

Operations | 8 min read

# Getting Your Restaurant Floor Plan Right the First Time



By [Amanda McCorquodale](#), 11 January 2019

We've all experienced a restaurant with a bad layout: finding the restroom is a struggle, customers and servers must lean out of the way to let others pass, and chairs are so close they might as well be bumper cars. As a restaurateur, creating a floor plan is one of your first opportunities to ensure that your operation is enjoyable to both guests and employees.



# Overview

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Think of restaurant floor planning as a sort of choreography, or air traffic control, crucial to orchestrate all the hustle and bustle of customers coming and going while staff deliver and clear endless plates, bowls, silver-, and glassware.

Do guests have a clear path to the restroom? Is that separate from the route servers must take from the kitchen? Does kitchen noise overwhelm nearby tables?

Getting your restaurant's floor plan right the first time means you must consider your available space, your desired capacity, and the type of restaurant experience you want customers to enjoy. The ultimate goal should be to provide a clean, comfortable environment for your customers and a functional place for employees to work.

More importantly, floor plans are required by most local health and building departments before a new restaurant can be opened or an existing one expanded. As long as you're providing the correct agencies with a drawing of the space, use the chance to finetune how the physical layout can help execute your intended menu and tone as well as meet all the legal regulations.

## Restaurant Floor Plan Basics





Before we get into the core elements that should be included in your floor plan, let's look at the **factors that will fuel your layout decisions**:

## Customers and brand

Who is your target customer? And who do you envision frequenting your restaurant? Is your establishment a quick stop after work? If so, you'll want to prioritize a clear path to the counter and ample room to wait for the order. Or is it a place to linger over weekend brunch? Make the seats comfortable.

Is your concept located in a busy urban setting with high turnover? Make sure your mix of tables allows small parties and solo diners. Are you a date night spot? Consider the placement of light fixtures to tables for optimal atmosphere. Set your goals and let them guide decisions that affect aesthetic and ambiance such as décor, lighting, and table set-up.

## Regulations

The laws affecting your restaurant business can change at any time – note the **new regulations on predictive scheduling** in some locations. That's why you will need to familiarize yourself with federal and local building codes



and health department regulations for foodservice operations.

In most places, you will need to submit your floor plan for approval so that appropriate departments can sign off on operational elements such as maximum occupancy, fire hazards, ventilation, food surface types, sink placement, ventilation, restroom regulations, and more.

## Accessibility

In 1992, the Department of Justice passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to ensure that employees and customers with disabilities have the same access to basic services as other people. ADA regulations can affect everything from doors, general layout, countertop and table height, and parking.

**Recommended Reading:** [Americans with Disabilities Act Guide for Small Businesses](#) *U.S. Small Business Administration*

## Financials

Establish a budget for what you can pay to design a proper floor plan – and don't skimp on this step. Floor plans can affect everything from operational efficiency to whether customers return to eat at your restaurant. When laying out your dining room, you'll also need to crunch some numbers to calculate how many Sales per Square Foot or Restaurant Revenue per Seat is ideal to make sure you have enough tables to turn a profit. (Read a rundown of [key performance metrics](#) here.)

## Flow



Central to a good restaurant floor plan is how it directs flow – or foot traffic. Make sure you consider all possible routes: where deliveries come in and how they are taken to storage, how chefs move from storage to food prep, how servers pick up orders and bring them to tables, how servers access POS systems, etc. Keep an eye out for any areas where bottlenecking or crowding could occur.

## Key Restaurant Layout Components



Next, let's review the essential components to tackle while working on your restaurant layout:

### Kitchen

You'll want to start by outlining the kitchen space, which many in the industry think should occupy about 40% of your total square footage. The layout should optimize quality, speed of service, and safety. You'll also want to make sure storage spaces are set up in a way that prevents cross-contamination of food.

Typically, kitchens are organized in one of three layouts: assembly line, island, and zone. The most popular is the assembly line model in which food moves through a series





of parallel stations from prep, cooking, and plating to server pick-up.

Meanwhile, island-style kitchens allow for more movement and supervision between stations and are better suited for large operations. When kitchens have limited space, the zone model is used to allow access to multiple stations.

## Dining Room



There's an industry rule of thumb that says your dining room should take up about 60% of your total square footage. Next, consider your local building code's maximum capacity for the space and compare that to the target number of tables you'll need to meet your bottom line.

In designing the dining room layout, consider how customer and server traffic will flow, particularly at peak times. Consider the sightlines for all the seats in the house. Will your customers have to leave their seats to find their server? Also consider how flexible the layout is (and how nearby tables are affected) if and when you must accommodate a large party.



When placing tables, refer to this handy chart of suggested area per diner that ranges from 12 to 20 square feet depending on whether your operation is fine dining, full service or bistro service. There is also a helpful guide about how much space should be between chairs that are occupied, diagonal or parallel.

Plan to devote some time to figuring out what kind of table size and configuration best serves your target clientele.

**Recommended Reading:** [How to Create a Restaurant Floor Plan](#) *Total Food Service*

## Entrance and Waiting Area

While your kitchen takes up 40% of your square footage, any additional space – waiting, bar, coat rack, restrooms, etc. – should be taken out of the 60% allocated to dining. Your restaurant's entrance and waiting area is the first impression you will make with guests.

Ask yourself: When customers dip in to take a look at the menu, will they stay and dine? If your operation requires a waiting area, consider ample bench seating by the front door or whether you can simply direct customers to the bar while they wait for a table.

## Bar

A full-service bar that is centrally located can function as a visual focal point, an overflow for those waiting to order sit-down service and a place where servers pick up drink orders. Make sure to accommodate room for those standing waiting to order as well as for those socializing nearby. Experts point out that lines – whether at the bar,



outside the restroom or by a buffet – are the tell-tale signs of bad design.

**Recommended Reading:** [Planning Your Restaurant Floor Plan – Step-by-Step Instructions](#) *Fit Small Business*

## Restrooms

The trick with including an ideal space for restrooms is that access should be straightforward and intuitive but the space should feel separate from the space where customers are dining. Some will opt to place the restrooms by the kitchen to make sure of existing water and plumbing lines. Others include a staff-only bathroom that is separate from the one for guests.

Accessibility will come into play here so make sure you adhere to ADA regulations. Also make sure to familiarize yourself with any local and county regulations that dictate how many specific locations and gender designations are required in your restaurant's restrooms. In some cases, small operations (i.e. those with less than two dozen seats) may not be required to have a restroom for customers.

In addition to the five key areas – kitchen, dining, entrance, bar, and restrooms – your restaurant floor plan should include other features such as walls and hallways, closets and storage space, windows and doors, set fixtures and appliances.

## Resources and Best Practices







If your restaurant will be located in an existing building with its own unique set of complications, make sure to hire an architect who can address the total picture over an interior designer who will only focus on your specific space.

To find the right professional for the job, ask fellow restaurateurs in the area for references but don't stop there. Make sure you ask them about their experience using the designer or architect, how they approached challenges in the process, how long the process took, and whether they would use them again.

Once you have a couple positive references, take the time to visit the actual restaurants to walk through their layouts. Next interview the potential architects and designers, and don't forget to ask to see a portfolio of work.

## **Restaurant design software**

Or maybe you're the hands-on type and feeling ambitious? Some restaurateurs feel confident using restaurant floor planning software such as SmartDraw, RoomSketcher, ConceptDraw, or CadPro to create a floor plan themselves. With restaurant design software you can



choose from existing designs or start your floor plan from scratch after viewing gallery layouts for inspiration.

In most applications, you enter your structure's dimensions and then drag and drop features such as tables, half walls, and fixtures. Going DIY with floor-planning software will give you the freedom to continually tweak and modify the floor plan throughout the process.

**Recommended Reading:** [Top 6 Restaurant Floor Plan Creators](#) *Eat Restaurant Blog*

## Best Practices

In addition to basing your floor plan on a 40/60 split between kitchen and dining, industry experts also suggest taking the time to view the floor plan through the eyes (and tasks) of everyone in your restaurant. Ask yourself:

- What is the approach to the kitchen like for the delivery driver?
- Will your chef be able to see servers approaching for pick up?
- Will servers have an easy view of all their tables and customers?
- Do bussers have ample routes and room to service tables?

Before your grand opening, take the time to sit in each seat to identify floor plan challenges such as gusts from open doors, bathroom sounds and odors, and lack of elbow room and cramped seating. Also consider the perspective of the host or hostess, who must find the



table floor plan easy to navigate in order to seat guests and accommodate a range of party sizes.

Most operations now use a digital floor plan tied to the operation's Point of Sale system. Despite the time you spent creating the best floor plan, issues will arise as customers and staff use the space so make sure you have a plan to making appropriate changes.

And finally, while it is essential to get your restaurant's floor plan right from the get-go, even the best layout will only get your business so far. You must also hire the right staff, offer adequate training—and schedule crews appropriately to unleash your expertly crafted floor plan's maximum potential.

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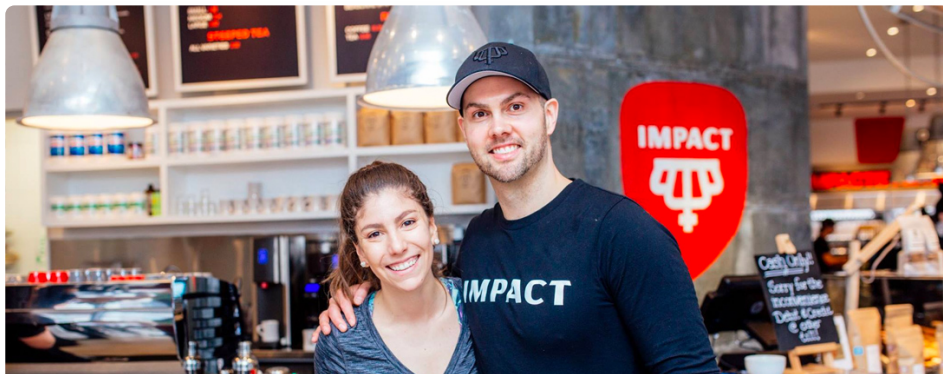
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