

Optimizing the patron's experience in restaurants and bars

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Cincinnati's Banks, Central Business District, Over-the-Rhine, Gateway, Hyde Park, and Northside areas, as well as downtown Newport and Covington, KY, have experienced a boom in new restaurants. Many of these businesses have earned notoriety for great food and music. A capacity crowd patronizes most of these establishments, even on weekday evenings.

While the quality of food and beverage service remains the patrons' most important selection factor for every restaurant, the ambience – or atmosphere – of the place continues to hold the number two position of importance. Let's review the dictionary definition of **"AMBIENCE" or "ATMOSPHERE"**:

1. the aesthetic quality, mood, or effect, especially a distinctive and pleasing one, associated with a particular place
The predominant interior décor of most new restaurants and bars is 19th century, featuring lots of exposed brick, hardwood, and glass, giving proper respect to a building's original character. Granted, most patrons tend to find the visual aesthetics to be pleasing.

Regretfully, the standard décor by its nature fosters and perpetuates noise. There is no other word to describe the sound. When there are dozens or hundreds of patrons conversing, the decibel level inside the establishment can go sky high. The multitude of conversations bounce around the room in random patterns, rendering them all unintelligible. Many owners and managers of these popular social businesses will tell you that their patrons like the noise, claiming that it fosters privacy, and besides, it gives the place a feeling of raw energy. They say "the higher the noise level, the more alcohol we sell!"

I personally would not go so far as to describe the typical bar / restaurant NOISE as a desirable and useful effect. Here is the dictionary definition of **"NOISE"**:

- 1. loud, confused, or senseless shouting or outcry**
- 2. a sound that lacks agreeable musical quality or is noticeably unpleasant**
- 3. any sound that interferes with one's ability to hear something of interest**



Patron Survey: Poor Sound Quality / Noise Reduces Patrons' Overall Rating of Restaurant

Noise is the second most common complaint made by restaurant goers.* Excessive noise levels cause the typical patron to downgrade their overall "satisfaction" rating for a facility. Ranking just behind service, sound quality / noise level is what customers use to determine if they'll be back or whether they will recommend a restaurant to their friends. **A patron unhappy about the noise level at their table will likely leave quietly without lodging a complaint with management – simply because it is too difficult to converse!**

*Zagat.com survey, The Audiology Awareness Campaign

As a restaurant patron, I believe I have typical expectations concerning noise in a food or beverage service area. When I go out to eat with friends, I would like to be able to converse with them and hear what they are saying. I want my food and drink servers to understand what I am saying when I place my order. I don't want to shout, or be exposed to high noise levels. Friends that I dine with share this opinion. My friends and I are not alone in our thinking. No one likes excessive noise, Check out this Google search link: [RESTAURANTS TOO NOISY IN CINCINNATI](#).

One might assume that the high noise levels are the natural consequence of sharing the space with hundreds of other people. This is not the primary reason for the excessive decibel levels, however. In each case, the high noise levels are the direct result of inadequate attention to acoustics. During the facility's interior renovation design, attention was given to creating visual appeal, but hardly anything was done to control the unseen noise.

For, most owners feel that they must choose between either catering to those who find the noise levels to be excessive, or catering to those who like the high noise levels. This is not true. To be most successful, the venue's ambience or atmosphere should appeal to all patrons on all levels. Patrons prefer to enjoy revelry at a tolerable decibel level.

The architect, owner, or developer should up the ante, and address acoustic and noise problems, ideally during the facility design stage, or if necessary, after the facility is already open. It is possible to install acoustic materials compatible with the design motif that can be "hidden in plain sight" to filter out the undesirable NOISE in the room, improve clarity of conversations with friends and service staff, and increase patron comfort. These interior design changes will improve the ambience or atmosphere of the place, and result in a higher rate of repeat patronage.

If you have a personal opinion regarding this subject, regardless of whether you design, own, or patronize establishments in Cincinnati or any other city, I would like to hear from you. If you currently own or are about to design or build a restaurant or bar, I invite you to contact me concerning acoustical / noise control design services available from my company. [We can work with your staff and / or project design team to control noise](#) while maintaining the aesthetics you desire.

CONTACT ME:

Send an email to me – Richard Lemker - at RJLemker@SpectraTechLtd.com or call me during normal business hours at (513) 419-9169. Visit our company website at [Spectra Tech Ltd](#).

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