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WORKPLACE HOSPITALITY



Innovation Does Not Have to Mean New

By Ivan Weiss of elite | studio e



The majority of our meetings with clients surrounding new projects begin with “we want this to be a really innovative space.” What does that mean? How does that translate into a dining environment? Are we discussing the finishes, the flow, the equipment, the food offer itself? Or even how the ideas we create are presented and shared with the team.

The truth is that innovation is a subjective thing. How many of you thought Siri was really innovative when your first iPhone had it? How many of you now find it annoying when it asks to help you in the middle of a meeting because it misunderstands much of what you say? Funny how it no longer seems innovative to us. That's truly why innovation does not have to be synonymous with new. New only lasts so long.

We place a large focus on innovation. Two years ago, elite | studio e introduced Virtual Reality experiences as a fantastic way to visualize a space before it is built. Today, we are starting to explore new technologies far beyond VR. However, we do not believe that new technology is the only way to go.

One of our favorite presentations completed in recent years was not in a board room. We had a large group, decision by committee to say the least! Rather than being stuffed in a conference room, our team created digital and poster displays in their existing café after hours. Each station had collages of imagery, including renderings

and similar projects, expressing how the station would be modified. In spaces where there was not an existing station, we placed a digital display with a panoramic view of the new area. The operator prepared menu samplings at each concept so you could see and taste the results. In the end, we went on a guided tour through the café. Each stop developed more dialogue around the experience. This was far from new technology, but is probably the most engaging design presentation we have created.

From an interior design perspective, we often play with finishes in ways they are not intended to be used. Ever think of placing very long planked floor tile on a wall? You can create interesting patterns not traditionally available. Look at everything that is being done with reclaimed wood and recycled products. There is a popular countertop material made of recycled products including bottle caps. Recently, I dined in a Washington, D.C., restaurant appropriately named Lincoln, where the floor is made of grouted pennies in lieu of tile.

There are many different ways products, presentations and services can be innovative. I would challenge you not necessarily to find what is new, but to use things in a different way. That is truly innovation!

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