



POST-PANDEMIC DINING:

Escapist interior design as a strategy to rebrand and revive London's restaurant scene.

HA6103 Dissertation
Independent Research Project

**Dining in London: To what extent does Escapist
Interior Design in Restaurants drive customer
attraction in the post-COVID-19 era?**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures	4
Acknowledgments	7
Abstract	8
Introduction	9
Chapter 1: Literature Review	12
1a: Interiors and Branding	12
1b: Post-COVID-19 impacts on London's restaurant industries	15
1c: Escapist design in restaurant interior	17
Chapter 2: Case study	19
2a: The Ivy Asia, St. Paul's	20
2b: Circolo Popolare, Rathbone St	27
2c: Carlotta, Marylebone	33
Chapter 3: The future of restaurant design in the post-pandemic landscape	38
Conclusion	40
Appendix A	42
Appendix A1	42
Appendix A2	43
Appendix A3	43
Appendix A4	43
Appendix A5	44
Appendix A6	44
Appendix A7	45

Appendix A8	46
Appendix B	47
Appendix C	48
Appendix C1	48
Appendix C2	48
Appendix C3	49
Appendix C4	49
Appendix C5	49
Appendix C6	49
Appendix D	50
Appendix E	52
Appendix F	53
Appendix F1	53
Appendix F2	53
Appendix F3	53
Appendix F4	54
Appendix F5	54
Appendix F6	54
Appendix F7	55
Appendix F8	55
Reference Lists	56

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: OpenTable. (n. d). *St. John Restaurant*. Available at: <https://www.opentable.com/st-john> (Accessed 18 December 2024).

Figure 2: The Little Violet Door. (n. d). *The Little Violet Door Restaurant and Bar Soho*. Available at: <https://images.squarespace-cdn.com/content/v1/65e71e5a0fac9d36e06f95e3/93c1095c-0bdd-4a84-8761-dbc65ddabb08/the-little-violet-door-house-party-soho-bar-and-kitchen.jpeg>. (Accessed 20 December 2024).

Figure 3: Poulsen, C. B. (2019). *Alchemist Restaurant in Copenhagen*. Available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2019/10/03/alchemist-restaurant-copenhagen-interiors/>. (Accessed 20 December 2024).

Figure 4: The Ivy Asia. (n. d). *The Ivy Asia St. Paul's Central Dining Room*. Available at: <https://theivyasia.com/restaurants/the-ivy-asia-st-pauls/>. (Accessed 19 December 2024)

Figure 5: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *The Ivy Asia Façade*.

Figure 6: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *The Ivy Asia Foyer*.

Figure 7: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *The Ivy Asia stairs to first floor collage*.

Figure 8: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *The Ivy Asia main dining room, flooring and banquette seating details*.

Figure 9: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *The Ivy Asia Open plan kitchen view from the modular private dining room*.

Figure 10: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *Collage of Design elements in the Ivy Asia – Chair, Wall Tiles and Temple Bar*.

Figure 11: Sabrina, P. (2023). *Screenshot of TikTok User Generated Content (UGC): A stunning restaurant you must visit in central London*. Available at: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS6xp1QhX/>. (Accessed 5 January 2025)

Figure 12: thesdiaries. (2024). *Screenshot of TikTok User Generated Content (UGC): Ivy Asia compilation*. Available at: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS6xpJhUb/>. (Accessed 5 January 2025).

Figure 13: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *Circolo Popolare London, Facade*.

Figure 14: Galland, J. (2017). *Circolo Popolare London, Main Dining Room*. Available at: <https://www.juneinmarch.com/interior-floral-design>. (Accessed 5 January 2025).

Figure 15: Galland, J. (2017). *Circolo Popolare London, Bar*. Available at: <https://www.juneinmarch.com/interior-floral-design>. (Accessed 5 January 2025).

Figure 16: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *Circolo Popolare London, Bespoke booth seating*.

Figure 17: Galland, J. (2019). *Circolo Popolare Terrace dining room*. Available at: <https://www.standard.co.uk/going-out/restaurants/jimi-famurewa-restaurant-review-circolo-popolare-fitzrovia-a4194196.html>. (Accessed 5 January 2025).

Figure 18: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *Circolo Popolare London, Restaurant foyer/entrance*.

Figure 19: Maclean, F. (2024). *Carlotta Marylebone Facade*. Available at: <https://www.london-unattached.com/carlotta-marylebone/>. (Accessed 15 January 2025).

Figure 20: Mawinda, W. Z. (2024). *Carlotta, Foyer and Bar*.

Figure 21: Big Mamma (n. d). *Carlotta Main dining space*. Available at: <https://www.bigmammagroup.com/admin/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Optimized-Carlotta-Ground-Floor-Credit-Jerome-Galland.jpg>. (Accessed 15 January 2025).

Figure 22: Knight, S. (2023). *Carlotta, Banquet seating*. Available at: <https://www.cntraveller.com/article/carlotta-london-restaurant>. (Accessed 15 January 2025).

Figure 23: Knight, S. (2023). *Carlotta, Framed pictures and signage*. Available at: <https://www.cntraveller.com/article/carlotta-london-restaurant>. (Accessed 15 January 2025).

Figure 24: Knight, S. (2023). *Carlotta, Toilet*. Available at: <https://www.cntraveller.com/article/carlotta-london-restaurant>. (Accessed 15 January 2025).

Figure 25: Screenshots of UGC contents of Carlotta's appearance on TikTok. (Accessed 10 January 2025).

Figure 25: Chapman, H. J. (2024). *Screenshots of UGC contents of Carlotta's appearance on TikTok: Vibiest Bathroom in London*. Available at: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS6qbg3sR/>. (Accessed 10 January 2025).

Figure 25: Ivasco, G. (2024). *Screenshots of UGC contents of Carlotta's appearance on TikTok: Pov This is the bathroom of a restaurant in London*. Available at: <https://vt.tiktok.com/ZS6qbpxW/>. (Accessed 10 January 2025).

Figure 26: Squaremeal. (n. d). *Carlotta, Basement floor dining room*. Available at: https://www.squaremeal.co.uk/restaurants/carlotta_24587. (Accessed 17 January 2025).

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic greatly disrupted London's restaurant industry, causing changes to leisure dining habits that have heightened the demand for immersive dining experiences. The study discusses the potential of Escapist interior design through aligning design, branding and consumer engagement, forming a packaged leisure experience to revive the restaurant sector in London. The central discussion involves three London restaurants with Escapist interior design: The Ivy Asia, Circolo Popolare, and Carlotta. Through immersive design elements, it demonstrates how their spatial journey, brand identity, and sensory stimulation evoke an embodied sensed experience, creating an intimate relationship between the consumer and the environment. The results will indicate how Escapist interior as an experiential marketing strategy addresses post-pandemic challenges and financial hurdles offering a packaged leisure experience, showing whether branding is vital and its relevance in contemporary practice to shape future restaurant design and re-engaging audiences in the post-COVID19 landscape.

Key words: Escapist interior, branding, leisure, packaged leisure, Immersive design, London, Restaurant, COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

Restaurant dining has been one of the most popular leisure activities in London. The city offers a variety of experiences, from high-end fine dining to casual dining, accommodating different tastes of consumers. According to Seldon (2023), 'leisure space' refers to environments specifically created to support and enhance these leisure activities, such as dining in restaurants. Interior design is crucial in crafting a restaurant's ambience and engaging visitors through an immersive experience (Nusairat et al., 2020). With London's restaurant industry heavily impacted by COVID-19, the importance of interior design in restaurant branding is highly demanded to tackle post-pandemic issues. Innovative design has become crucial for designers to brand and revitalise leisure dining, attracting customers in an increasingly competitive market.

London is witnessing a shift as the pandemic subsides. According to Panzone et al. (2021), the food service industry saw significant disruptions. The widespread closures greatly impacted reinvestment and long-term operational stability, resulting in revenue losses of up to £25 billion in the UK during lockdowns. Rogers (2023) conducted a survey revealing that London restaurants anticipated a 21% average decline in revenue for 2023. Additionally, the cost-of-living crisis has impacted dining habits. 30% of diners reduced their monthly budgets for eating out. It stated that many restaurants tackle challenges with creative solutions, maintaining success despite the difficulties. Drawing inspiration from the Greek and Roman eras, Ryder (2004) notes that restaurateurs have long used theatrical, themed interiors to captivate audiences. Implementing imaginative design approaches could provide a solution for London restaurants to attract consumers back to restaurant dining.

Guy Julier is a prominent design theorist and researcher known for his contributions to understanding the relationship between design, culture, and society. Julier (2014) discusses the idea of 'Time-Squeeze', which describes insufficient time to complete tasks, driven by the faster pace of life associated with the modern

economy, resulting in businesses to rebrand themselves and attracting visitors. The idea led to the emergence of organised fun in the 20th century. It discusses how brands are creating inclusive designs to ensure consumer satisfaction, bridging the gap between marketing strategies and the physical experience of consuming products or services. Due to the idea of 'post-tourism', which describes high-quality artificial experiences for tourists and prioritising authenticity, designers are focused on creating immersive experiences that engage human senses, developing a unique packaged leisure experience rather than achieving the traditional concept of authenticity.

An immersive experience pushes storytelling by blending simulated and imaginary realities with our physical world. It engages viewers by blurring the lines between fiction and reality, allowing individuals to interact, influence, and feel part of the narrative, making the experience engaging and transformative (Zhang, 2020). Zhang et al. (2017) discuss emotional immersion in storytelling as the process of creating a deep emotional connection between the audience and the narrative. This type of immersion creates an emotional investment, cultivating a more enriching experience.

Due to lockdowns and restrictions on indoor dining, changes such as a rise in food takeout and heightened concerns about health and safety in dining, impacted restaurants and customer behaviours (Steel, 2020). In response, designers have been creating immersive experiences to draw customers back to leisure dining, with Escapist interior design emerging as a key concept post-pandemic (Hitti, 2020). Escapist interior design creates environments that evoke a sense of escape, creativity, and immersion. It aims to offer an escape from everyday life by using thematic elements to transport visitors to different cultures, historical eras, or imaginative realms (Russell, 1997). The concept aligns with the idea that dining out can be an affordable way to travel the world, offering potential strategies for restaurants to entice customers back post-pandemic. These experiences would contribute to the economy's recovery, fulfilling the growing desire for social interaction and the opportunity to embrace the new normal.

The dissertation investigates the connection between restaurant branding and environmental psychology, focusing on how escapist interior design serves as an experiential marketing strategy to revitalise dining in London post-COVID-19. The study includes case analyses of The Ivy Asia and two Big Mamma group restaurants- Carlotta and Circolo Popolare. It examines how these designs cultivate immersive design qualities leaving a lasting impression, boosting brand visibility through social media and their potential as a long-term concept for customer attraction.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1a: INTERIORS AND BRANDING

Nowadays, brands are using experiential design as key advertising strategy especially in London's competitive landscape. Branding and brands leading practitioner - Clifton et al. (2009) defined branding as a trademark for goods and services. However, it has evolved to include a commercial application that forms an impression in people's minds based on the perception that the brand created. This bridges the gap between Interior design and its influence on restaurant customer behaviour. Onem and Harsici (2020) argue that businesses create more meaningful and memorable experiences by integrating their brand identity with the design of their physical spaces. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), experiential design plays an important role in shaping customer behaviour, it acts as a 'stage' in which brands can craft unique, memorable experiences that engage customers on a sensory and emotional level. Interior design helps create a memorable experience to build personal engagement and trust between the brand and customers. The importance goes beyond aesthetics, the brand and designers must prioritise creating interactive and engaging spaces. This enables customers to resonate with the brand identity, whereby the customer expresses themselves through their trust and loyalty to the brand.

Design elements create specific emotional responses, making it crucial for designers to adopt an inclusive approach throughout the design process in restaurant spaces. Wang et al. (2020) studied the relationship between human brain activity and architectural interior design experiences. It suggests that consumer behaviour is affected by interior design as brain regions engaged or suppressed in response to various spatial shapes, imply that these areas are important for aesthetic perception. Therefore, it can impact customer experiences and actions. Pine and Gilmore (1998) discussed that experiential design triggers sensations, feelings, perceptions and behaviours through brand-related stimuli such as shapes, colours, and signage. This collectively forms the brand experience. They introduced a framework to achieve the overall theory by implementing the five ethos: sense, feel, think, act, and relate.

Successful restaurant designs go beyond aesthetics, but space planning and designing using the 'form follows function' theory is crucial. Design studio Fettle stated that, in addition to visual aesthetic importance (Killigrew, 2024), a space must function effectively to allow good service. They emphasised that successful staff circulation ensures service delivery, catering to the customer experience and brand as an overall success rate in restaurant design. Moreover, food plays a big factor in communicating brand identity through interiors. Gundry (2024), founder of Gundry + Ducker – an interior studio highly experienced in London's best-loved restaurant design, stated that food, service, and interiors are three hierarchical elements that communicate brand identity successfully to the client (Appendix A1).



Fig. 1. (OpenTable, n. d) St. John Restaurant.

For example, St. John's restaurant, founded by an architect-turned-chef, offers Michelin-star traditional British cuisine. They focus on quality dining without unnecessary embellishments in its food, décor, or service (Hatchman, 2018). The minimal interiors, featuring stripped white painted walls and ordinary wooden chairs, prioritise food over décor, avoiding distractions. In contrast, Escapist balances three elements to attract a wider audience whilst prioritising functionality and engage emotionally alongside aesthetics.

Moreover, the physical environment influences consumer decisions and their perception of food, especially when the brand controls the space and targets specific consumer groups. Kotler (1973) examines how atmospherics as a marketing strategy, influences consumer behaviour, particularly in retail environments where purchasing

decisions are made. These can be achieved by an attention-creating medium, which comes through the use of colour and shapes in design, acting as a signifier—secondly, a message-creating medium which communicates the brand's unique selling point (USP) or benefits. Lastly, an affect-creating medium that communicates a sense of emotion through tactility of materials (Ertzberger, 2009). Escapist interior design in restaurants highlights sensory and emotional signals to create immersive surroundings, fostering the relationship between environmental psychology and interior design.

1b: POST-COVID-19 IMPACTS ON LONDON'S RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

During the pandemic, restaurants and the UK governments had to come up with solutions to tackle the issues related to the economy and closures in the industry that affected restaurant owners and their operational teams. It is essential to understand changes in the industry in order to align restaurant values with post-pandemic consumer expectations. Filimonau et al. (2022) examines how the pandemic changes food consumption behaviour in English households, discussing the before, during and after impacts. The study shows that most participants ate out at least once a month pre-COVID-19, whereas younger participants ate out several times a week, and few participants reserved only for special occasions. When the pandemic began, restaurant closures and concerns about safety led people to shift toward home cooking, being hesitant to trust the health and safety standards of takeaways.

When the pandemic subsided, the government introduced rules and restrictions in restaurants to uphold a health and safety standards via social distancing and temperature checks. However, there are two types of groups: those who are eager to participate in the 'new normal' and those who are still paranoid. Filimonau et al.'s (2022) survey concluded that they value the importance of health and safety, such as temperature checks, social distancing protocols in table layouts, glass dividers between closed tables, and wearing masks. It was also discussed that most participants prioritised these health protocols over discounts when dining out. These changes highly affected how restaurants like Carlotta, Circolo Popolare, and The Ivy implemented the protocols and possibly make design changes to their floor plans and services to attract people back to restaurant dining promoting its safety.

The UK government introduced the Eat Out To Help Out (EOTHO) scheme in August 2020 to support the restaurant sector by offering up to 50% off food and non-alcoholic drinks from Mondays to Wednesdays. According to research by Papillon et al. (2021) from LSE's Centre for Economic Performance (CEP), the scheme aimed to encourage people back to dining out, which resulted in an increase of 5%-6% in dining

leisure activity during the days when the discounts apply. However, EOTHO was short-term as people did not continue going out when the discounts subsided. Notable brands such as the Big Mamma and Ivy Asia avoided relying on discount programmes, and instead developed innovative interior design and floorplans that supported health protocols, creating a packaged leisure experience.

During the worldwide lockdown, limited outdoor activities and reduced social interactions increased reliance on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram for communication and information sharing. Jung et al. (2021) investigated changes during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted that social media encouraged the exchange of ideas and experiences through low-cost communication. This shift presented an opportunity for restaurants to promote their dining experience, particularly by showcasing interiors, food, service, and health protocols as part of their 'affect-creating medium.' Gundry (2024) (Appendix A2) emphasises that design communicates a brand's identity through customer-shared images. With lighting playing a critical role in shaping a restaurant's atmosphere. Interior designers craft those visually striking impressions that enhance the restaurant's ambience on social media, making it a crucial tool to attract customers in the post-COVID-19 era.

The increased return of dining out in the transition period provided an opportunity for the restaurant industry. Zhong et al (2021) studied factors that drive consumer behaviours of dining out in China and Korea during the pandemic. The study showed that consumers' food consumption is strongly influenced by social norms and the opinions of a group of people, including family, friends, and broader social circles. It found that if a particular group perceives dining out as safe, individuals within that group are more likely to adopt a positive attitude toward it. Additionally, the widespread use of social media to share information highly affects consumer attitudes, potentially leading to the recovery of London's restaurant industry by overcoming the public's fear of dining out.

1c: ESCAPIST DESIGN IN RESTAURANT INTERIORS

The pandemic resulted in an economic recession for both the government and individuals, raising concern with how time and money may be spent. According to Hitti (2020), changes in the transition period highlights how designers are adapting to pandemic-related challenges and how those responses have affected the design industry going forward, with escapist interior design participating in contemporary practices and trends. This design approach aims to immerse visitors in unique experiences, providing a sense of escapism and originality. The design enables people to transport away from their post-lockdown surroundings. With economic constraints increasing the demand for worthwhile experiences, escapist interiors provide a packaged leisure environment that delivers maximum value through immersive design and service.

Escapist interior concept is growing in popularity among restaurant interiors. The design concept uses curated aesthetics, thematic components, and sensory experiences to achieve a sense of wonder and nostalgia, creating settings that engage with the human senses. An experienced high-end contemporary furniture curator - Chaplins (n. d) highlights how combining varied textures, orb-like fixtures, and avant-garde elements promotes an immersive quality. Designers often relate the idea of escapism to futurism or retro-futuristic design. According to Online (2024), retro-futurism combines past influences with imaginative concepts, crafting spaces that feel familiar, habitable, yet nostalgic. By integrating maximalist design qualities such as fluid shapes, bold colours and metallic accents, the space sparks creativity and conversation, promoting restaurant branding.



Fig. 2. (The Little Violet Door, n. d) The Little Violet Door restaurant and bar.



Fig. 3. (Poulsen, 2019) The Little Violet Door restaurant and bar.

Restaurants often use terms like ‘Escapist’ or ‘Themed’ to brand themselves, and interior designers differentiate these concepts through design approaches. As shown in Fig. 2, themed interiors portray a literal idea of a ‘flat party’ atmosphere, which can feel artificial. On the other hand, escapist interiors incorporate immersive elements such as well-placed lighting, textures, and innovative design, boosting a certain mood, triggering emotions and sensations that transport diners (Simpson, 2003) to an outdoor setting under the stars (Fig. 3). Inspired by immersive theatre in the past, its maximalist design offers a modern approach to achieve escapist effects. This concept has become more popular in today’s digital world, where visually striking and immersive spaces promotes branding (Simpson, 2003). It shapes unforgettable customer experiences, providing captivating and memorable dining spaces in the post-pandemic period.

CHAPTER 2: CASE STUDY

This research utilises reviews from magazine articles, TripAdvisor, and OpenTable - popular platforms for restaurant reservations and customer feedback. The curated reviews are focused on the 2020 to 2024 period to investigate the changes and input implemented during and after the pandemic.

The insights examine the role of escapist interior design as an experiential marketing strategy and its alignment with customer expectations to boost satisfaction. The study discusses three renowned London restaurants, The Ivy Asia and two Big Mamma group restaurants - Circolo Popolare and Carlotta. It analyses the semiotics of design elements used to create an escapist effect, delivering immersive experiences to build a strong brand identity and attract customers. Addressing that, Carlotta evaluates how the Big Mamma group evolved its immersive interiors, responding to the leisure dining decline post-COVID-19. Additionally, food quality is considered to assess the likelihood of return visits by consumers drawn to the ambience or the food. Finally, the research evaluates how experiential design incentivises diners to return through social media exposure during the transition period. This study aims to understand how escapist interior qualities create memorable experiences, foster loyalty, and enhance brand visibility.

2a: THE IVY ASIA, ST. PAUL'S



Fig. 4. (The Ivy Asia, n. d) The Ivy Asia central dining room.

One of the first examples of an Escapist Restaurant interior invited people to travel to Asia with the launch of The Ivy Asia in London, serving an array of pan-Asian cuisine. The pandemic reshaped customer priorities, the vibrant and opulent interior communicate the brand's luxury image, creating a packaged leisure experience through its immersive design, food, and service.



Fig. 5. (Mawinda, 2024) The Ivy Asia facade.



Fig. 6. (Mawinda, 2024) The Ivy Asia foyer.

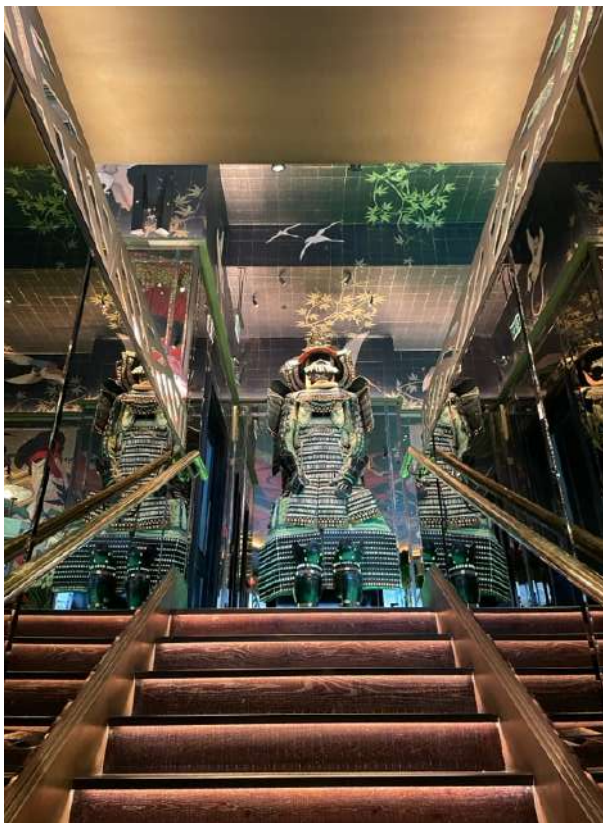


Fig. 7. (Mawinda, 2024) The Ivy Asia stairs to first floor.

The restaurant is located inside a tall glass building, allowing the foyer and bold interior colours to be visible and attract people from the street level, shown in Fig. 5. Killigrew (2024) mentioned, a carefully designed spatial journey promotes good service and customer satisfaction. Ivy Asia provided seats in the foyer (Fig. 6) and limited seatings at the bar on the first floor to ensure a seamless customer journey. However, Kelly (2024) (Appendix B) suggests that while the foyer seating is comfortable, giving the option to wait at the bar would bring a more engaging experience.

Fig. 6 illustrates the semi-stone pink flooring covering the foyer, its high-quality material suites the restaurant's objective to provide luxury dining. The Ivy Asia uses illuminated bright pink flooring, green chairs, and a temple-inspired reception counter as their attention-creating medium, which became an icon of the restaurant. This forms an immersive first impression that introduces and aligns with their brand objectives of serving gastronomy pan-Asian cuisine. The curated customer reviews (Appendix B) show low ratings come from dissatisfaction with service quality. However, these same evaluations always highlight the memorable ambience, praising the unique interiors. Fig. 7 illustrates the visitors journey to the main dining room, where they are immediately immersed in a secluded staircase wrapped in reflective glass mirrors, ambient lighting beneath the steps, and a dark colour palette contrasting with the vibrant foyer. These brand-related stimuli evoke a sensory experience, transporting them to Asia (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). This suggests the potential of escapist interior design to leave a lasting impression that can help overcome negative service experiences.



Fig. 8. (Mawinda, 2024) The Ivy Asia, main dining room, flooring and banquette seating details.

The main dining room, shown in Fig. 4 and Fig. 8, features an extension of semi-stone flooring in green rather than pink. Experiential design influences customers' comfort and purchase decision (Kotler, 1973). According to Kuang and Zhang (2017), while pink is often used for attraction, prolonged exposure can cause restlessness. In contrast, green is a natural colour proven to cool down psychological pressure. The designers used a green colour for the main dining room, given that diners typically spend over an hour in the space. This choice enhances comfort and creates a dramatic visual effect, leaving a lasting impression. Bent (2024) reviewed that the environment takes customers to "press pause" on the outside world through the combination of visually captivating design and strategic use of colour, and an affordable way to celebrate special occasions.



Fig. 9. (Mawinda, 2024) The Ivy Asia, Open plan kitchen view from the modular private dining room.

According to Hitti (2020), designers predicted that open kitchen plans will be trending in the future seeing people are more conscious about hygiene and safety. The design promotes transparency, and it establishes trust between chefs and customers. The open kitchen plan curves from the main dining room to the back, facing the modular door system from the private dining space (Fig. 9). It allows diners to witness cleanliness standards and showcase culinary practices. However, an OpenTable Diner (2024) (Appendix B) expressed disappointment at being seated next to the kitchen, which limited their ability to enjoy the view. While the open kitchen provides an additional sensory experience and fosters trust, it may not be ideal for the busy atmosphere of the space and become a distraction, considering that The Ivy Asia promotes its view of St. Paul's Cathedral as their USP for tourists.

The restaurant's menu offers small portion sizes, with prices that make it more suitable for special occasions than casual dining. According to The Honest Reviewer (2020) (Appendix B), diners might need to order multiple dishes to feel satisfied due to small portion sizes, reinforcing the perception of exclusivity and luxury. This aligns

with the brand's focus on creating an immersive dining experience, where the interior design becomes as central as the food itself (Gundry, 2020) (Appendix A3). It suggests the brand promotes its unique experiential design through social media, incentivising target demographics to celebrate at the Ivy Asia. Therefore, the strategy reflects on how post-COVID-19 dining increasingly emphasises unique environments to attract customers and differentiate from competitors, supporting the experiential marketing framework.

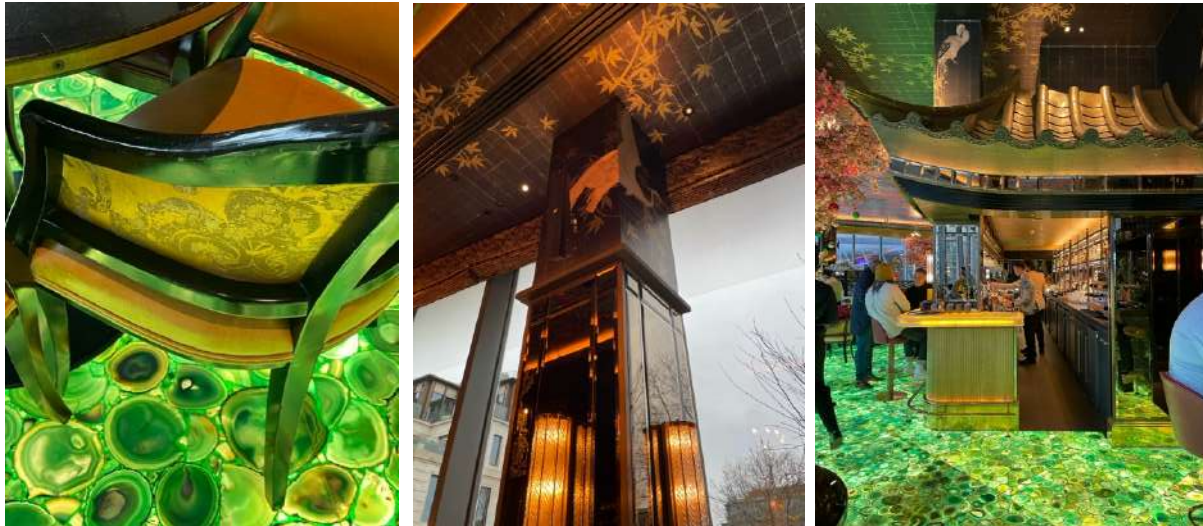


Fig. 10. (Mawinda, 2024) Design elements in The Ivy Asia, Chair, Vignette Wall Tiles, Temple Bar.

Referring to Jung et al. (2021) study suggests that the limitations on physical activities during the pandemic led to a surge in social media usage for information sharing. Design elements illustrated in Fig. 10, from the Jewel tone dining chairs that symbolise sophistication and comfort, stories printed on the vignettes to the temple bar, tell a cohesive narrative, supporting experiential marketing that strengthens the experience. Moreover, the restaurant manager, Blazquez (2025) (Appendix C6) states that Ivy Asia introduced an app allowing customers to collect loyalty points for more discounts due to the brand's increasing popularity. This innovation helps build customer loyalty in the post-pandemic era, giving restaurants a competitive edge while addressing economic inflation and delivering the best packaged leisure experience.



Fig. 11. (Sabrina, 2023) Screenshot of TikTok User Generated Content (UGC).

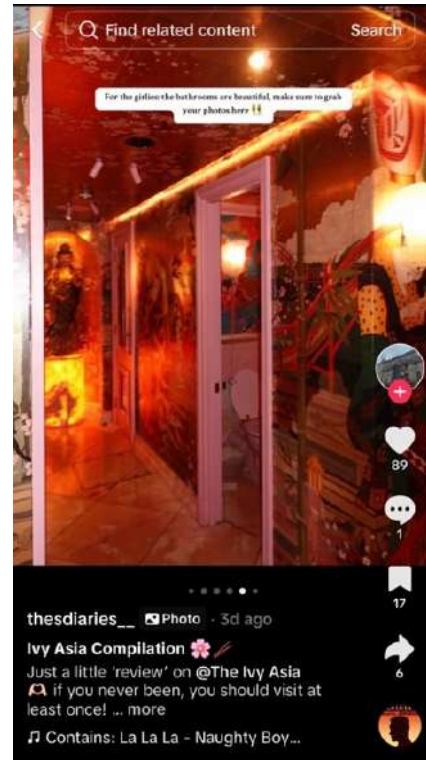


Fig. 12. (thesdiaries, 2024) Screenshot of TikTok User Generated Content (UGC).

Gundry (2024) (Appendix A3) shared that lighting and emphasis on materials can change perceptions through taken images, enticing audiences. How Ivy Asia uses illuminated green flooring as their icon and other elements discussed, created an Escapist interior effect resulting in originality within the brand. This leverages visually captivating content shown in Fig. 11 and Fig. 12, attracting new customers and driving curiosity through information sharing on social media platforms. With all the factors discussed above, it is evident that escapist design qualities incentivise a positive dynamic between the customer, the environment, and the brand.

2b: CIRCOLO POPOLARE, RATHBONE ST.



Fig. 13. (Mawinda, 2024) Circolo Popolare London, Façade.

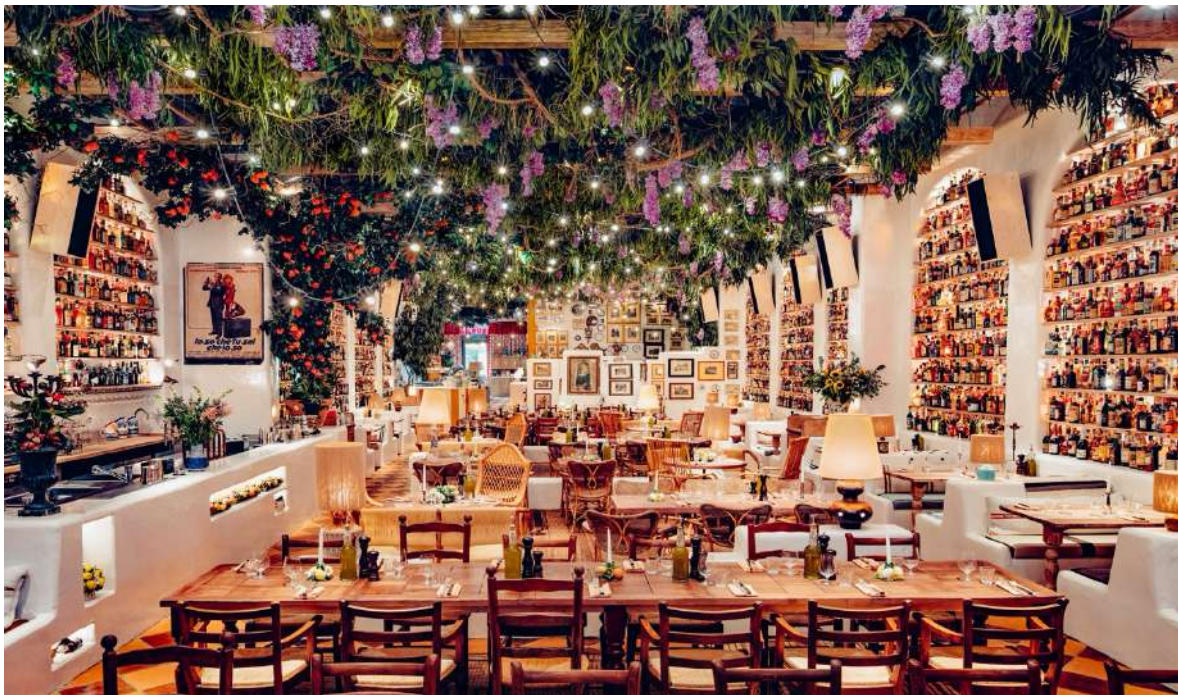


Fig. 14. (Galland, 2017) Circolo Popolare London, Main Dining room.

While diners go to The Ivy Asia for fine dining, Circolo Popolare— a restaurant branch of the Big Mamma group, has become a vibrant hotspot, gaining viral attention on social media. Big Mamma designed the restaurant inspired by a Sicilian trattoria hidden in the busy street of central London. The brand focuses on Italian cultural heritage through authentic Italian ingredients, playful experiences, community and inclusivity (Big Mamma, n. d). Fig. 13 depicts the restaurant's façade covered in leaves, creating curiosity for passersby and increasing the chance for people to explore. Ertzberger (2009) explained using the three strategies to project emotional responses within brands and consumers. The research also suggests giving a sense of curiosity and mystery entices patrons to explore. The leaves also create a contrast between the restaurant and the rest of the building, providing a sense of escape from central London's busy street as soon as they enter the door.

Referring to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) methods of evoking sensations through brand-related stimuli. Circolo Popolare transported diners to a Sicilian trattoria, greeting them with a Babylon Garden on the ceiling (Fig. 14) designed by a floral designer Emily Baylis, aimed to recreate an outdoor dining 'al-fresco' feel inside the restaurant (JuneinMarch, 2017). A reviewer in the Condé Nast Traveler – Barber (2023) stated the attraction of the restaurant is through the opulent décor and lively atmosphere besides the food. Reflecting on Gundry's (2024) hierarchies of design elements to communicate a brand's identity, Circolo Popolare's menu centres around pasta, a hearty staple in Italian cuisine. Because of the simplicity of the menu, the restaurant design is amplified to mimic the excitement of eating the food as a part of a community surrounded in a fun atmosphere nostalgic of the Italian culture.



Fig. 15. (Galland, 2017) Circolo Popolare London, Bar.



Fig. 16. (Mawinda, 2024) Circolo Popolare London, Bespoke booth seating.

As Ertzberger (2009) mentioned, lighting plays a crucial element in shaping how a space is experienced. The ambient lighting in Circolo Popolare depicted in Fig. 14 lights up the whole space, drawing attention by highlighting illuminated elements such as the bottles displayed on the arched wall. The repeated arched wall in the space (Fig. 15) creates rhythm in storing the illuminated bottles, symbolising celebration and consistency to tell the Italian cultural heritage and food. As stated by Online (2024), combining past influences creates imaginative concepts that feel both nostalgic and novel. The brand pays homage to traditional Sicilian trattoria heritage by applying a whitewashed wall that connects to the bespoke booth chairs shown in Fig. 16. From the moment she entered the restaurant until she left, Nim (2020) (Appendix D) described the experience as though she was in Italy and had booked a birthday celebration, suggesting that escapist interior gives an unforgettable experience that would entice new clients and returns for special occasions.

Spatial design can communicate brand identity, for example, Fig. 13 shows how the tables are closely packed, and the central sharing table creates a sense of familial warmth and inclusivity. However, Charlotte (2021) (Appendix D) felt the tight layout and poor customer service lowers safety during COVID-19. Another reviewer - Escape101818 (2021) (Appendix D), noted discomfort from hot temperatures in the summer, lowering customer comfort, especially in a closed space during COVID-19. These factors demonstrate how interior design significantly impacts customer satisfaction. This distinction shows the customer experience may be disrupted by the staff journey and restricted circulation from the poor ventilation system, making The Ivy Asia more COVID-19-safe to visit.



Fig. 17. (Galland, 2019) Circolo Popolare London, Terrace dining room.



Fig. 18. (Mawinda, 2024) Circolo Popolare London, Restaurant foyer/entrance.

Circolo Popolare showcases its culinary arts with an open kitchen (Fig. 17), increasing trust between customers and the brand, especially during the pandemic. Serving as a divider between the central and terrace rooms, it adds a theatrical touch, offering the quieter area a private show away from the fun and the celebrations from the main dining room. Reviews from 2021 highlight Circolo Popolare's improved safety measures and service, including complimentary items and efficient payment technology (Appendix D). Gurv D (2021) (Appendix D) notes satisfaction with the payment technology, reflecting a post-pandemic focus on customer experience during the shift before the brand comes up with an effective long-term solution. They use an online booking system, which reduces crowding but limits walk-ins due to the lack of waiting area (Fig. 18), reducing potential clients due to a tight space for waiting in the post-pandemic period.

In comparison, Ivy Asia's foyer offers comfortable and safe seating for guests, both during and after the pandemic. Moreover, most of the curated reviews noted issues with food quality, significantly affecting consumer loyalty. Hoang and Suleri (2021) examined customer behaviour in Vietnam before and during COVID-19, finding that while interior design attracts new customers, consumer loyalty depends on food and service quality. Therefore, escapist interiors must work harmoniously with service and food quality, creating a holistic experience that promotes customer returns and lasting solutions.

Zhong et al. (2021) conclude that social opinions can influence food consumption. During the pandemic, increased exposure to social media led many customer reviews to highlight Circolo Popolare's "Instagram-worthy interiors". Since food cannot be tasted online, Circolo Popolare utilises its interior design as a marketing strategy, drawing customers through captivating video content. The evaluation implies the power of visual branding and immersive features as an affect-creating medium, supporting the restaurant's experiential marketing approach.

2c: CARLOTTA, MARYLEBONE

Big Mamma's latest restaurant opened in 2023 as the public transitioned to the new normal. This chapter explores how Big Mamma adapted to the post-pandemic landscape, revitalising their brand by drawing in new buzz and customers through even bolder, maximalist interiors, exceptional food, and elevated service.



Fig. 19. (Maclean, 2024) Carlotta, Marylebone Facade.

This trattoria aims to pay tribute to Italian culinary and cultural traditions, blending authentic elements from Italian American communities. It reflects traditional Italian roots and the adaptations that evolved in new cultural settings (Big Mamma, n. d). The concept itself has evolved to embrace the new normal as the world changes after the pandemic, they aim to transport people out of everyday life, rekindling a sense of vibrancy and bustle. They have carried their mysterious Façade design like the concept in Circolo Popolare. Fig. 19 displays that red is the branding colour for this restaurant, which creates a feeling of excitement (Kuang and Zhang, 2017). In response to how the pandemic's adjustments limited closed-door dining, Circolo

Popolare may have seen success in attracting customers with their facade design, which Carlotta adapted along with adding outdoor seats, offering diners alternatives and improved circulation in case of future pandemic.



Fig. 20. (Mawinda, 2024) Carlotta, Foyer and Bar.



Fig. 21. (Big Mamma, n. d) Main dining space.

Carlotta greets visitors with a bar wrapped in illuminated glass panels and red stools (Fig. 20), evoking a sophisticated jazz bar vibe compared to Circolo Popolare's more casual setting. Jess (2024) (Appendix E) reviewed that Circolo's extensive booking postponed her visit. This time, Big Mamma gives walk-in guests a chance to wait for their tables while being immersed in the space. Chaplins (n.d.) highlights how avant-garde elements and varied textures enhance immersion. A red curtain separates the foyer from the main dining room, adding a theatrical touch reminiscent of an Italian American wedding (Fig. 21), with mirrored walls and white fabric mimicking a wedding gown, while the framed family wedding photos honour Italian American traditions and community values. Carlotta's design captivates attention and strengthens Big Mamma's branding, as Hall (2023) noted, praising their unique environments in each restaurant branch.

Carlotta uses materials such as red leather banquettes and metallic chairs, aligning with Big Mamma's identity of refining the crowd and transporting people to a sophisticated 1980s Jazz Bar vibe, fitting the location in Marylebone. Moreover, the tables at Carlotta are more widely spaced shown in Fig. 21, likely reflecting a shift toward a pandemic-friendly and long-term spatial arrangement. A review by Platogiusto (2021) (Appendix D) highlighted that Circolo Popolare's closely packed tables made dining with strangers uncomfortable and unsafe during the pandemic. While The Ivy Asia offers a private dining option, Carlotta's spatial layout is distantly spaced, outliving the pandemic.



Fig. 22. (Big Mamma, n. d)
Carlotta, Banquette
seating.



Fig. 23. (Big Mamma, n. d)
Carlotta, Framed pictures
and signage.



Fig. 24. (Big Mamma, n. d)
Carlotta, Toilet

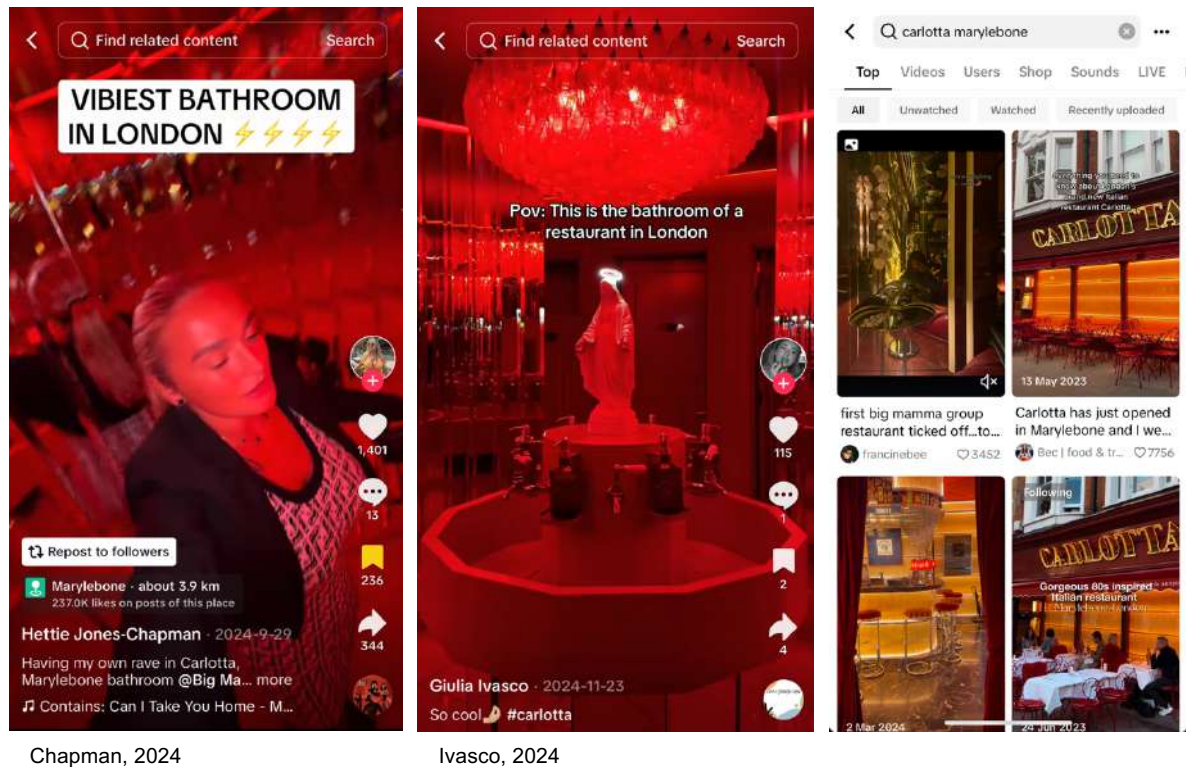


Fig. 25. Screenshots of UGC contents of Carlotta's appearance on TikTok.

According to Zhang et al. (2017), storytelling builds an emotional connection with the audience, resulting in an unforgettable experience. Supporting elements like Italy's boxing shorts and framed pictures (Fig. 22) (Fig. 23) brings personal character into the space, developing emotional nostalgia, and appealing to customers seeking authenticity. Additionally, Carlotta enhanced their immersive design from dining rooms to the toilets compared to Circolo Popolare and The Ivy Asia. The pandemic led Carlotta to design a sensational bathroom (Fig. 24) with a circular open sink surrounded by mirrors, constructing the effect of escaping to a disco experience. Hall (2023) notes that the playful restroom delivers a memorable, whimsical touch, initiating an iconic restaurant feature that boosts customer interaction and brand. It created UGC content all over TikTok (Fig. 25), going viral due to the bathroom design itself. This attracted new customers, from locals to tourists. Maximalist qualities achieved escapist effect that boost experiential marketing, and it's shown to extend beyond dining areas to create unexpected spaces, encouraging visitors to share their experiences online, boosting the restaurant's visibility.



Fig. 26. (Squaremeal, n. d) Carlotta, Basement floor dining room.

As Hitti (2020) mentions the increasing popularity of open kitchen plans, the two case studies above showed that open kitchen plan concept continues the trend not only as a symbol of trust, but as a means to showcase culinary arts. The hectic scene of chefs in a kitchen acts as a 'stage,' in a closed space which enhances its theatrical element (Fig. 26). Cachondo (2024) (Appendix E) stated that the restaurant makes people feel like they are in a 1970's movie, emphasising Carlotta's escapist qualities and demonstrating a consistent narrative, cultivating a unique experience and boosting customer loyalty and engagement.

Moreover, Julier (2014) explains brand image marketing strategies' alignment with real-life customer experience helps gain loyalty with positive engagement. Wright (2023) reviewed Carlotta's Italian American-inspired dishes, and shareable portions guarantee guests leave fully satisfied. It indicates improvements from Circolo Popolare's bad reviews (Mahk, 2021) (Appendix D) regarding portion sizes whilst also suiting their restaurant identity of providing comfort and creating a better-packaged leisure experience. Thus, Carlotta's design elevates the dining experience beyond a simple meal, but a memorable experience through environmental senses, this has boosted customer retention and revitalised London's restaurant industry post-COVID-19.

CHAPTER 3: THE FUTURE OF RESTAURANT DESIGN IN THE POST-PANDEMIC LANDSCAPE

This chapter discusses the future of escapist interiors in restaurant design, examining qualities of escapist interiors that would be effective for a restaurant's long-term design using information from the case studies in chapter two and surveys directed to diners in London.

The survey concludes that (Appendix F1) 43.1% of people dine more than six times a month in the post-COVID-19 period showing an increase in return to dining. However, 33.3% of people who dine occasionally reflect a growing preference for dining as an experiential leisure activity, reinforcing the importance of escapist interior design. The previous analysis concludes that maximalist design qualities produce escapist effects, which cover all the mediums, stated by Ertzberger (2009) in the literature review. Thematic elements in the examples above form a strong narrative helping experiential marketing to captivate customers through word of mouth or social media. From all the elements used in the three restaurants, colour, lighting, and aesthetics that resonate with the cultural heritage of a brand's identity, evoke the most memorable responses from customers, starting conversations between people and attracting exposure from social media.

Circolo Popolare and Carlotta generate curiosity through bold entrance designs, such as vibrant simple colours, compared to Ivy Asia's reliance on patterns and signage. This approach may engage customers more effectively over time without solely depending on social media marketing. Relying on safety measures such as glass dividers is ineffective, with only 5.9% of respondents prioritising them (Appendix F2). Blazquez (2025) (Appendix C2) also shared that safety measures are removed immediately in The Ivy Asia post-lockdown during the transition period. However, wider spatial arrangement is evidential for long-term measure based on the examples. As discussed in Chapter 2a, customers prefer waiting in bar areas rather than foyers. Carlotta attended this preference by offering the option to enjoy a cocktail while

waiting, enhancing the customer experience and providing versatility for walk-ins. Carlotta's addition of outdoor seating further demonstrates adaptability, offering better circulation and a viable strategy for future pandemics, unlike Circolo's tighter indoor space.

The majority of the participants are aged 18-24yo, and 24% of them are 25-34yo (Appendix F3), meaning they use social media the most during and after the pandemic, which promotes the exposure of these experiential designs. Over half of the respondents (51%) (Appendix F4) agree on the importance of interior design when deciding where to dine, showing how critical it is for attracting customers. Gundry (2024), notes that the longevity of escapist interiors depends on the broader state of society (Appendix A4). In times of economic instability, escapist restaurants may thrive because they offer a sense of celebration and temporary escape from daily activities in an affordable way where they just go to the city centre instead of travelling.

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that creative and innovative interior design strategies are vital to revitalising London's restaurant industry and maintaining its competitive edge. Escapist interiors have gained relevance, offering customers an affordable sense of escape and engagement in the post-pandemic era. As discussed in chapter two, maximalist design principles have successfully pushed a feeling of being transported out of the everyday. Gundry (2024) highlights that striking a balance between theatrical, escapist designs and casual, authentic dining experiences will likely shape the future of restaurant design (Appendix A4).

By leveraging experiential design, restaurants enhance brand exposure, appealing to customers who seek memorable celebrations. This approach reflects the growing importance of unique post-COVID-19 dining environments, which attract diners and set businesses apart from competitors. Such strategies align with the experiential design framework stated by Pine and Gilmore (1998). It encourages social interaction and generating exposure on social media platforms. Survey data indicates that while 47.1% of respondents (Appendix F2) prioritised food quality over ambience pre-pandemic, a significant post-pandemic shift showed an increased demand for immersive dining interiors. Therefore, whilst food quality remains essential, the importance of creating spaces bridging the gap between marketing and the physical environment evoking emotional responses, ultimately delivers a cohesive and irresistible leisure experience, as discussed by Julier (2014).

Semiotics and sensory elements are crucial in shaping customer perceptions and enhancing dining experiences. The shift towards establishing a cohesive narrative and evoking a sense of nostalgia reflects a reaction against minimalism as the public seeks original visually stimulating dining spaces—such as Carlotta's wedding-inspired theme, Circolo's Sicilian al-fresco concept, or Ivy Asia's luxurious atmosphere that transports diners to Asia, demonstrating the ability to start conversations and gain restaurant engagement. These designs integrate thoughtful spatial planning, curated

aesthetics, and a strong focus on providing a packaged leisure experience. Escapist interior shapes customer perceptions, drawing crowds and conveys a strong brand identity. As dining habits evolve, immersive experiences that combine past influences with contemporary practices continue to define the future of restaurant design, ensuring these spaces remain compelling and appealing to customers.

APPENDIX A

Interview with Tyeth Gundry

Tyeth Gundry is a furniture and Interior designer who founded his practice studio, Gundry + Ducker. The Interview helped gain insights to understand an in-depth practice in restaurant design.

Appendix A1: "Are you aware about the term or concept of Escapist Interior design?"

"It's not a new thing, the idea has existed for a while."

"It's about basically, like a theatrical experience or a maximalist experience, immersive theatre, in a way"

"So, you got the kind like St. John restaurant, it's basically a restaurant set up by an architect who became a chef, highly respected British food, Michelin star."

"It's in this beautiful found place, painted white, super stripped back, ordinary chairs, the complete opposite of the sort of maximalist design."

"And the idea is that all of this stuff is complete nonsense, it's all about the food, the service, removing all of unnecessary things on this kind of cues and indicators of visual noise that is distracting to the beautiful food."

"So there is a certain position in the hierarchy to design, and this type of restaurant design is very popular with a chef-led restaurant, which is kind of very bad for design because it has barely any design."

"But then you got the people that make quite rich interiors by using lots of found stuff that is normally very dark."

"And then you got the mainstream restaurants, to the point where you feel comfortable and familiar, like you've been there before."

"And then you got these maximalist restaurants."

"We don't really use the term Escapist interior, but I know exactly what you mean, it's sort of transformative, it's a transporter"

Appendix A2: "How do you communicate a brand's target audience through design? Is it a different process for casual and fine dining restaurants?"

"It's very different, the way you communicate it is by the way it looks."

"So, from the images taken on people's phones, the ones that are operated by their website."

"You may have done this before, when you take pictures in a restaurant, they are generally very, very different to the ones they show on their websites."

"Normally, it is the way their lighting looks"

Appendix A3: "So the first thing that you do when you design is to understand the client's goal of what type of food they serve or what kind of service they want to provide?"

"Yes, when we first design a restaurant, the first thing we do is collect images with our clients and at the end of the discussion, we sort of start getting the visual of what they want to achieve."

"Alongside that, we develop a plan, once you got the plan, you understand the service model, the customer journey and the private journey."

Appendix A4: "What do you think is the future of restaurant design? Do you think this escapist interior is just a trend or does it have a long-term potential?"

"I think that depends on what happens in society as a whole, I think if we go down the track, we are now."

"A poorer, less stable world, then I think they will do really well"

"Because I think what would happen is that you'll end up with a large transformative restaurant where you go to the middle of cities for big celebrations to have a full-on experience, and it becomes a big memorable thing."

Appendix A5: "How do you communicate the restaurant's brand identity through design?"

"Through material choice, essentially."

"The importance to certain elements given in the interior, what you highlight, or what's your 'hero' which is the language or the signifier to stand out"

"Let's say you do a very organic food, the way you express that in interiors is to use really high-quality natural materials detailed in a very precised and beautiful way"

"That would describe, one and the other."

"If you're a restaurant that sells sparkle drinks with them, perhaps a transformative restaurant."

"Then you use things that are bright, reflective because you're not interested in the food, you didn't come there for the food."

"Food is an important factor when it comes to designing restaurants"

"There are three elements that are important, which is service, interior and food"

"There is an argument over which comes first, but there are examples of those that succeed in all three elements such as maybe the transformative interior where the staff also has to wear uniforms, or there is."

"People must go in a restaurant and know what the brand is trying to say"

Appendix A6: "Would you say there is a connection or difference between theme and escapist interior design? If yes, what values or forms defines an escapist interior?"

"Firstly, there has been quite an overlapping of these terms, these terms relate to their position in time."

"So, a themed restaurant is a term that would have been used 10-15 years ago."

"Whereas escapist, is a new term but it really is what we have taken from a maximalist, but these things overlap in terms of what they mean and also the timeframe in which when they are used"

“So before, restaurants weren’t really themed. They are just designed in a way where it’s targeted to the audience the restaurant wants to attract, for example, if you go to an opulent old fashioned London restaurant, it will just look like a rich person’s house”

“Like in the late 80s, people start designing these themed restaurants and that’s when people start designing more spaces like this especially now it suddenly becomes more relevant with the growth of social media”

“so, the idea of the St. John restaurant is slight reaction to the Conran restaurants in the early 80s that were quite opulent where they emphasize that they’re serious about food and don’t care about all the other nonsense”

“So, with this transporter stuff, it’s a reaction going back the other way”

“And I think you’re right with everything that’s going on with the world economy, more people think rather than going out three times a week they can just go somewhere less often so I’ll spend less money, but I’ll spend a bit more to get there but I want to make the most out of it”

“The other thing we discuss is the high days and low days restaurants, it helps to identify what the restaurant wants to achieve, the high days get daily customers that go there casually, whereas the high days receive more customers for celebrations like birthdays, etc. It could be that this transformative restaurant offers.”

Appendix A7: “What was your approach to creating an immersive multi-sensory design in the restaurant?”

“There is a connection with immersive theatre so, they’re always turning up to max of everything”

“Acoustics is very important, getting rid of reflective sound, especially when you’re trying to send people away, so getting rid of a banging noisy bar to sort of like classy quieter ones”

“And there’s the lighting that is very, very important, it has to be tuned in a very sophisticated way”

“There is a trend about a block colour restaurant where they use one colour to amplify everything such as red that’s very intense, and there has been a thing about that”

Appendix A8: “What are the most important ambient factors you consider when you make the restaurant design decisions?”

“There are two things you want to achieve, there’s a layout that supports the service style or a dining room that is reflective of the price point.”

“For example some places want to hide but some other places want to show off”

“Unless you’re dealing with a very high end brand where they want all things.”

APPENDIX B

Reviews collected from OpenTable for The Ivy Asia restaurant.



kelly
London
7 reviews

★★★★★ Dined on 24 October 2024


Overall 4 • Food 5 • Service 5 • Ambience 5

First time visiting, amazing experience, vibe and food was incredible. I didn't like waiting in the **foyer** downstairs when table wasn't ready, would of been nicer to be given a drink or a place to go like the bar area ...but loved it regardless would definitely come back soon!! Thank you.

[Read less](#)

 Is this helpful?

Kelly, 2024




Prft1235
Kent
19 reviews

★★★★★ Dined on 3 January 2020

Overall 4 • Food 5 • Service 4 • Ambience 5

Loved the ambience of the Ivy Asia, great vibe and the food was amazing! Decor stunning and view of St Paul's superb. The only disappointment is that we went for our twin daughter's 18th Birthday celebrations which I mentioned on the booking comments and no reference was made to this on the night. Also had to request a change of table as we were tucked away in a corner at a table too small for our party of 5 and one person was seated with their back to the restaurant. More attention needs to be given to booking details by front of house staff but could not fault food and venue.

[Read less](#)

 Is this helpful?  Report

Prft1235, (2020) Collected Reviews that mentions bad service but appreciate the ambience.



Victoria
London
4 reviews

★★★★★ Dined on 19 August 2020

Overall 4 • Food 4 • Service 3 • Ambience 4


I have to say The Ivy Asia, is more than an Instagram hot spot! contrary to popular belief...the food is fresh and flavoursome. I was pleasantly surprised and have to give them props where props are due. The service was not amazing, being attentive is very important when waiting for a table and they lacked this, unfortunately.

Also, a big issue for my friends and I was the selection of drinks on the cocktail menu (not the best). The drinks we initially ordered from the menu were weak and lacked a smidge of alcohol or sweetness and simply tasted like a glass full of ice, however, a friend of mine ordered a classic Mojito (not on the menu) and said it was delicious.

Overall I would go back as the ambience and food were delicious. One thing to consider when ordering - The waiter made it clear they run as a small plates restaurant however the starter plates are extremely filling and ALL of us were full after our starters so don't order everything at once and consider sharing your starters instead of ordering a plate each.


[Read less](#)

Victoria, (2020) Collected Reviews that mentions bad service but appreciate the ambience.



 Dined on 29 December 2024
 Overall 3 • Food 3 • Service 3 • Ambience 3

OpenTable
 Diner
 Birmingham
 3 reviews

Requested a seat with view of St Pauls as it was a special occasion. We were assigned a table next to the **kitchen** hatch..... Which meant we didn't get to enjoy the ambience and the decor of the restaurant. In fact we could of been anywhere.
 This was a shame considering that we had travelled from the midlands especially
[Read less](#)

 Is this helpful?

OpenTable Diner, 2024




 Dined on 9 August 2020
 Overall 3 • Food 4 • Service 4 • Ambience 5

TheHonestReviewer
 London
 1 review

The interior of The Ivy Asia is stunning, that's for sure. Definitely one for the 'gram. What's not so stunning is the value - prices of the items on the menu would lead you to believe you'd be getting a reasonable portion, only to be presented with dishes that only a small child would be satisfied with.

 Having said that, the food tasted good, but portions really need to be bigger.

 I'd recommend The Ivy Asia if you: (a) are looking for somewhere very picturesque, or (b) aren't really that hungry - otherwise, look elsewhere.
[Read less](#)

 Is this helpful?
  Report

The Honest Reviewer, 2020

APPENDIX C

Interview with The Ivy Asia restaurant manager – Tamara

The interview was conducted via E-mail to investigate changes The Ivy Asia made during and post-COVID-19

Appendix C1: "What changes did the restaurant go through during the Covid-19 Pandemic? Have there been any modifications to the layout post-COVID-19 to adapt to health and safety regulations? If Yes, how long did it last?"

"During pandemic panels were installed at the receptions, tables were removed to make more space between them and for a period of time only outside spaces were available."

Appendix C2: "How has it change to the post-covid transition to new-normal?"

“Restaurants are back to normal with no covid regulations.”

Appendix C3: “Does the restaurant receive takeouts more or dine in more?”

“Our restaurant does not provide takeouts, we did receive a lot more guests when the pandemic just finished as people felt the urge of going out however, industry felt a big drop since pandemic and Brexit also being affected by the inflation of prices.”

Appendix C4: “How do you ensure a smooth transition between waiting areas and seating?”

“In St Paul's we have a lobby downstairs and the bar upstairs where the guests can wait while their table is getting ready, we work with returning times which if followed allow us to smooth out the seating.”

Appendix C5: “What challenges, if any, do staff face in navigating the space while serving customers?”

“I believe nowadays with social media everyone is more interested in taking pictures of where they are than actually enjoying their time together and can be a challenge as everyone is on the way without realising.”

Appendix C6: “Do most people join the events that The Ivy Asia offers online?”

“Ivy in general is very popular and with the arrival of the Asia Branch, its aesthetics and the arrival of the Ivy App where guests can collect points and have some extra discounts, I believe we are one of the busiest brands there is in London.”

APPENDIX D

Online Reviews collected from TripAdvisor for Circolo Popolare restaurant.

**Nim**
London • 16 contributions

 0 ...



Great food and great atmosphere


Jul 2020 • Family


This place was amazing. I walked in and thought I was in Italy. We went for my 40th. And I was definitely not disappointed. The food from starters to desserts was fantastic. I been dreaming about going back to this place soon. So I booked it for my husband's birthday in November, but looking at this covid lock down, again. It's looking unlikely. I will just keep dreaming of this place and there signature lemon meringue pie... Thank you to all the staff to, service was incredible. 🍋🍋🍋🍋


[Read less](#) ^

Written 31 October 2020

Nim, 2020

**Charlotte**
Barcelona • 16 contributions

 1 ...




First time we walked out of a restaurant


Jun 2021 • None

Booked a dinner over a month ago with a friend I met through work. When we arrived, our table was not ready and they seated us by the digital tills where all the staff members kept going to. During Covid, being near so many people walking by you every few seconds is really uncomfortable. Also, half of our view was of a staircase, the till/screen and a broomstick. We politely asked to be moved but the waiter was so dismissive and rude. Said that we basically have to deal with it and moved onto the next table.

This was a McDonalds level customer service in a restaurant that charges you almost £20 for a plate of pasta. Just not welcoming at all, instead making you feel like you should be happy to be even eating there because there's other 120 people they have to serve to. It really is just an Instagram spot. We decided that we didn't want this place to have our money and get through all that with such a rude waiter so we decided to leave because of him. My friend couldn't even finish her glass of prosecco in peace because he made her pay for it immediately, and on top of it she got charged 13% service charge (which was not optional). Tragic. It's crazy how one waiter can ruin your entire experience. Very disappointing.

[Read less](#) ^

 Value

 Food

Written 16 June 2021

Charlotte, 2021

**Escape101818**
Gerrards Cross • 34 contributions

 2 ...




Unconformably hot....


Jun 2021 • Family

This is my first ever review..... The restaurant was nice to look at but the food was average but the temperature in the restaurant was unbearable. Asked management to turn on the AC to be told they have opened the doors to let the air flow. It was unbearably hot. Never again.....

Written 16 June 2021

Escape101818, 2021

 **Lovaine S**
2 contributions



Special evening meal
Aug 2021 • Friends

We were very impressed with the effort Fabrizio made to rebook after a **covid** related postponement. He even fitted in an extra two to our party! AND included a free prosecco 🍷 Our waiter, Ricardo, could not have been more helpful, explaining to each of our party, the details of each dish and making excellent recommendations. We thank him particularly for making our evening really special. Thankyou so much 🥰🥰🥰

[Read less](#) ^

Written 16 August 2021

Lovaine, S (2021) Collected reviews in 2021 explaining improvements in Circolo Popolare.

 **Inez B**
24 contributions



Danilo was incredible!
Apr 2021 • Friends


Great food and service. Danilo was so fantastic and my pizza and the cheesy pasta was soo incredible!


Really impressed with this and they managed **covid** rules so well!

Written 28 April 2021

This review is the subjective opinion of a Tripadvisor member and not of Tripadvisor LLC. Tripadvisor performs checks on reviews as part of our industry-leading trust & safety standards. Read our [transparency report](#) to learn more.

Inez, B (2021) Collected reviews in 2021 explaining improvements in Circolo Popolare.

 **Mahk**
11 contributions




Small portions
Jun 2021 • Friends

I'd been looking forward to coming to this restaurant for my birthday for months! In most videos and pictures I'd seen people get the cheese wheel pasta so thought I'd have to have that as that's what everyone has when they come here. However I was most disappointed at the portion size of this £16 pasta and we also paid extra for the bacon pieces which were again hardly existent. The waitress also never asked if we wanted extra cheese which I had heard others being asked when ordering this dish.

It was just such a shame that it put a dampener on my birthday and put everyone in a bad mood so we didn't stay for desert.


If you are thinking of going here the pizzas did look really nice so I'd get one of them instead


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Written 28 June 2021

Mahk, (2021), Bad review regarding portion size

 **Gurv D**
2 contributions



A LONDON MUST VISIT!!!!
Oct 2021 • None

The whole experience from start to finish was AMAZING!



The decor, staff, service, food and payment **technology** was 10/10.


Some places in London are "for the Instagram" and usually lack in the food and service department. NOT THIS ONE - The staff were sooo friendly and helpful, the food was unbelievably tasty and they use a payment service called sunday, which allows you to scan the QR code, split the bill, leave a tip and then get up and leave within 30 seconds.

Can't wait for my next visit and would recommend to anyone and everyone.

BTW - Truffle pasta was incredible!!!!!!!

[Read less](#) ^

 Value  Service

 Food

Written 25 October 2021

Gurv D, 2021



palatogiusto
209 contributions



Being popular doesn't mean you should drop in quality

Oct 2021 • Friends

This is my third visit to this restaurant. This time I didn't make a reservation and we walked in. We were accommodated on a sharing table. Now, I am not one of those **COVID** scared, but this was a bit too much of a push. We were on the same table with other four strangers next to us, with no distances between us at all. 10 cm from one side and 10 cm to other side. Then, comes the Carbonara. Basically a soup of a prepared mix of carbonara sauce, with a 100g of spaghetti inside. Guys, the place is great and perfect for Instagram, but I am not sure I would come back at this point. Getting famous is not easy, and you made it. Now try to maintain it.

[Read less](#) ^

Written 30 October 2021

Palatogiusto, 2021

APPENDIX E

Online Reviews collected from TripAdvisor for Carlotta restaurant.



jess
4 contributions



wonderful staff and atmosphere 10/10

Jul 2024 • Couples

It wasn't a case of whether to go to a big mamma restaurant. It was which one do I choose! Fortunately Circolo Popolares extensive booking list meant Carlotta was the one destined for our tastebuds.

The interior design of this restaurant was magnificent, so to was the atmosphere which a vibrant hum of dinner time conversation. The staff were attentive in all regards. The food was as elevated as I was lead to believe. We tackled the Burrata Con Acciughe and the Insalata Di Polpo E Patate. Followed swiftly by Hot Paccheri All'Arrabbiata and Risotto Al Nero Di Seppia. All delicious-especially the Risotto, bonus points for the black appearance. Finally onto the finishers. The dessert consisted of strawberry ice cream and tiramasu which we democratically dissected into 50/50 portions. To die for!

Definitely recommend this restaurant. Unfortunately for us we have decided to embark on a pilgrimage to all Big Mamma restaurants, so won't be back for a while.

P.S. the cocktails were sank in quick succession.

[Read less](#) ^



Written 27 July 2024

Jess, 2024



Mariposa_cachondo
Canton of Basel • 12 contributions



Excellent Food, Service and Ambiente

Jul 2024 • Couples

An amazing place with excellent food and an extraordinary waiter, thanks Alberto.
You will feel in a movie from the 1970.



Written 23 July 2024

Cachondo, 2024

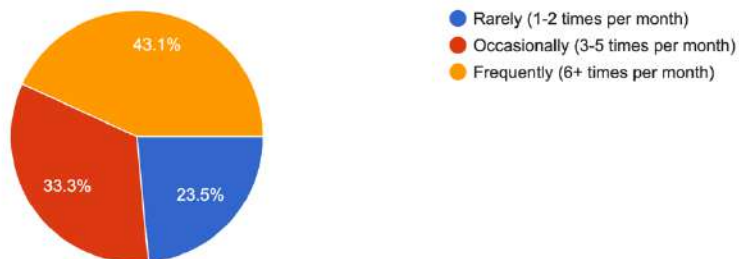
APPENDIX F

Survey Questionnaire

A survey that is directed to people in London to understand how COVID-19 affected their leisure dining habit.

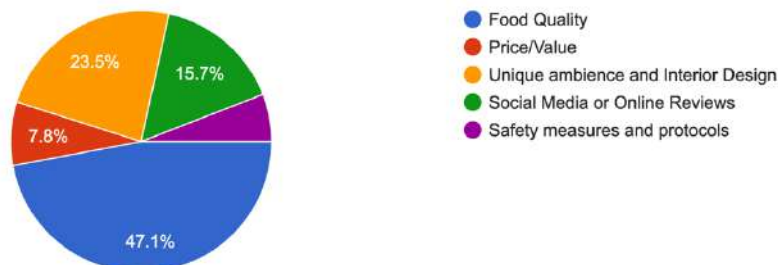
F1: "How often do you dine out post-pandemic?"

How often do you dine out Post-pandemic ?
51 responses



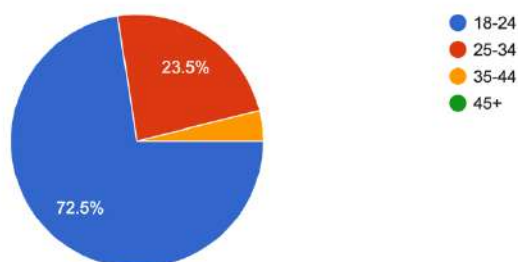
F2: "What attracts you most to dine at a restaurant in the post-COVID19 period?"

What attracts you most to dine at a restaurant in the post-COVID period ?
51 responses



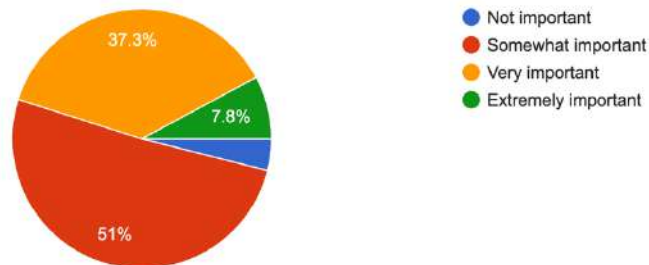
F3: "What is your age?"

What is your age ?
51 responses



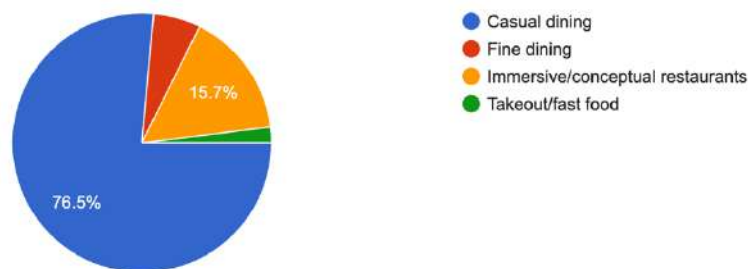
F4: “How Important is the interior design of a restaurant when choosing where to dine?”

How important is the interior design of a restaurant when choosing where to dine ?
51 responses



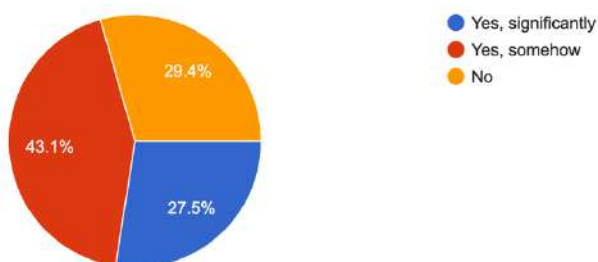
F5: “What type of restaurants do you prefer?”

What type of restaurants do you prefer ?
51 responses



F6: “Have your leisure dining habits changed since the COVID19 pandemic began?”

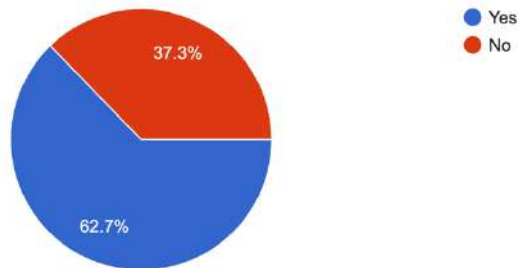
Have your leisure dining habits changed since the COVID-19 pandemic began ?
51 responses



F7: “Since the COVID19 pandemic, do you find yourself seeking restaurants with immersive interiors more frequently?”

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, do you find yourself seeking restaurants with immersive interiors more frequently ?

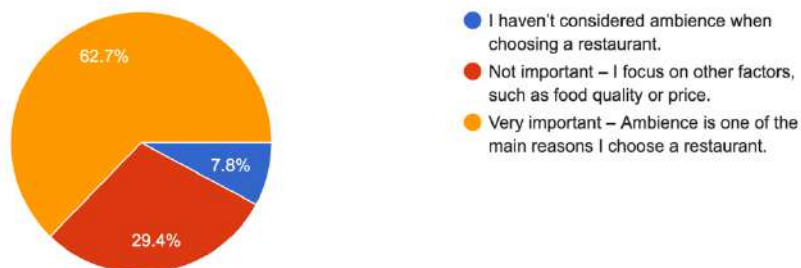
51 responses



F8: “How important has ambience been in influencing your dining experience?”

How important has ambience been in influencing your dining experience ?

51 responses



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