

Deep Dish #8
Restaurant Design & COVID-19: Designing for Tomorrow
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Throughout history, urban design and epidemics have had an influence on each other. For example, the cholera epidemics in many cities in the United States in the 19th century, brought about urban design interventions such as wide-ranging public parks, spacious boulevards, and standardized city-wide sewage systems (2). Additionally, tuberculosis epidemics in Europe prompted the birth of modernist architecture. The design of sanatoriums with long walls of extensive windows, light-coloured rooms, and roof terraces were considered part of the cure for the disease, as bacteria was thought to thrive in dark rooms (1).

The COVID-19 pandemic is influencing the future of how we design our spaces as fear of contracting the virus controls our level comfortability with indoor space. Architects and interior designers will need to consider changing health and safety regulations, air flow, and technology that can help improve customer confidence in restaurants (6). Throughout the course of the pandemic, BIAs have actually sought out these professionals to help them find ways to eventually get people back to the main streets to support local businesses and the local economy.

Making the most out of outdoor and open plan space has become one of the most crucial moves that restaurant operators can make right now. Customers are more willing to visit a restaurant if they can dine outdoors in the fresh air, where the COVID-19 virus is less likely to be spread from one person to another (3). In places like Toronto, regulations have prohibited restaurants from offering indoor dining for most of 2020 and into 2021. This has spurred the City of Toronto to pass bylaws allowing restaurants to extend their patios onto sidewalks. The restaurant industry has learned the importance of outdoor dining during this time and the importance of making these spaces just as appealing as indoor dining spaces (6).

Interview insights: “We have a program in place called CaféTO which is an awesome initiative put in place by the City to help create more outdoor space for restaurants and bars in Toronto. The program allows these businesses to convert sidewalks into patios at no cost.” – Property Developer, September 1st

A restaurant in Amsterdam created a number of mini greenhouses along the canal that allows groups of up to four people to dine in an outdoor setting without coming into contact with other customers (3). The restaurant’s website states, “Enjoy a corona-proof dinner in an intimate greenhouse” (5). The servers use long wooden boards to bring out the food, so that they never have to enter the private greenhouse (5). Also, Trestle Brewery in Parry Sound, with the help of Parry Sound Community Business Development Centre, has increased their outdoor seating by installing one 10-person yurt and four 8-person domes (7). These yurts and domes are heated allowing them to be used throughout the winter months (7).

Interview insights: “We offer a number of façade grants that we have been seeing businesses take advantage of during the pandemic. Some people used the grant to increase social-distancing signage and others used it to create large windows that open so that they could bring the outdoors, indoors in the summers.” – Industry Professional, November 30th

In terms of the future of restaurant design, architects and designers should also rethink circulation. One-way circulation systems that allow customers to flow in a single direction minimize the risk of them coming into contact with each other (2). This could mean having one door designated to entering the restaurant and another door for leaving the restaurant. Additionally, double food production lines are quickly becoming a staple in many kitchens. One line is assigned to dine-in orders and another one is assigned to take-out only orders. Starbird, a fast-food chain in the United States, has built pick-up cubbies at the end of the take-out only production line (4). These cubbies could easily be incorporated in more traditional restaurants and they could even become more elaborate by incorporating heating and lock technology (4). The external design of restaurants is also expected to become more important. For example, more parking spaces are likely to be designated for curbside pick-up and we could even see fine dining restaurants adding drive-thru options (4). For those who have spent times in UK pubs, table-side service may become just as irregular to find here in Canada.

Interview Insights: “We are seeing a lot more ghost kitchens popping up and restaurants are utilizing delivery more than ever before.” – Industry Professional, September 1st

The restaurant industry is quickly changing and with that the design of restaurants is also changing. Restaurants are evolving to meet customer needs with temporary solutions such as plexiglass between booths and longer-term investments that include a complete redesign of enclosed spaces. Overall, the role of design and architecture within the restaurant industry is becoming more prevalent than ever before.

References

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