

# THE 6-FOOT SPIN

*The efficient bar is a study in time and motion. Remember that form follows function when you select equipment and draft your design.*

BY MICHAEL W. SHERER

**J**ust about any bartender can tell you what's wrong with your bar—not enough glass storage; the beer cooler's too far away; the cash register's in the wrong place; the sink drain keeps clogging; the ice bin's not big enough. And the litany goes on.

The fact is, designing a practical, workable bar is probably harder than designing a galley on a 30-foot sloop. In not much more space, an operator has to cram enough equipment to let a bartender provide diverse beverage service to hundreds of customers a night.

Before you decide what equipment you want behind your bar, you must first consider carefully that space where your bartenders live and breathe, where they play showman and shrink, where they earn their keep—the world of the 6-foot spin.

## Where to Start

Bars are designed to be distinctive, to attract attention, to create an atmosphere that is also reflected in the surrounding decor and furnishings. But a bar that doesn't work isn't going to make money, no matter how pretty it is.

Equipment selection, layout and construction should be considered on

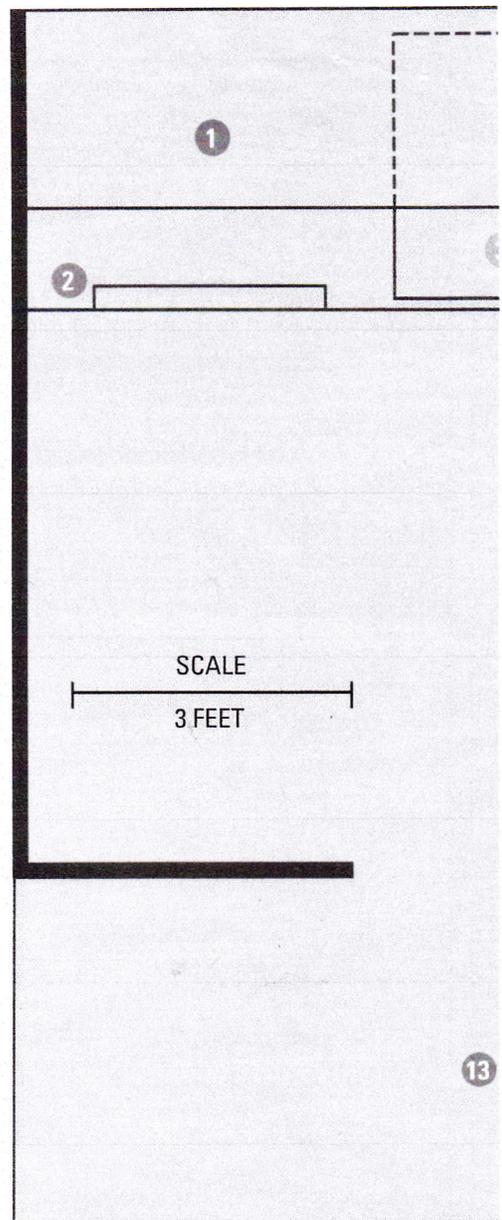
a strictly functional basis. Activity behind the bar can get intense. Bartenders make drinks, wash glasses, handle cash and restock supplies, all within a very confined space. Design has to make the most efficient use of that space possible.

Just as a restaurant kitchen is separate from the front of the house, a bar should be designed separately from the lounge area or dining room. It should also be designed from the inside out, which means there has to be coordination between the bar designer or specifier and the interior designer.

The way to start to determine bar size and layout is by considering the type of bar you operate. Sports bar, disco, showroom, restaurant lounge or neighborhood tavern, every bar will cater to a different clientele. The image you create and the clientele you attract will in large part define the kind of bar service you'll need.

Most good bar designers will work with an operator to find out what kind of trade he intends to establish. The next step is to establish a drink program. The type of drinks served will have a major impact on the bar layout and type of equipment.

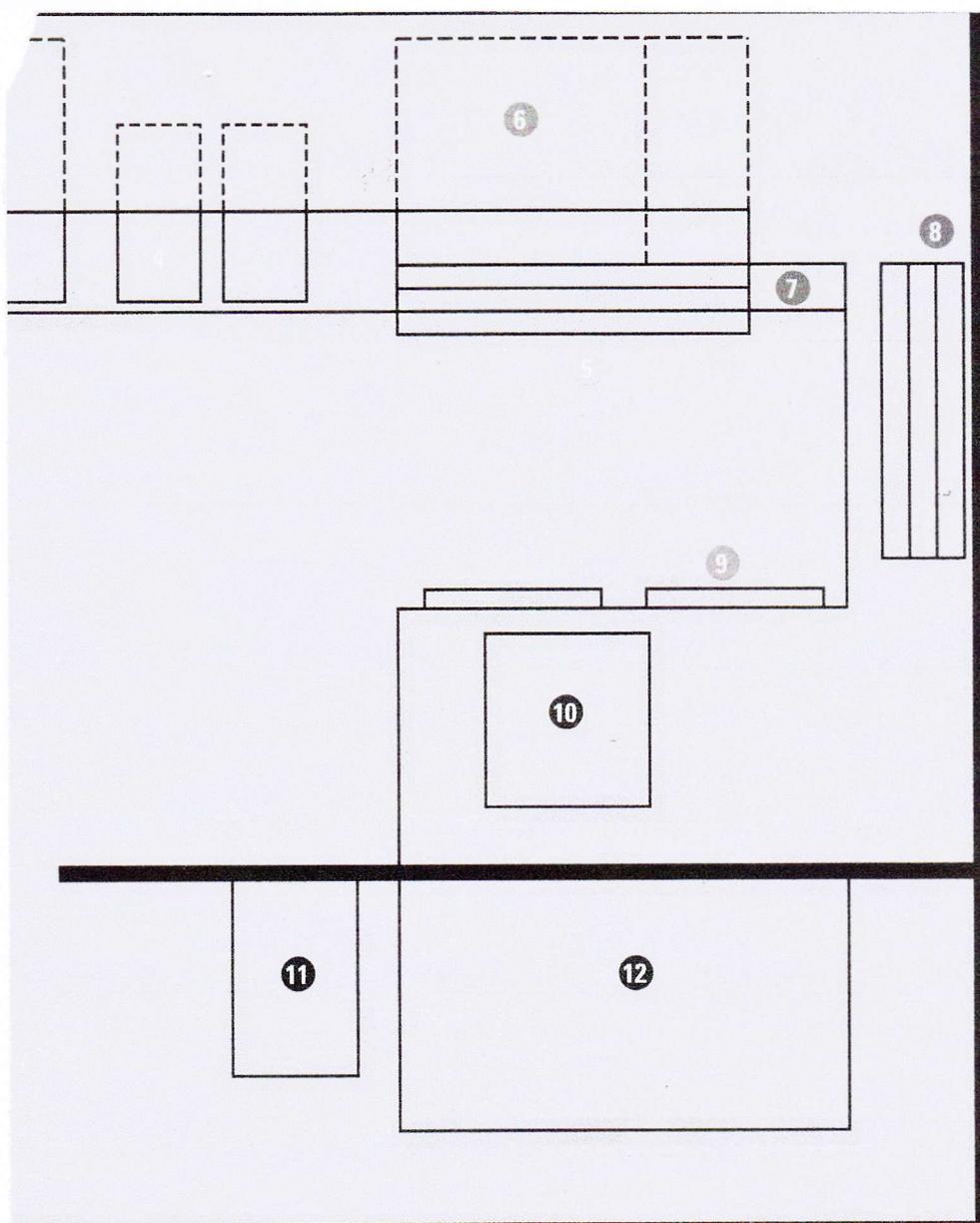
With a type of clientele and a drink menu established, you can estimate drink volume and begin to



define other parameters that will affect equipment selection and layout. Designers will lead you through a series of questions that need to be addressed, such as:

- How many bartenders?
- Will bartenders service wait staff as well as bar customers?
- Where will the bar be located? Show bar or service bar?
- Post-mix beverage dispensing or soda bottles?
- Spirits-control system or free pour?
- Draft beer, bottles, or both?
- Where/how will glasses be washed?
- Wine service by the glass or bottle? Will volume justify a wine-dispensing system?
- What kinds of specialty drinks will be served?
- What kind of cash-handling system will be used?

Answers to these questions will



- 1 Bar
- 2 Under-bar counter/back-up station with single speed rack
- 3 Pass-through glasswasher
- 4 Two-compartment sink
- 5 Triple speed rack/beverage guns
- 6 Ice bin
- 7 Blender
- 8 Spirits-bottle steps
- 9 Back-bar cooler
- 10 Cash register
- 11 Ice flaker
- 12 Ice machine
- 13 Storage room/inverted-bottle racks

## Must Haves

What's the most important consideration in bar design and construction?

"The cocktail station has to be right," according to Harry Schildkraut, vice president of Cini-Little International, Inc., and head of the firm's Chicago office. "It's the heart of the under-bar operation."

At a minimum, says Schildkraut, the centerpiece of the bartender's 6-foot spin should be a 36-inch cocktail station with a 150-pound ice bin, double speed rack, ample glass storage, blender station, sink and space for a POS terminal.

The No. 1 complaint among operators? "Lack of storage space," says Schildkraut. "We try to make sure that we build in as much space as possible." The best solution, he says, is to plan a service pantry close to the bar to house the ice machine, compressors for beverage dispensers, refrigerator and backup glassware.

The most often overlooked design element? Space for a trash bin at each bartender's station.

tell the designer what kind of equipment is needed, and just as important, where to put it. It's the designer's job to put the cocktail station, beer tap or bottle cooler, glasswasher, cash station and glass storage within turning radius of the bartender. If the bar is large enough for two or three bartenders, the objective is to eliminate cross-traffic by making each bartender's station as self-sufficient as possible.

### Practical Considerations

Volume, traffic fluctuations and flow within the bar will help determine layout and equipment. Other decisions will be based on an operator's personal preferences and the drink program itself. Most of the practical considerations made in selecting equipment will be based on the checklist you go through with the designer and the physical limitations

of the space you have to work with.

• **Mechanical.** Before you select even the first piece of equipment, you must be sure the bar is provided with adequate plumbing and electrical service. Drainstands should be large enough, for example, and there should be enough electrical outlets (and circuits) to accommodate blenders, cash registers, credit-card imprinters, cappuccino or espresso machines, and other gizmos you might not have thought of. All mechanical work must be specified and constructed to meet local building and health codes. In many areas, for example, local health codes require a hand sink behind the bar, even if there's already a three-hole glasswashing sink.

• **Beer Dispensing.** If you decide on bottled beer, you'll need one or more beer coolers large enough to handle your estimated vol-

## EQUIPMENT BUYING

ume. Placement behind the bar is important, and coolers can take up space needed for other functions.

Draft beer can be dispensed by direct-draw or remote systems, depending on layout and volume. Direct-draw systems mean bartenders will be changing kegs, sometimes at peak periods. You also may or may not want to install mug frosters.

• **Spirits Dispensing.** A number of types of spirits-control systems are available, from a completely computerized drink dispenser, to mea-

sured-shot gun dispensers, to pre-measured pourers. Most open bars choose to use free-pour dispensing in front of customers, reserving control systems for service bars or high-volume operations. Remember that a spirits-dispensing system requires a storage area relatively close by for racks of inverted bottles.

• **Wine Dispensing.** Remote bulk-wine dispensers are available, as are nitrogen-flushed bottled-wine dispensers for wine-by-the-glass programs. Many restaurants and bars use dispensers for house wines and

use an attractive wine display to merchandise other bottled wines. Your clientele and projected volume will suggest which systems to use.

• **Beverage Dispensing.** The size of your operation will determine what size and how many compressors you'll need. Units can be self-contained under the bar or remote, depending on layout and volume.

• **Glasswashing.** Operators can choose in-sink, automatic or pass-through washers, or bussing glasses to the kitchen to be washed—or some combination of systems. Often, higher-volume operations will use a combination of automatic or pass-through washers and bussing glasses to the kitchen during peak periods.

If you run a high-volume bar, be sure that you have plenty of reserve glassware and ample storage area behind the bar. When under-bar washers can't handle peak loads, glasses washed in the kitchen will come out too hot for bar service and will need time to cool down.

• **Ice Stations.** Again, volume will dictate the size and output of the ice machine needed. Generally, machines should be located within easy access of the bar. A flaker also should be conveniently located to replenish the bar with flaked or crushed ice.

Ice bins at each cocktail station should be large enough to handle anticipated volume without frequent replenishment.

• **Glass and Bottle Storage.** Well brands and frequently used call brands should be readily available to bartenders in speed racks. Specialty brands and liqueurs should be stored somewhere within the 6-foot spin.

There should be ample space for glass storage, whether under-bar shelving or counter space, or, for stemware, overhead racks.

• **Back-Bar Coolers.** A back-bar cooler is generally required for storage of fruits, garnishes, mixers and wines. The size or number of coolers will depend on how much storage space is needed for these things as well as for storage of bottled beer and, perhaps, chilled glasses.

### The Ultimate Spin

I'm no designer, but I've tended bar in a lot of establishments that I wish had been better designed.

Once, I overheard the owners of one such emporium discussing plans to add a fourth bartender's station to an already crowded rectangular open bar in order to handle busy Friday and Saturday night volume. The problem wasn't manpower, it was flow behind the bar. Call brands were on an overhead shelf at either end of the bar, not easily accessible to the middle station (or to the bartenders at either end).

"Guys," I pleaded, "save yourself some money. Install a double speed rack at each station to accommodate call brands, and you'll increase productivity 30 percent."

They did. It worked.

There was one bar I worked, though, that met practically all the requirements a bartender could think of. The establishment had three nearly identical service bars, one serving a 220-seat restaurant and two serving a 600-seat nightclub.

Well brands were dispensed by a measured-shot gun. Call brands were free-poured from a triple speed rack, and specialty brands and liqueurs were on steps on the counter to the bartender's right.

The ice bin was large, holding both cubes and crushed ice. An ice machine and flaker were in an adjacent storeroom.

We stacked highball, rocks and Collins glasses on the bar top on either side of the ice bin. Stemware hung in racks directly in front of the bartender. Back-up glassware was kept in the storage room. A pass-through glasswasher was accessible to both bartender and wait staff.

House wines were dispensed through a gun from a bulk dispenser. Bottled still wines and sparklers were available on call from the restaurant floor. Popular wines were kept in the back-bar cooler. We sold only bottled beer, also kept in the cooler directly behind the bartender.

With everything from cash register to glasswasher within the 6-foot spin, one bartender could plant his feet and get down to the business of pouring drinks. In the showroom, as many as 2,000 drinks were served during the course of two shows, or about five and a half hours.

Because each bar was strictly a service bar, and because of the controls imposed, price-cost ratios averaged between 15 and 17 percent.

These bars were a truly remarkable example of functional design.

Now, if someone could only figure out how to make them pretty...

# EQUIPMENT BUYING

• **Smallwares.** There is a host of light equipment and smallwares essential to every bar operation, including blenders, ice scoops, cocktail shakers, shot glasses, pourers, cutting boards, towels and towel rings, wire strainers, fruit knives, fruit peelers, mixing spoons, corkscrews, garnish caddies, wine buckets, beer pitchers, stirrers, and more. Easily accessible drawers designed under the back-bar counter are a good place to store these items.

Depending on your drink program, you also may want to leave space for a cappuccino machine, espresso machine, coffee brewer or at the very least, a hot plate for a coffee pot.

• **Construction.** Under-bar construction should be of 18- to 20-gauge stainless steel at a minimum, to provide durability and minimize noise. The bar counter, fittings and shelves should be of hard, impervious materials that are easy to clean. Laminate, chrome, stainless, or materials with an acrylic or polyurethane covering are most commonly used.

Floors should be able to withstand water and traffic, and should be

easy to clean. Anti-fatigue mats are a blessing to bartenders standing on hard-surfaced floors.

Ventilation, heating and lighting also are important considerations. Air in the bar should be changed at least four to six times per hour, and despite stricter anti-smoking policies in many cities, a smoke filter is a smart addition to a good ventilation system.

Lighting over the bar itself should be bright, but recessed or indirect to prevent glare. Talk with your designer about providing under-bar lighting, also a blessing to bartenders.

Most under-bar components are manufactured to dimensions based on the height of an average bartender. Bar tops are typically 42 inches off the floor and 24 inches in depth; under-bar counters are 30 inches from the floor; aisle width from back bar to under bar is 36 inches. Keep bartenders in mind when you make modifications to your design.

Adding a double speed rack at a cocktail station, for example, will move the bartender four to six inches farther away from the bar top, impairing his reach. While we live in a predominantly righthanded world, some

bartenders, believe it or not, are left-handed. Cocktail stations that are too close-quartered will make it difficult for the lefty to get to the soda gun and mix drinks.

The goal is to design a bar that satisfies most conditions, but operators should realize that at certain times, the bar will be less efficient than originally planned.

## Selecting Vendors

Most experts recommend that operators stick with one manufacturer for all the under-bar components. That way, stainless gauges, fittings and components will match, making construction easier.

Beyond that, bar equipment should be selected on the basis of need and price/value considerations. Budget will determine some of the equipment specified. As long as it is from reputable manufacturers, you should have little trouble with whatever equipment you select.

If you're just doing some redesign or restructuring of the bar, used under-bar equipment is fine—as long as it's in good condition and meets local health codes.

It's generally smart to select an equipment dealer who can fulfill as many of your equipment needs as possible. "One-stop shopping" may not provide you with any discounts, but it will save you time and money in administration. When choosing a dealer, consider reputation, pre-purchase assistance in specifying the right equipment for your needs, payment terms, price and credit arrangements, delivery schedules, and service after the sale.

When all is said and done, once you and the designer have discussed most of the important considerations mentioned here, space can be laid out and equipment selected. Projecting product mix, volume and flow will determine the size of the bar and the equipment needed to make it run efficiently. When that task is accomplished, a glamorous facade can be wrapped around the whole package to create a functional and good-looking bar.

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## Who You Gonna Call?

Good bar design is a combination of form and function. There are excellent resources available for expert advice on how to make that combination a winner in your operation. From under-bar equipment to bar stools, the association headquarters listed here give you the names of members in your area that can help.

FOODSERVICE CONSULTANTS SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL (FCSI)  
12345 30th Ave., N.E., Suite H  
Seattle, WA 98125  
(206) 367-FCSI  
(Association of bar and restaurant designers.)

FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTORS ASSOCIATION (FEDA)  
332 S. Michigan Ave., #1840

Chicago, IL 60604  
(312) 427-9605  
(Association of bar and restaurant equipment dealers.)

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS (ASID)  
1430 Broadway, 22nd Floor  
New York, NY 10018  
(212) 944-9220

CONTRACT FURNISHINGS COUNCIL  
1190 Merchandise Mart  
Chicago, IL 60654  
(312) 321-0563

FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES SPECIALIST "BUYER'S GUIDE"  
1350 E. Touhy Ave.  
P.O. Box 5080  
Des Plaines, IL 60017-5080  
(Complete listing of bar and restaurant equipment manufacturers; available for \$25.)