

Carpet selection for restaurants

By Doug Berjer

February 2, 2011



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With business picking up, some restaurant owners are starting to feel more confident about the future. That means updating the restaurant - at the very least, replacing its aging carpet - is now at the top of their list.

Owners will need to know which decision to make first: what type of carpet to select, what colour it should be, or whether it should match the current carpet or be a completely different colour and pattern to give the room an entirely updated look and feel.

The answer, at least at this time, is none of these. What is termed the “face” of the carpet is not the first thing restaurant owners and managers should be concerned about when selecting a new carpet. Instead, it is the back of the carpet that should be their primary focus.

Many popular carpets today are broadloom carpets. This means simply that the carpet is woven using a wide loom, and the benefit of this is that it minimizes the seams on the carpet. If properly installed, a broadloom carpet will look essentially seamless. However, many broadloom carpets have a porous backing, and this can be a problem when installed in a restaurant.

Spills, food particulates, grease, oil, walked-in soiling, and other contaminants can seep through the carpet fibers and then again through the backing of the carpet. When this happens, reservoirs of contaminants can build up under the carpet and can grow into bacteria, mould, mildew, or fungi. Because it will likely be hidden from view, as carpet is designed to act like a sponge and hold and hide soils, often the first indication a problem exists is when an unpleasant odour begins to fill the dining room.



This problem can be avoided by selecting a carpet with a structured backing. Structured backings are typically made of nylon or other synthetic materials and provide a moisture-impenetrable backing. Spills and debris cannot filter through the backing, and therefore contaminants don't have the chance to grow and develop.

Once the proper backing has been selected, the face of the carpet can be given greater consideration. What is always recommended in a restaurant facility is to select a dark-coloured carpet if at all possible. Although most carpeting does hide soiling, this is not necessarily true of stains, which are often more permanent or at least harder to remove. A darker carpet will help make stains less noticeable.



Maintenance is key

Once a carpet is selected, maintenance becomes the primary concern. In most cases a commercial carpet may last just over seven years. Given the costs and disruption required to replace the carpet maintenance is key.

First and foremost is daily vacuuming with a high-performance vacuum cleaner. The Carpet and Rug Institute honours the most high-performing vacuum cleaners with a Seal of Approval. These more advanced machines are more effective at soil removal as well as protection of the carpet fibers and indoor air quality, and they should be selected over a more conventional vacuum cleaner.

The way the carpet is cleaned is also crucial. Some managers use interim carpet cleaning systems such as shampooing and bonnet cleaning or "dry" carpet cleaning methods. Instead, restaurant owners and managers are far better off having their carpets cleaned using the extraction method. With this method, water and detergent are sprayed into the carpet pile under pressure. Then the water, detergent, and loosened soil are removed with the extractor's powerful vacuum.

So, when it's time to re-carpet your restaurant, remember to check the back of the carpet first. The face - color, pattern, and pile - is secondary. And to enhance carpet performance and longevity, nothing is more crucial than regular vacuuming and proper carpet extraction.



About the author:

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