

Friday and Saturday nights for years. The idea is to ensure a level of comfort and entertainment for customers that will see them return or, better yet, stop them from going elsewhere.

However, the world has changed dramatically from where we were two years ago and most publicans now see the benefits of tendering the fit-out of their premises. In the past, publicans were often anxious to re-open as quickly as possible and saw the tendering process as overly time consuming, however, increasingly, this is no longer the case and with suppliers in need of business they are willing to negotiate on prices or offer discounts.

While the cost of trades has not come down significantly, maybe 10%, by tendering individual works the most competitive prices can be realised. Unfortunately the cost of doing business is expensive for everyone in Ireland with overheads and insurance prices, trades included.

KITCHEN PRACTICALITY

Pub redesign frequently centres around seeking a means of extending trade to other days of the week and finding methods of attracting a wider customer base, be that younger clientele on weekends or someone looking for a bite to eat mid-week. As such pub design needs to be

homes for a night. Publicans who have been reluctant to change in the past are now recognising the need to provide a better smoking area and are searching for the best approach to achieve their aims without losing their existing trade. Customers who smoke often make their decision on where to drink and socialise based exclusively on a bar's smoking area. Women in particular dislike standing on the street, while some publicans think they may not have the necessary space, with creative thinking and a fresh approach many under-utilised areas can be adapted.

When designing a smoking area it is vital to ensure the design meets the requirements of the Office of Tobacco Control (OTC). Given the Irish climate, you then need to ensure that there is a shelter or canopy against the rain, and drainage for this rain – often forgotten. Regularly electric heaters are fitted but there are alternatives – guarded fires for instance. Electric heaters can cause an electricity bill to soar and undo all the good of energy-saving lights and green initiatives. Use comfortable seating that can withstand the elements, with removable seat cushions if necessary. There are some great faux leathers now that can withstand a certain amount of moisture – great for covered outdoor areas and many publicans are now fitting plasmas screens suitable for external use.



Images of the recently renovated The Coachhouse Bar in Gorey, Co Wexford.

carefully thought-out; it should cater to a wide plethora of demands yet, just as importantly, not alienate existing customers.

Installing a new kitchen or improving existing food service ability is a major concern at present, a typical kitchen, which can cater for all types of food service costs approximately €70,000 – that includes everything from flooring to white-rock walls and fans but excludes utensils. Of course the simpler the menu the lower the cost of the kitchen, and it is extremely advisable before fitting a new kitchen that a publican designs the menu first. Whether you have a chef on board or are bringing in a consultant in the interim, the size and design of the kitchen follows from the food that will be served. If most of the food is pre-prepared or is light (paninis and toasties) then a very small kitchen will work perfectly – about 5m x 3.5m.

Most kitchen equipment companies will prepare layouts but it's always best to consult with the Environmental Health Officer (EHO) while the plans are being drawn up as they can very often have their own comments and provide useful help.

OUTDOOR INTELLIGENCE

With increased comfort and design in Irish homes, so too comes the demand for comfort and design in Irish bars. With drink-driving awareness; the smoking ban and increased costs of alcohol, the pub experience needs to be as comfortable as possible to entice customers out of their

When completing a new smoking area there are certain pitfalls best avoided, adequate ventilation, even if it is outdoors, removes stagnant smoke and always ensure that the area is easy to maintain. Plants have a great impact on a smoking area and artificial plants are low maintenance and the quality that is currently on the market is excellent.

IMPORTANT LESSONS

When approaching the design process always have a definite budget in mind before meeting with any design specialist, it is often of great help if you have compiled a wish-list of needs and wants – but be realistic about what can be achieved.

Listen to what advice is given, many suggestions may sound obvious, such as ensuring doorways are wide, proper ventilation features throughout and there is easy outdoor access from the kitchen if possible – kitchens get very hot and this can be overlooked at the design stage. Easily accessible exits also help with deliveries and refuse, if an exit is used for ventilation or high-powered extract fans consider how this may create a draught on doors and most importantly on your customers when it filters through to the dining space.

Recessions are cyclical, forward thinking publicans realise this fact and are positioning their premises so they'll be ready for the upturn when it comes. Remember, the Chinese symbol for crisis is the same as that for opportunity. ■