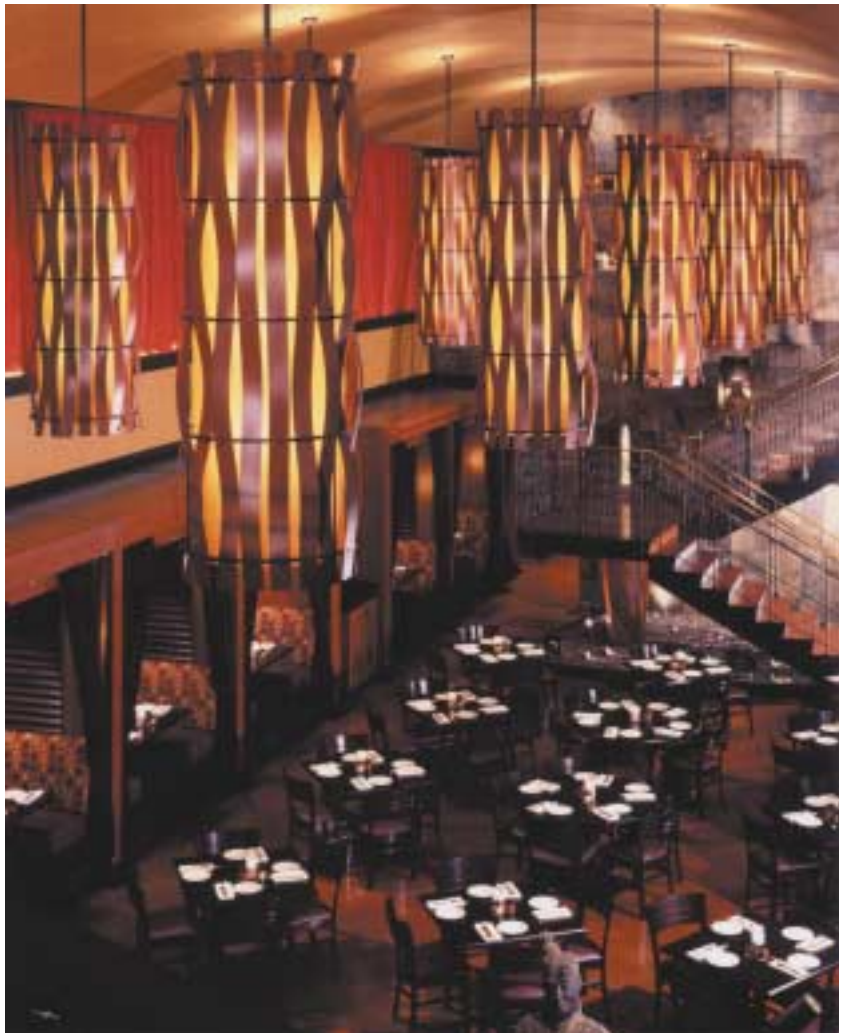


## Constant, documented communication is the key to architect-client relations

By John R. Proctor  
and Gordon Crespo

A restaurant is like a complex organism complete with a personality. Every component and aspect of a restaurant's design must function fluidly as integral parts of the whole. The character and atmosphere that the patron experiences at the "front of house" is contingent on the real drama which occurs at the "back of house" where the culinary presentation is created. The success of any restaurant is largely predetermined by the analysis that takes place as the concept is being developed. Even the most stunning, elaborately conceived restaurant will not survive if it is not keyed to the demographics of its location. An understanding of everything from the age, ethnicity, income or even education level of the potential customers to the competition is essential.

The teams of people who design restaurants — architects and various consultants — must create a seamless integration with an effective collaborative relationship with the client. Close coordination between the architect, the client and every member of the project team, and especially the food service consultant and contractor is necessary from the beginning phase through the completion of construction. Poor circulation or inadequate equipment layout compromises the efficient operation of a restaurant that may translate into compromised food quality, service, and the



The architect and restaurant client need to know the environment in which the restaurant will be located. This P.F. Chang's is in The Aladdin hotel and casino in Las Vegas and presented different challenges than other P.F. Chang's locations.

profitability and reputation of the establishment. By maintaining the relationship with the owner and operator of a restaurant after its opening, the architect will gain useful knowledge of the effectiveness or possible disadvantages of their design

strategies as they relate to the functionality and success of the establishment. This knowledge will guide how the architect approaches future restaurant projects.

The restaurant designer is called upon to create the physical



This P.F. Chang's just opened in The River in Rancho Mirage, Calif. Architect and the clients massaged the basic restaurant design to produce a unique result, but one that still is recognizable as a P.F. Chang's.

embodiment of the client's vision or theme, where the atmosphere is an extension of the cuisine or evokes the culture it represents. The degree of creative latitude the designer is permitted depends on the nature of the client and their level of experience as a restaurateur and whether the restaurant is an independent establishment or part of a corporation. Often, larger restaurant corporations have in-house design staff or an established design program where the design process becomes a collaborative effort between the architect and the client.

Based in Alameda, Calif., **MBH Architects** cut its teeth on a number of successful, independently owned "destination" restaurants in San Francisco early in its exis-

tence. The firm enjoyed the kind of creative freedoms any design firm would hope for while gaining both expertise and a solid reputation in the challenging field of restaurant design. Blessed with savvy clients and sophisticated consultants and contractors, the firm's real success boils down to one fundamental strength — communication.

Established in 1993, when the first restaurant opened its doors in Scottsdale, Ariz., **P.F. Chang's China Bistro** is the brainchild of restaurateur **Paul Fleming**, president of **Fleming Restaurants, Inc.** Fleming called upon **Philip Chiang**, the founder of the **Mandarin** restaurant in Beverly Hills to assist in the development of his restaurant concept. The ongoing relationship between P.F. Chang's and MBH began in

1998 with a project in Walnut Creek, Calif.

As P. F. Chang's began the expansion into new markets it was essential to maintain the integrity of its vision, growing not like a typical chain, following a cookie cutter approach, but as a collection of unique restaurants adapted to their different locations and demographics. The firm works in close collaboration with P.F. Chang's director of design and architecture, **Brian Stubstad**, who brings his personal visions as a designer and his extensive knowledge of restaurant design and operation to each project, helping to keep the company on track with its identity and original concept, consistent with the desire that each new restaurant



Building P.F. Chang's restaurants, which are of different designs at each location, requires constant, documented communication among all the parties involved in the project.

will be a unique part of the P.F. Chang's collection.

According to **Gordon Crespo**, architect and director of the restaurant studio at MBH: "Our firm and P.F. Chang's have established a very successful owner/architect relationship. This relationship is based on three things: communication, communication, communication. This communication is maintained in four ways; the Friday Letter, a Master Project Schedule, required weekly calls between the architect and the general contractor, **ITX Construction** of Anaheim, Calif., and weekly conference calls between the client, the client's site development coordinator, (permit expeditor)

and the architect."

The Friday Letter format was created by Chang's Stubstad. This is a list of all active projects assigned to a particular architect, key tasks and those responsible to complete them and abbreviated project schedules. The project architect is responsible for issuing the weekly Friday Letter and keeping it updated. As key tasks are completed they are removed from the letter. Generally, each restaurant location under development can be covered in one or two pages. If it can't, it usually means something's wrong! The letter is established at the beginning of every project to ensure the close interaction of team members from the preliminary

site feasibility studies to project close out. Decisions on site selection, site design, utility requirements, and numerous other issues including a clear description of landlords versus tenants work are all tasks included in the Friday Letter. The bottom line to all of this is simple — maintaining clear, organized and frequent communication between all parties involved.

The Master Project Schedule includes all tasks, milestones and completion dates for all projects. P.F. Chang's is responsible for creating and distributing the Master Project Schedule. The architect is responsible to make sure that all dates in the Friday Letter are coordinated with the Master Project Schedule. Both documents are copied to all other project team members who are expected to read the report and let the architect know if any schedule slippage may need to be incorporated due to unexpected problems on their end.

Keeping this interactive process flowing on a weekly basis has resulted in virtually all projects being completed on time, or at least with delays being identified in time to avoid not meeting turnover dates. A delayed project turnover will always cost the client money, but knowing about this sooner rather than when it happens, can reduce the loss by thousands of dollars.

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