Literature Review:

Art and Music’s Influence in the Restaurant Space

Art and music have a particularly powerful influence on people in the restaurant space. The degree to which this can be manipulated in favour of the business and the customer remains an ever evolving ambition for restaurateurs and artists. Research that surrounds the topic focuses on the influence that art and music have on the customer and how they contribute to their spending and dining habits. Much of this research is focused on the behavioural habits of patrons in restaurant spaces. Along with this are detailed examples of new restaurant designs that seek to optimize the use of art and music. All of this will be compiled in this review to show the information currently vital to the topic at hand.

Mood is a significant factor for how a guest will experience any space. Their disposition when entering the room will undoubtedly influence their experience within the space. Understanding mood is a necessary component of designing a restaurant space. For the most part, a restaurant space is designed to be a place where people can relax and enjoy food and drinks that satisfy their senses. Desmet’s research suggests that people influence their moods with various activities, that the space itself doesn’t necessarily impact their mood. However, the restaurant is a place that people choose to enter often to enhance their mood. Thus, it constitutes as one of the activities people choose to adjust their mood. Desmet’s paper defines three focal points that people must focus on to change their mood: seek relief, restore balance, and build resilience (3). The restaurant space immediately falls into the first category as a refuge for those feeling down.

Desmet’s paper compiles interesting points into how people tend to approach dealing with mood. However, it doesn’t give many answers and tends toward simply asking more questions and noting multiple times that “additional research [is] required” (Desmet 11-12). Important notes from the author are that most research done that suggests certain colours substantially change moods have been proven wrong (3). Furthermore, the biggest take-away from the article is that design must facilitate the engagement of activity, meaning the space must be designed in accordance with whatever it is trying to achieve (2). Of course the may seem obvious, but if the goal of the restaurant space is to host a wide range of art and music the space must effectively represent that goal in some way. If not, people will not actively engage with their surroundings, leaving their moods unchanged and perhaps ambivalent to the environment around them.

Music becomes a massive factor in affecting the mood and atmosphere a restaurant space creates. Caldwell et al. note that music directly influences consumer behaviour and can lead to very different purchasing actions dependent on its level of arousal (897). This arousal is dependent on the music’s timbre, tempo, and rhythm (897). Their research involved playing various music and different volumes to guests and recording their consumption habits and duration of which they stayed in the restaurant. They then asked the customers to rate the music on a scale of 1-5, 5 being they strongly liked the music and 1 being they strongly disliked the music (905). The conclusions they found were that slower tempo music that the customer liked was correlated to higher spending and more time spent in the restaurant (Caldwell et al. 912). It’s also very dependent on what type of clientele frequent the restaurant and how restaurant managers adjust to their specific needs. The main issue with this article is that the researchers almost attempt to fully discount their own claims in their conclusions. This includes stating that everyone has different preconceived notions as to what is defined as fast and slow music; that the questionnaires answered by the participants are heavily biased; that music taste is extremely subjective across age, gender, and ethnicity (913-914).

The research done by Biswas et al. focuses on music in the retail environment but with a more thorough approach. They note that the current trend in stores and restaurants is favoring louder and louder music (37). With this in mind, their studies were conducted in order to find optimal music levels for retail environments. There were several of these studies executed in various environments, some being lab and others field environments. In each environment, participants were exposed to various levels of ambient music volume and then either asked to pick between certain kinds of food or were in a restaurant/supermarket atmosphere where they could freely choose between various types of food. They all came to the conclusion that music volume was the key difference in how it affects customers (Biswas et al. 50). Changing genres was not as significant. Their results found that louder music leads to unhealthy food choices and quieter music leads to healthier food decisions. Thus, depending on the restaurant’s menu and clientele, managers would be well advised to focus heavily on their music volume in order to influence the consumer’s decisions. They note that restaurants should not be setting their music arbitrarily, it should be very consistent in order to positively influence food sales (Biswas et al. 50). The study falters in a couple ways, one being the small sample sizes for each study. Groups were for the most part split into groups of no more than fifteen which leaves the question open to how larger groups in larger spaces would react to the various volume levels. Even the field studies, one being in a café, had very small amounts of people in them at one time. The researchers also acknowledge that restaurant atmospheres can vary heavily in noise levels and that music can play a different factor in all these environments (Biswas et al. 52).

When it comes to current restaurant designs, there are endless examples of restaurants that seek to create a unique atmosphere for the customer. Some of these restaurants are transforming art pieces in themselves. An example would be New York’s What Happens When restaurant. This space is designed to drastically change every thirty days. Everything from the music, food and art are completely changed so the customer is given a totally new experience each time (Plunkett et al. 184). This is the kind of space artists can thrive in and let their imagination go freely. Other restaurants are seeking to change the way sound operates in the eating space. Cave in Sydney is a restaurant designed with computer-modelling techniques to create a room that minimizes noise levels. The entire restaurant is layered with wooden ribs that interrupt sound waves and give music and light a unique space to work in (Plunkett et al. 134-135). Restaurants like this allow for a different auditory atmosphere but unfortunately make it difficult for art to exist due to the walls being virtually impossible to hang anything off of (135). Of course, this in itself is an interesting challenge for an art commission.

What seems to be key throughout the research presented and the restaurants being built today is the desire to optimize customer experience and create unique atmospheres that work well for themselves. Music choices need to be a certain way in-order to facilitate the customer behaviour needed for a particular restaurant to be successful. Spaces need to be interesting and appealing to the senses. Restaurant designer Joyce Wang creates visually captivating spaces that check all these boxes. She notes that “restaurants grant us the opportunity to create environments that sculpt narratives and allow diners to immerse themselves in the sensorial journey” (Akkam et al. 59). Wang achieves this by designing rooms that burst with colour and décor that attempts to capture th`e spirit of the the food and scintillate the senses equally as much as the cuisine. Other restaurateurs like Julien Albertini and Alina Pimkina seek to create restaurants that are art pieces in themselves. Their Café Cobalto in Mexico City has light fixtures that double as art pieces and their Café Polet in Moscow has brilliant sculptures carved into its walls. Their goal is for their restaurants to “play a role in people’s lives and create long lasting memories” (Akkam et al. 61). Many elements must come together for this to happen, but with great design and intelligent music usage, all that is left is the quality of the food for the success of a restaurant.

Works Cited

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