and planning ahead can lead to powerful results for your customers' satisfaction.

Check out these seven helpful restroom upgrade tips:

Choose Your Focus Wisely

Making changes to your restroom space will take time and money, and rarely is something restaurant owners have budgeted. And considering you'll have to close down the restrooms while the renovations can be made, knowing what's really important to change in the space is crucial.

Is it simply the sinks and countertops that need replacement? Maybe your stall doors just need new locks and handles. Is a fresh coat of paint all it will take, or is it a complete do-over?

It's true that some restaurant restrooms need tons of renovations, particularly if they haven't been touched in many years. However, others simply need sprucing up or specific upgrades. Figure out the focus of your restroom renovations will ensure the renovation process is as efficient as possible.

Set a Budget

Once you've chosen your focus, you need to set your budget. Do as much research as you can on the specific types of upgrades you want to do in order to make sure your business can handle the extra costs. If you don't set a budget or if you budget incorrectly, it could mean major issues for your finances and slow down the project as you get the additional funds.

This is especially true if you have to secure financing – you absolutely want to make sure the money you procure will cover the project and arrive in a timely fashion. Small business loans take time to approve, sometimes up to thirty days, while a merchant cash advance can be approved much more quickly. The last thing you want is a contractor waiting around or passing you over for another job that's ready and delaying unnecessarily.

Schedule the Work Carefully

You don't want to have to close down your restrooms during service if you can help it. Ideally you want any restroom renovation work to be finished when you're not open to guests. When researching contractors to do the job, make sure to investigate what their past clients have said about their timeliness and their scheduling flexibility.

Make sure your contractor can work around your restaurant's schedule so that the renovations have the least impact on your guests' dining experience. If you're doing some of the work yourself (repainting the walls, replacing



If you don't set a budget or if you budget incorrectly, it could mean **major issues** for your finances.

simple light fixtures, replacing the toilet seats, etc.) learn how to do it properly and safely — and in the time you've set aside for the job. If the entire project is a multiple day job, try to schedule it so that one task can be complete before the next shift, so that any guest coming into the restroom will avoid seeing an incomplete job.



Think About the Future

Like the rest of the décor in your restaurant, you want to make sure your restroom looks modern and on brand for your overall business, but not so trendy that it'll look out of date in a few years and you'll feel obligated to redo it. If you're going to throw in a trendy detail make sure it a.) matches the décor in the rest of your restaurant, b.) fits within your brand standard and c.) is something you can easily and affordably change out if or when you decide to redecorate/update down the road.

Aim for Function

While aesthetics is certainly an important part of a restroom renovation, don't forget to take care of all the little details that make a restroom more functional for guests and employees alike. For instance, a couple coats of easy-to-wash wall paint will allow routine wall cleaning, just like you would schedule in your back-of-the-house cleaning. Setting up an automated air freshener with a light, neutralizing scent can help keep the space odor-free, especially if your restrooms are close to the backdoor and your dumpster.

Installing touchless motion-activated faucets, soap dispensers, and paper towel dispensers can improve sanitary conditions for those using the restroom, but they also help regulate the water, soap, and paper towels used by each person. This modest investment can help save you money on supplies and your water bill over time (not to mention the possibility that manufacturing and municipal credits for energy/water efficient commercial-use bathroom accessories may be available).



When replacing your toilets, look for models that have good reviews for flushing properly in a commercial setting. If you don't, you might end up dealing with repeatedly clogged or overflowing toilets. No one wants to see that in a restaurant. Even simply adding coat hooks to the inside of the stall doors can be a small touch that adds up for guests carrying bags or wearing overcoats. And while you're at it, make sure your restrooms are clearly marked with easy-to-read signs.

The ADA has specific accessibility guidelines for public restrooms.

Be Accommodating

If you have a lot of families visit your restaurant, it's a smart and courteous idea to update or install baby changing stations in your restrooms (including in the men's room for the dads dining with you).

And don't forget guests with disabilities. The ADA has specific accessibility guidelines for public restrooms, including handrails, sinks reachable for those in wheel chairs, and other otherwise minor details that make a huge difference for those with physical limitations. It's a smart idea to go over those

guidelines with your contractor to make sure your restrooms are compliant while updating other aspects.

After you renovate, keep it clean!

Now that you have this beautifully renovated bathroom for your restaurant, make sure to keep it that way! It's crucial to maintain a solid cleaning schedule for your bathrooms, taking care of not only the countertops, sinks, floors, and toilets, but also periodically cleaning the walls, ceilings, and lighting fixtures. Not only will consistently cleaning your restrooms keep your restaurants sanitary and your guest happy, but it will absolutely help ensure your new restroom features stay in good condition and ensures your updates are worth the investment of time and money.

Endnotes


¹ "Restaurants and Bars" – Dredf.org

² "Energy Efficient Light Bulbs Can Save Your Restaurant Thousands Per Year" – Lighting Science Group; lsgc.com

³ "For restaurant owners, striking the right noise level is key" – Bostonglobe.com

⁴ "Follow the Signs – Protect Your Hearing" – Pluralpublishing.com

⁵ "Would You Eat in a Restaurant with a Dirty Bathroom?" – USAtoday.com



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