

AUGUST 2021

Foodservice

equipment & supplies.

Ghost Kitchens

Page 20

Next Gen Healthcare

Page 48

Culinary Center Feng Shui

Page 77

in the past from an automated machine,” says Geier, who is impressed with the machine’s capabilities and that it requires only a small footprint behind the bar.

In Washington, D.C., Dwight has just finished work on a bar that has an ice machine that makes 600-pound blocks of ice. Staff load an individual block of ice onto a cart and wheel it into the bar area, where it sits on the backbar, beautifully illuminated. “Over the course of the evening, the bartender will hack off a chunk of ice for certain drinks with that block of ice slowly melting,” says Dwight. “You’re seeing things happening, which is a fun and important aspect of bars.”

And that entertainment quality isn’t limited to ice. “The cocktail experience, at least in what we try to do, has really evolved to an experience and not just going out to get a drink,” says Leage, who likens the often-intricate drink-making process to “a performance in your lap.”

At Polite Provisions, vintage-style lamps on the bar top do double duty, providing additional illumination for the bartenders when lights are turned down as well as functioning as spotlights of sorts. “It looks like it’s a stage, and our hands are the actors,” says Castro. “It creates a spotlight and shows what we are doing and what we do differently from other bars.”

To tap into the entertainment potential at Andros, Geier designed an open space, which includes a large open kitchen with the bar in the center of the room. “The kitchen and the expo have been worked into the bar area, so it’s really the hub of activity,” says Geier, adding that the layout provides great views for everyone, including the guests, chefs and bartenders. “It’s lively, and that’s a good thing.”

But even if you have a solid idea of what your bar will be and the equipment and design it requires, nothing is set in stone. “You have to also build in a level of adjustability and flexibility,” says Leage. For example, if you thought you were only going to be making two-ingredient cocktails and now everyone wants shaken drinks with egg whites, you have to be able to adapt in service to accommodate that.

Pivoting is something Samantha Sanchez, director/manager of operations of the recently opened Tree House, knows well. Formerly Old Crow Smokehouse, the Chicago family-owned and-operated restaurant and bar was in need of a makeover. Distressed wood and rows of whiskey barrels gave way to a nature-inspired space, hence the name, with bright colors, exposed concrete and lush greenery.

That changeover applied to the bar areas as well. At

the main bar, the emphasis was on visual impact with LED ceiling lights as well as eight refrigerators with glass doors and well-lit interiors. “It’s great exposure when people see all the fresh ingredients and juices,” says Sanchez, who designed Tree House. “I always felt that when people see how a cocktail is made and all the prep that goes into that, that ties into the whole experience.” The smaller back takes a more artsy approach with liquor bottles displayed on shelves between birch tree-inspired installations, which work to create the feeling of a second venue with a slightly different vibe.

But these days, no matter the design, efficiency of service is more important than ever. “As bars are ramping up to catch up on bills and rebound, it’s ever important that every labor dollar counts and that you’re having minimum waste of product and selling as much as you can without compromising what you do,” says Castro. “Anything you can do to feed the register while putting a smile on someone’s face is paramount.” **FE&S**



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