

Guests, Not Pests

Drew McFadden

Design your restaurant to attract only the guests you want

If you've only considered your human guests in the blueprints for your new or remodeled restaurant, you haven't adequately tackled all the important design issues at hand. This is your chance to build preventive measures into your facility—measures that could save you an enormous amount of time and money in the area of rodent control.

Design for Prevention

You want your restaurant to present the ideal space for guests. At the same time, you need the space to be perfectly unsuitable for unwanted guests: mice and rats.

Making an environment unsuitable for pests is, of course, a function of regular day-to-day health and safety activities at restaurants. Proper food storage, vigilant sanitization, general maintenance and upkeep are all a necessary part of a successful pest prevention program. But with the design of a new or the remodel of an existing location, you have the opportunity to build certain elements into your structure that can further discourage and prevent the infiltration of unwanted pests. Just like in medicine, prevention is the key to a healthy environment.

Some Ideas To Consider:

- Focus on the refuse area. Paying attention to how garbage and recycling are handled is always key, but focusing here during the design stage can really make an impact. Talk with your contractor or architect about how and where you'll store and contain the trash via rodent-resistant trash bins, and how to make refuse-area sanitation easier overall for ongoing pest control.
- Choose the best sealing and weatherization techniques. The modern approach to environmentally sound construction involves sealing your structure for resistance to heat loss and/or other energy-conserving goals. This approach goes hand-in-hand with keeping out pests too. But talk with your contractor to ensure that such techniques are actually on the agenda. In both a new build and a remodel, don't assume anything.
- Pay special attention to pipes. Gaps around plumbing and HVAC pipes and fittings are very common entry points for rodents. Double check these points during construction (and keep doing so at least once a year). If you find a gap or hole the width of a pencil or larger, fill it with proven pest-exclusion material. Rule of thumb: If a pen or pencil can fit through the hole, so can a mouse.
- Consider gaps in ceilings. Architects often design "acoustical gaps" in ceilings, but unfortunately, these gaps serve as ideal habitats for rodents and cockroaches. During a new build or remodel, talk with your architect about designing a ceiling that keeps pests out.

- Carefully consider outdoor landscaping choices. Ensure landscaping choices don't invite pests to your establishment. Vines planted to grow up the side of a building can be beautiful, but they are literal ladders for both mice and rats, giving them easy access to your walls and roof. And bushes, shrubs or other landscaping planted close to the building foundation provide both concealment and protection for rodents, not to mention great places to build nests.
- Plan for times when exterior doors are open. All the pest proofing in the world is useless if exterior doors are simply left open. Plan ahead so this doesn't occur. For example, install hose ports so carpet cleaners won't have to prop doors open. And consider self-closing doors in areas where deliveries are received (and don't ever allow doors to be propped open for any period of time).
- Reconsider "living walls" and other indoor landscaping. Green living walls are popular now, especially in some hotel-based restaurants and other places that thrive on making their guests feel "transported" to a luxurious environment. However, the effect of these walls on pest infestations isn't yet well known. Until architects and pest control experts get together and study the situation more closely, consider other ways to create a unique space for your patrons.
- Take door sweeps seriously. Despite all your pest-proofing design efforts, rodents may simply walk under the door. Even a tiny gap can lead to a big problem. (Remember, mice can squeeze through a hole the width of a pencil!) Resist the urge to allow inexpensive, flimsy door sweeps to be installed. You're very likely to pay in the end when a rat or mouse easily eats right through what you thought would be a barrier to entry.
- Use exclusion products proven to work. When it comes to pest-exclusion products, the keyword is proven. Pest proofing won't do much good if you use the wrong products or techniques. For example, using spray foam to seal cracks and gaps is still a common technique for keeping rodents out of buildings, but it's completely ineffective because rodents will eat right through the foam. (Rats have been known to gnaw through concrete, so canned spray foam is nothing to them). Another outdated technique is wedging steel wool between cracks or in holes to create a permanent barrier against rodents. This tactic will work for a period of time, but steel wool will eventually rust and break down. That not only leaves it useless as a barrier, but it may also damage your pipes or walls over time. Bottom line: Do your research.

Whether you're working on a new build or remodel, take the opportunity to plan for pest prevention in your design work. Work with your contractor and pest professional, and do your own research. Doing so can make all the difference to you, your staff and, most importantly, your guests.

Drew McFadden is Director of Brand and Marketing at Xcluder Pest Exclusion Products.