



How Does Your Concept Stack Up?

A Smallwares Primer for Startup Operators

By Howard Riell

Choosing the look, feel, size, shape and price of small wares is a crucial decision that must be given careful consideration. And there is plenty to consider.

Don't 'Cheap Out'

“A restaurant has to be disciplined when determining the tabletop items to select for service,” insists **Arlene Spiegel**, FCSI, president of restaurant consultancy **Arlene Spiegel & Associates** in New York City.

“First, the chef needs to consider the menu and how he/she wants to present each dish. Second, the plates, dishes, glassware, cups and specialty ware need to be in sync with the brand – not too fancy or precious if the restaurant is casual, and not too rustic or industrial if the restaurant is positioned as fine dining.”

Other key factors to consider, **Spiegel** continues, include the space needed to house at least three times the number of sets for almost every dish. “One set in service; one set being washed; and one set in back-up inventory.” The quantity of items needed in inventory will also have to do with replacement turnaround time. If the dishes are custom-produced by an artisan potter or shipped from overseas, the time factor becomes important.

Price Shopping

Price is, and always will be, a fundamental

consideration. To achieve economies, the chef should try to use the fewest types of dishes for the most menu applications. Says **Spiegel**: “To differentiate plate presentations, I recommend fresh garnishes rather than separate dishes for each item. Since most dishes are sold by the case, distributors and manufacturers will usually offer a discount on high-volume purchases of any one type of dish.”

Your threshold for suffering will be a good indicator of “too expensive”. “It’s when the owner/operator feels pain when the dish or glass is broken,” **Spiegel** adds. “Too-expensive dishes and glassware can give the wrong impression about the positioning of the menu prices.” Guests sitting down to a Wedgewood China setting, for instance, “are going to feel they are in an expensive special occasion restaurant. This could lower frequency of visits.”

Do Your Homework

As **Spiegel** advises restaurateurs, “Do your homework. Order catalogues. Go to industry shows. Visit manufacturers’ showrooms. Make friends with a distributor that will guide and inform you of new items coming to market. Go to consumer retail stores like Crate and Barrel, Sur La Table, Williams Sonoma, and see if they enhance your presentation skills.” **RS&G**