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Designing FOR THE herd.

As David Attenborough might say, animals feel most comfortable in their natural habitats. People are the same, and that's why **interior design** is vital to the success of cafés.

A successful design can mean very different things for a café owner and a café user. For the café owner, the number one aim is to maximise economy of seating, create a space that is easy to operate in and to improve trade. For the café user, the design needs to create an environment they want to inhabit and feel at ease in.

The occasional Asian restaurant might get away with plastic chairs, peeling yellow walls and a fish tank as a result of cheap, great-quality food and good word of mouth, but it's not a formula for success. Interiors matter; they enhance the café user's experience, allowing them to relax as they sip their latte and people watch.

Of course, there's no such thing as one design fits all. That would be too easy. Essentially, the success of your design depends on your target demographic and what they look for in a café.

Social researcher, Hugh McKay, believes we're moving towards a society in which people are understood as herd animals.

"We're beginning to understand and appreciate the sense of identity and security we get from being part of the herd – part of a tribe," says McKay.



Evolution may be well progressed, but we still have an inbuilt tribe mentality, and people are more likely to revisit a cafe if it's occupied by similar people to them. By attracting the right people with the correct interior environment, you will ensure that the inhabitants have a sense of belonging and identity that inspires a feeling of being part of a herd or, in modern times, a community. The aim of the café design is to attract the biggest herd and keep them coming back for more.

One of the obvious ways of pinpointing the ideal design for your target market is to research your local area to look at the most popular cafés and what sort of people they're attracting. Alternatively, if you want to create something fresh and different, seek inspiration from different areas or types of spaces that are not necessarily cafés. In fact, it doesn't need to be an interior at all; it's basically a process of understanding what appeals to your target demographic.

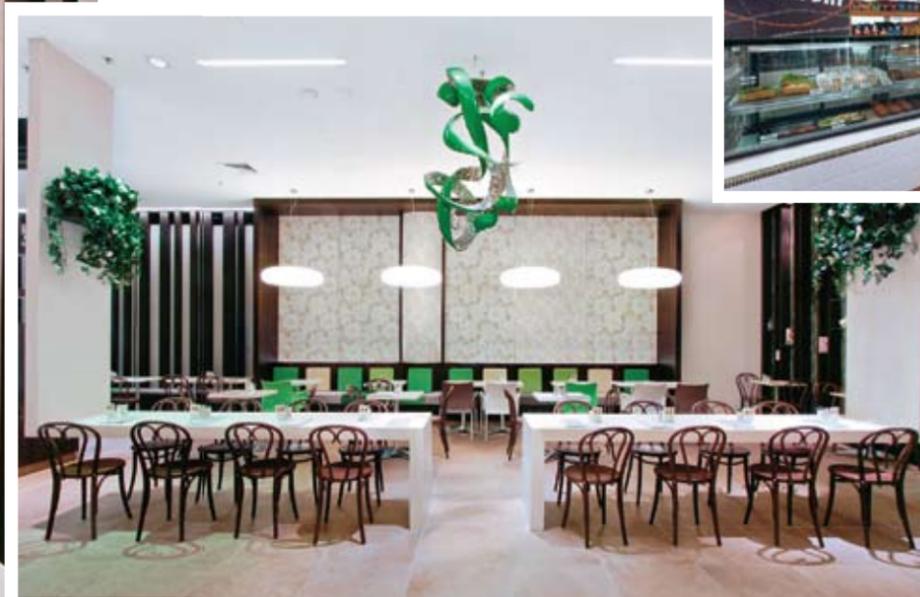
This might sound simple, but tailoring your café interior to your target market requires

extensive thought. Take the runaway success of Grilled, the healthy burger chain. It's not a café chain, but they have recognised that their standard interior design style needs to be flexible enough to suit different groups of people in different communities.

Consider its Surry Hills branch in Sydney, for example. The Surry Hills 'hipster' mentality embraces individuality and the one-size-fits-all chain concept would no doubt alienate its residents. However, the resulting grungy urban design of its Crown Street outlet with graffitied ceilings and concrete floors has had hipsters flowing in and paying over the odds for fancy burgers and bottles of Corona.

Here are three recently completed projects that have tapped into very different target markets.

The first, Chantilly's Café, is based in an up-market food court in Chatswood Chase, one of Sydney's premier shopping destinations for food and fashion. The new café is a striking contemporary design with natural overtones and clean



simple lines to showcase various artworks, creating a comfortable ambience and attracting fresh clientele in this new prestigious location.

Chosen for an international interior book publication, it has gained accolades. Custom-made high end furniture was designed to attract the desired clientele, and there is enough space to never feel claustrophobic. It has attracted a wide clientele, becoming a favourite with families, providing an oasis in the busy shopping centre.

Grab 'n' Go was a completely different proposition – a café designed for places of departure from train station platforms to airports, it had to appeal to everyone, particularly people in a rush. The coffee had to be great and quick, and the food had to be appealing in a non fast-food, healthy way ... the interior had to capture all of this.

Referencing travel by incorporating subway tiles and an industrial look with overhead stainless steel structures from which menus hang, the interior is both familiar and different enough to add interest. The menus, located directly above the corresponding food offer, make navigating the food options quick and easy and the purchase simple, because when people are in a rush, the last thing they want are complications.

An open shopfront and coffee area at the front of the store allows for easy entry and reduces any physiological fear of being stuck when the train arrives. Multiple service points ensure customers can be served quickly and be on their way.

Café Allegra in Northbridge, Sydney, is more your local café and, with a central position in a shopping centre atrium, it had no problem asserting its authority. Catering to everyone who goes to



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the centre, it needed to have broad appeal, from children to business people and retirees.

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With Allegra, we had a designated seating area for meals and business meetings and another space with lounges to relax and enough space right at the front for mothers with prams to navigate. This ensured that everyone's ideal café experience was covered. Framing all this, Design Portfolio used recycled timber to add warmth and white weatherboard to add familiarity and make people feel at home.

At the end of the day, the main impact on the café environment is the people who inhabit it. Robert Somme, the renowned author of *Personal Space* said, "All people are builders, creators, moulders and shapers of the environment: we are the environment"; but having the best possible interior environment will ensure that your café attracts the best possible herd.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Design Portfolio is an award winning company with over 25 years' experience in Retail Design. They are a multi-disciplinary team that integrates: retail design, interior design, industrial design and graphic design to create retail environments that improve your business.

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