

RESTAURANT DESIGN: WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Customer expectations are driving new trends in the restaurant world, from the design, to the food, to the service, finds Retail Focus

Designed by Shed. Cha Chaan Teng in Holborn, London is inspired by the infamous Cha Chaan Teng culture of post war Hong Kong.

London restaurant German Gymnasium scored a hat trick at the Restaurant and Bar Design Awards in September, winning Best Restaurant or Bar in a Heritage Building, Best UK Restaurant and Best Overall Restaurant. The all-day dining establishment from D&D London beat off strong competition from around the globe, with its soaring roof structure, Victorian archways and black steel staircases. But, how important is design to the overall restaurant experience?

Conran + Partners, the design studio behind German Gymnasium as well as around 100 other bars and restaurants,

believes that we have higher expectations of almost every aspect of the dining experience, from the design, to the food, to the service. 'We don't want silver service, but we do expect reliable, honest and down-to-earth attention to detail,' says Tina Norden, director at Conran + Partners. 'We no longer feel privileged to be eating in high-end establishments, but expect to feel comfortable throughout the experience over good food and good company.'

German Gymnasium opened towards the end of 2015 in King's Cross, in a building originally constructed as a purpose-built gymnasium. Inspired by the grand cafes and brasseries of



central Europe, it offers an all-day dining experience in a setting that celebrates bygone days of Victorian sport and entertainment, architecture and glamorous travel.

More recently, in its first foray into the UAE, Conran + Partners has designed a new Anatolian-themed restaurant and bar concept located inside the Grosvenor House Hotel at Dubai Marina. Called Rûya (meaning 'dream' in Turkish), the restaurant and bar is the brain child of Turkish restaurateur Umut Ozkanca and backed by d.ream, who plan to expand the concept to key cities around the world, including London. 'We set out to create a vibrant and contemporary new concept which would showcase the rich heritage of Anatolian and Turkish cuisine, but with a modern styling for a contemporary international audience,' explains Norden.

Mandy Saven, head of food, beverage and hospitality at innovation research and advisory firm Stylus, believes that Middle Eastern-inspired food has become more inventive with contemporary twists, citing London restaurants The Palomar and Yosma as two cases in point.

Yosma is a Turkish meyhane, mengal and raki bar on London's Baker Street, which opened earlier this year by restaurateurs Levent Büyükuğur and Sanjay Nandi. Designed by Afroditi Krassa, the restaurant is inspired by the streets of Istanbul with simplicity and textures at the heart of the design.

'Nowadays, customers buy experiences,' claims Krassa. 'Going to a restaurant or a cinema isn't just about the food or the movie you are consuming, but it's about the social interaction that is created around it. In this respect, spaces need to be designed with a maximum of flexibility, to allow for communities to get together.'

With any restaurant design project, Krassa always takes the food as the starting point. 'Based on the menu we will look at a space through the customer's eyes to create a 360 degree experience,' she says. 'We never design for ourselves or designers, but for customers and their experience: from the chair they are sitting on, what they will share on Instagram to what they can smell, it is all part of our holistic approach.'

Martin Reid, innovation researcher at GDR Creative Intelligence, agrees that customer expectations in the UK are driving new trends towards dining experiences that engender a genuine sense of community, and that are grounded in bolder design themes and narratives. 'More restaurants and cafes are experimenting with the arrangement of space to encourage a more social and casual atmosphere, from several parties sharing the same tables to more open-plan seating and taking aesthetic inspiration from its local environment,' he says.

'The explosion of restaurants that satisfy the latest food trends or that centre on unexpected journeys and interactions, from as small as Pret and Costa serving alcohol to the fully realised quirky dining experiences offered by Hipchips or Squirrel, demonstrate how much customers value varieties of experience,' adds Reid.

It seems there has also been a shift in the restaurant world to simplification: not necessarily in terms of design style but from a menu perspective. 'The expectation of standards is now so high, especially in London, that doing fewer things well is the only way of maintaining quality,' claims Matt Smith, director at interior design company Shed, which has worked on all of the MEATliquor sites, as well as Cha Chaan Teng in Holborn and French patisserie Orée in Fulham.

Saven has also noticed the singular focus catching on, as



Top: Cha Chaan Teng is divided visually into three areas: the bar, bao and main dining area, each rife with their own Cha Chaan Teng persona.

Bottom: Scandinavian-inspired 26 Grains in Seven Dials, London is geared towards the breakfast market, serving wholesome porridge, smoothie bowls, bircher museli and coffee.

hospitality operators focus on doing one thing really well. 'I think 26 Grains in Covent Garden is a great example of this: its porridge done all sorts of ways,' she says. 'This is a smart way of elevating simple ingredient or recipe and upgrading a meal occasion.'

Homeslice is another homegrown success story, which opened its first permanent site at Neal's Yard in Seven Dials and recently expanded to create a bigger flagship restaurant.

'Overall, people will still always want a concept to be original, high quality, well executed and reasonably priced rather than gimmicks or a gap in the market,' says Julia Wilkinson, portfolio and group restaurant strategy executive at property firm Shaftesbury. 'Delivery services such as Deliveroo and Uber Eats will continue to grow due to convenience, but they won't replace the social interaction or pleasure of dining out with friends.' **RF**



'NOWADAYS, CUSTOMERS BUY EXPERIENCES' AFRODITI KRASSA



Clockwise from left: German Gymnasium walked away with three awards at the Restaurant and Bar Design Awards in September, including Best Overall Restaurant; Yosma, designed by AfroditiKrassa, is a Turkish meyhane, mengal and raki bar on London's Baker Street; German Gymnasium, designed by Conran + Partners; Rüya (meaning 'dream' in Turkish) is a new Anatolian-themed restaurant and bar concept inside the Grosvenor House Hotel at Dubai Marina, designed by Conran + Partners.

