

Restaurant from page 1G

Architecture to a restaurant can be compared with spices to food. It definitely adds to the flavor, but exactly how much is open to individual interpretation.

"A restaurant is like a three-legged stool," said Tom Wilcam, owner of a Sizzler franchise that recently opened in Westland. "You have food, atmosphere and service. All three are equally important."

"It's difficult to say," said Gary Wright, design project manager for General Mills Restaurant Inc. "If you consider Walt Disney World and the different restaurant designs there, can you say whether architecture brought people in — the atmosphere created — or were they hungry, a captive audience and they had to eat?"

"You don't know if it's the food, atmosphere, service to people or location," Wright added. "I think it (architecture) plays a substantial part. For any nationwide restaurant, initial perception is recognition of the building."

Architecture may not be important at the high-end of haute cuisine or the low-end, mom-and-pop shops where people go strictly for food, said Ron Ren, a designer and partner with Peterhans in Birmingham.

But it does become a factor in the highly competitive middle ground.

"You're trying to give them a dollar value — good food, reasonably priced, in a good atmosphere," Ren said.

"Visuals of the exterior and interior will excite them. They will go in for the way it (building) looks. Then it's up to the operator to make sure they're served well, the food is good."

"I never tell my clients design will make their business. It will assist them have better business," Ren said.

General Mills owns and operates Olive Garden and Red Lobster restaurants. An Olive Garden recently opened in Novi. Another is under construction in Canton.

"Our buildings have a certain number of square feet, the number of seats is constant and so is the kitchen," Wright said. "The exterior is customized according to the community you go in."

"We can take a base footprint and change the appearance of the footprint and the skin to make it look like many different types of buildings."

Clay tiles can give a Mediterranean appearance, vertical parapets and glazed tiles convey a more modern look and different kinds of bricks and awnings treatments present other images, Wright said.

Many municipalities require certain kinds of appearances as far as brick work, roofing colors and lighting fixtures for conformity within a business district.

Structural changes will shift according to local building codes and unusual local conditions. Earthquakes are a concern in southern California. Snow piles up on roofs in the Midwest.

Wilcam's Sizzler has a high ceiling, pastel colors and extensive use of glass.

"Must restaurant buildings here, in my opinion, are kind of dreary," he said. "They're made of brick. They're dark. The big thing about Sizzler is an openness feeling. Glass in front is designed to make people feel good, just like background music."

"Philosophically, I think people eat out to have needs served. It's an escape. When I go out, I want to relax. It's just not to feed my stomach. I can go home and cook my favorite foods," he said.

Wilcam said he requested the company's newest prototype when selecting a design for his Westland restaurant.

"Architecture is an important function," Wright said. "It gives people the first impression they see and know of the restaurant. As they go through

the door, different elements start to plug in. The interior. They start interacting with personnel, the hostess, waiters. The quality of food.

"You start with the building on an overall impression of restaurants. The first impression is the most lasting or at least sets the tone."

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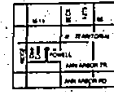
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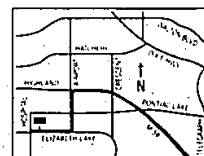
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