

Day to Night

Flexible Furnishings and a Little Pizzazz Can Help a Venue Make a Grand Transition

By Emily Hanna Mayock

With the economy still struggling to make a turnaround, operators are looking everywhere for ways to earn more money — and for some, this could mean servicing more dayparts. Although longer operating hours equal more labor and energy costs, the additional hours also can bring in loads of revenue if done correctly.

When predicting the top 2010 design trends for *Nightclub & Bar*, Michael Werner, vice president and director of operations for St. Louis, Mo.-based Leap Hospitality, named transitional design — in which a venue changes its setup to be conducive to whatever daypart it's servicing — as one of his five trends to watch. "Smart



Seating options that can transform a space into VIP areas, like at New Orleans' Generations Hall, expand revenue opportunities.

transitional design allows operators and concepts more flexibility with floor plans, light, sound, service issues and security, all of which create opportunities to enhance the guest experience," he says.

"One of the biggest fixed expenses a nightclub owner has is rent, so they want to start utilizing space more in the daytime," explains Boris Zhuravel, director of business development for Modern Line Furniture. He says transitional design became popular in the early to mid 2000s, but he expects it to be even more prevalent this year. "We're certainly seeing the trend of people saying, 'I want to offer meals and then have furniture that can turn into a club setting; make it a restaurant by day and move it out at night for the dance floor.'"

Finding a transitional design that works for your space can be tricky, but some clubs have seen great success with it over the years, such as Chicago's Nacional 27, owned by Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises. The venue was designed 11 years ago with the intention of serving both dayparts; the modern Latin restaurant transforms into a salsa dance club on Friday and Saturday nights. "It wasn't something we tried to force into the space," says general manager Adam Seger. For Nacional 27, all it took to make the concept work was a dance floor, some flashy tricks and a lot of practice.

The venue features a round bamboo dance floor in the middle, which is covered with tables during dinner hours. At precisely 11 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, a designated song begins, signaling the beginning of the transition from a dining establishment to a nighttime salsa club. A

fog machine starts up and the restaurant lights shut down, leaving only a spotlight on the dance floor and lights on the backbar. The dance floor tables are cleared, and as the other diners in the restaurant finish their meals by votive candlelight, 12 employees donning black outfits quickly and easily clear the dance floor — the light, easy-to-move tables and chairs are lifted and stowed away before the fog clears. At that time, the lighting switches to "club level," which is dimmer than the dining setting, Seger explains, and the mood is set for dancing. "It's a bit Cirque de Soleil," he says. "For people who haven't been here before, it's definitely a pretty incredible thing to see and it's funny because when we have regulars come in with guests in from out of town, they talk about it — even on [weeknights] when it's not happening."

By now, the transition at Nacional 27 is an entertaining show for guests, but it hasn't always been such a well-oiled machine. "We didn't always do it this dramatically; it's something that we've focused on in the past couple of years and it's helped quite a bit," Seger says. And, after years of tests and tweaking, therein lies his number one suggestion to operators looking to transition their dining establishment into a nightclub: Make it dramatic. Before, Nacional 27's transition was subtle; chairs and tables were moved off as diners finished their meals. "It was more of a gradual transition, and it was like 'Oh, they're stacking up chairs.' It was kind of a negative because the guests were having dinner, and it just looked like we were interrupting their meal and setting up



(Top) “The concept is both decadent and non-traditional,” explains GM Edme Straver of Supperclub in San Francisco. “We like to surprise our guests as well as encourage them to relax, and the beds achieve this.”

(Left) Nacional 27 in Chicago is a Latin restaurant in the evening, but the bamboo dance floor is cleared at 11 p.m. to make way for a salsa club.

Tips for Transitioning

Transforming your venue from daytime to nighttime can be challenging, but here are a few tips for making it work:

- Choose furniture that is versatile, easy to move and maximizes your space.
- Don't make your guests feel rushed or displaced during the transition; find ways to make it part of the entertainment factor.
- Don't try a design that's too far from what your venue can handle; stay true to your concept and space constraints.
- Utilize furnishings, lighting and music to change the mood.



for a party.” Today, the transition is something of an event at the venue, signaling diners to stick around for some dancing.

Meanwhile, on the West Coast, San Francisco’s Supperclub — part of an international hospitality and entertainment company with Supperclub outposts in Amsterdam, Istanbul, Singapore and London, with another set to open this year in Los Angeles — takes a different approach to restaurant furniture by serving patrons full meals on pillow-adorned lounging beds with small tables. The evening starts at 7 p.m. with cocktails, and the three- or four-course prix fixe meals are served starting at 8 p.m.; by the time dessert is served, the music and lighting have

become energetic, tables on the dance floor have been removed or transformed into go-go tables, and the guests are ready to begin their evening. This is also when non-dining patrons are let into the main area from the bar.

“This furniture is ideally suited for the after-dinner party,” says general manager Edme Straver. “Dinner guests are guaranteed their beds for the duration of the evening, but the bed design invites socializing and we see that many of dinner guests share their beds with newly arrived nightclub guests.”

Offering beds for seating is not only an homage to the original Amsterdam Supperclub in which artists brought old mattresses to a warehouse to watch their colleagues perform; it also serves as a way

become energetic, tables on the dance floor have been removed for an entertainment venue like Supperclub to give guests an ideal view of the performances of dancers, singers, interactive videos and even contortionists. “With all of the beds facing toward the center of the room, the guests focus their attention to the performers,” Straver explains. Plus, he says, the setup makes the guests more interactive.

Not to worry, though — transitional design doesn’t have to mean unusual furniture selections or dramatic shows. Modular furniture allows operators to configure their own setups with as many or as few pieces as desired. For example, if there was a dining setup of four chairs, three pieces put together could make a couch, and one piece by itself would be an armless chair, suggests Modern Line’s Zhuravel.

“The benefit is that you can take a number of pieces

and create perimeter seating around your nightclub, but also, say you have five or six VIP parties and each one wants their own private nook area,” he says. “You can take these same pieces, take it apart and create five little VIP nooks.

“The biggest thing,” Zhuravel continues, “is now people want to get the most out of what they have, whereas before people were just content to put a couch in a corner and leave it there. That’s not the case anymore. Nightclub owners are really looking for additional value, they’re looking for versatility, and I think that’s driven by the desire for additional revenues.”

With a combination of the right furniture, the perfect amount of drama and maybe even a quirky setup, a savvy operator can redefine his or her venue into one that’s popular both day and night. **NCB**