

## COOKING UP SUCCESSFUL DESIGN SOLUTIONS

Design consultants to the hospitality industry can provide design solutions on a variety of scales. From something as simple as selecting the correct style and location of a guest room robe hook, to the complex design solutions found within a major hotel building program, all successful design solutions follow the same recipe. Within the recipe are found varying degrees of the same basic ingredients: vision, creativity and expertise.

A successful design solution starts with a vision. There is a significant difference between a stated goal and a vision. The vision contains the bigger picture. The vision looks at issues from a different perspective and acts as the culmination of an idea. For example: putting a robe hook on the door in each guest bathroom constitutes a goal. A vision in this regard might be expressed as providing the guest an opportunity to place their garments in an easily accessible location within the bathroom. More opportunities for successful design are created if one starts with a vision.

The second ingredient in our recipe is creativity. Creativity provides the differentiating aspect to the design solution. Providing your guests a hospitality experience that sets your property apart, from the competition, is a key factor in the success of a design solution. Going back to our robe hook example; is the guest reaction "its just a robe hook", or is it "hey, I'd like to bring this idea home?" Creative solutions provide the guest with a thought provoking memory of their experience. It is these impressions that build guest loyalty and keep them returning.

The final ingredient, expertise, is that portion of the recipe where knowledge plays a key factor. In conjunction with the owner and operator, the expert helps to create and define the vision. With a fresh perspective, the expert provides the options necessary for informed decision making. In alignment with a solid vision, these options become a valuable road map of knowledge, leading the design solution toward the vision. Without solid knowledge and guidance, the design solution is less likely to achieve the desired results.

The relationship between each ingredient is also a key factor in the success of a design solution. Establishing these relationships, in the correct proportions, ensures a proper execution of the recipe. The relationship between vision and expertise has been made clear. The relationship between expertise and creativity is not as well defined. Creativity is a thought process that relies upon viewing things in a different way. In order to establish what constitutes a 'different way of viewing things', there has to be a certain knowledge base already established. Thus, in order for creativity to shine through, a certain amount of expertise is required. Creativity also has a uniquely defined relationship with the vision. It is through the creative process that the vision is given an identity.

Once weighed and measured, the ingredients are combined, with a pinch of functionality and efficiency and then sifted through a sieve of economics. The mixture rises in a mixing bowl of reality. Is the design solution affordable? Does it make sense? Is it worth doing in the first place? What value does the solution bring to the owner, operator and guest? The answers to these questions determine how the design solution is cooked.

Whether the solution is baked, broiled, fried or grilled depends upon the criteria for success established in the beginning.

What constitutes the definition of a successful design solution? Only the owner, operator and guest can truly answer that question. However, I would offer that the underlying notions of value, as well as the attainment of the vision, are always present when speaking of success. In order for the ingredients of vision, creativity and expertise to be mixed in their proper proportions, success needs to be defined early. Then and only then, are we able to measure the success of the design solution.

Eric B. Hansen ([e.hansen@colerussell.com](mailto:e.hansen@colerussell.com)), a member of the International Society of Hospitality Consultants ([ishc.com](http://ishc.com)), is a principal at Cole + Russell Architects, Inc., of Cincinnati, Ohio.