

# MICHIGAN Restaurateur

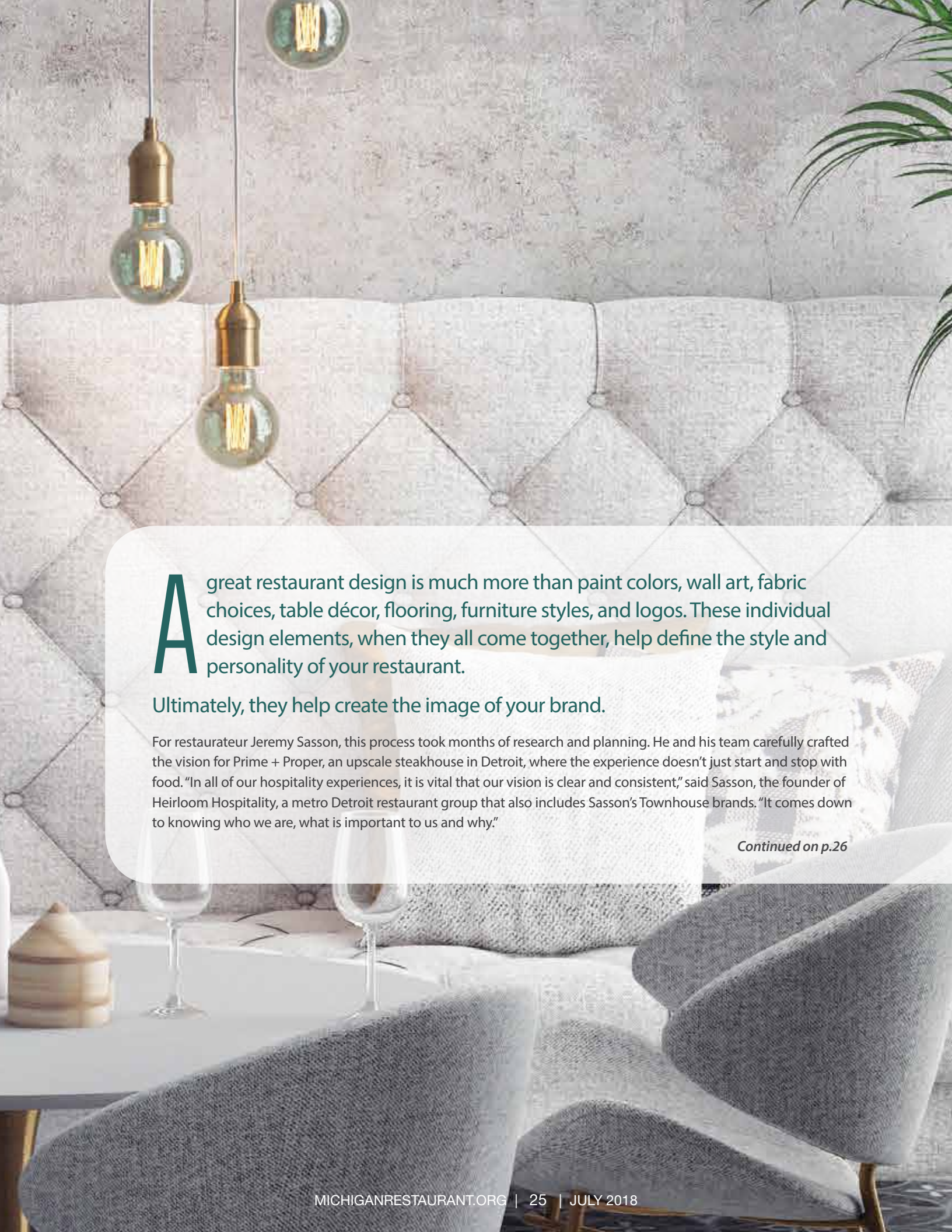
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## It's All About the Details

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# It's All About the Details



**A** great restaurant design is much more than paint colors, wall art, fabric choices, table décor, flooring, furniture styles, and logos. These individual design elements, when they all come together, help define the style and personality of your restaurant.

Ultimately, they help create the image of your brand.

For restaurateur Jeremy Sasson, this process took months of research and planning. He and his team carefully crafted the vision for Prime + Proper, an upscale steakhouse in Detroit, where the experience doesn't just start and stop with food. "In all of our hospitality experiences, it is vital that our vision is clear and consistent," said Sasson, the founder of Heirloom Hospitality, a metro Detroit restaurant group that also includes Sasson's Townhouse brands. "It comes down to knowing who we are, what is important to us and why."

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For Sasson, "it's about authenticity in all that we do." This philosophy is reflected in the 10,000 square foot restaurant's design, which includes its museum-like dry aging meat facility, where USDA prime beef and lamb mature until their executive butcher determines they are best to serve.

### It's All About the Details

A thoughtful restaurant design and branding plan work together to create a memorable guest experience.

Whether building from scratch or renovating existing space, crafting a

renovations over time as funds allow, Weller always starts by asking about the menu. She said this will often take her in a specific design direction. "I get a pretty good idea right away from the food," she said.

Then, Weller reviews as much information as possible, including paint colors, logos, architectural drawings, and photos. They discuss style and what the restaurateur likes and doesn't like. A visit to the site is often in order for measurements and to get a feel for the space.

### Designing with Purpose

Sasson wanted the design of Prime + Proper to evoke a specific level of comfort. "I want our guests to feel at home, like this is their restaurant, a place they can trust to bring their friends and family," he said.

Creating a one-of-a-kind experience for guests through design is how restaurants can differentiate themselves from each other, said Layne. "There are hundreds of options people can choose for dinner, from grocery stores and drive-throughs to fine dining establishments," he said. "Going out to eat is a form of entertainment. Of course, the food has to be great, and the service has to be great, but the price has to be in concert with the ambiance and service."

### Trending Power

Over time, trends shift, menus are modified, and décor evolves. According to Layne, every five to ten years, restaurateurs should consider refreshing their space. "You should reinvest as people's tastes change because you want to create a unique, pleasurable service," he said.

The economic downturn of the late 2000s and early 2010s hit many restaurants hard, but as the economy slowly recovered, many restaurateurs began renovating their spaces. Detroit has been the focus of a recent rebirth as a cool, hipster vibe has emerged among restaurants mixing vintage elements, such as retro arcades, with modern components like creative, high-end bar food, said Weller. "It's a fun time to be in Detroit," she said.

This combination of old and new has carried over as restaurants are currently using a lot of reclaimed wood from torn



Often described as a modern interpretation of a classic steakhouse in the heart of Detroit's Capitol Park neighborhood, Prime + Proper's overall design on two floors has a luxurious vintage feel, with glamorous contemporary touches in a striking black, gold and white color palette. This fusion of old and new is similar to what guests can expect with the food, as steaks and chops are properly aged and butchered the way they used to be years ago, then exquisitely prepared over charcoal and oak and presented with modern flair.

It is important for a restaurant's design to reflect the food, price point, and service, said Michael Layne, president of Marx Layne & Company, a strategic communications and public relations firm in suburban Detroit. "The design is part of the brand every bit as much as the menu offerings and service," he said. "The ambiance of the setting can greatly contribute to the enjoyment of the experience. Design is as important as the food you serve and the graciousness in which you serve it."

functional, beautiful restaurant takes research, planning, but more importantly, it requires a vision.

"People want a unique dining experience whether they're eating a taco or a rack of lamb," said Layne. "A huge part of the total experience is the restaurant design." All elements, from accessories and furnishings to the fixtures and fabrics, should pair perfectly to create a memorable dining experience.

As a design consultant for Premier Furniture in Westland, Karen Weller works with clients to bring their vision to life. Premier Furniture is a restaurant furniture supplier, specializing in chairs, barstools, table, and outdoor pieces.

Some restaurateurs have a clear plan in their head for how they want to outfit their dining areas. Others have a space but need guidance to find the right furnishings fit for their food. Whether they are looking to open up a completely new space and purchase furnishings all at once, or want to complete

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down older properties and barns to incorporate a bit of history into their space, said Weller.

Spring is also a time when restaurants open up their patios, so there has been attention on outdoor dining sets, particularly those that mix woods with metal, she added.

### Creating a Cohesive Brand

Branding is about creating ways for customers to easily recognize businesses and identify the products and services they offer. A well-planned branding strategy can set a business apart from its competitors.

Design plays a major role in establishing a presence in the marketplace, generating business through word of mouth, and creating a positive first impression with new guests.

For this reason, Sasson said, the development of your restaurant's vision has to be a group effort with your team. When everyone shares the same core values, it helps cultivate a brand that people understand because they learn about the "why" behind the business - why it operates the way it does - as opposed to just knowing what products and services it offers.

Design brings the vision to life visually. "The ambiance can make the difference between a success and a flop. Design is important whether you have a single outlet restaurant or are trying to communicate the brand in a uniform way across hundreds of locations," said Layne.

### Social Media Solutions

While design helps to create your brand, social media shares it with the world.

Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow restaurateurs to speak directly to loyal customers and potential guests. The benefits are undeniable: more traffic, increased engagement with customers, and an expanded reach to customers 24/7.

If the very definition of hospitality is centered on creating a warm and inviting environment for guests, then the way a business communicates on social media should mirror that generous and friendly manner. "Social media is a platform to cultivate conversations about your brand," said Sasson. "Your brand's vision and personality is projected to the public in how it presents itself and engages with guests."

Engaging photos and videos appeal to people beyond words, so don't underestimate the power of a beautiful imagery. Prime + Proper's Instagram account is filled with stunning snapshots of food, décor, and team members. Collectively, these photos tell a story.

Sasson said, "If you're going to take the energy to snap a photo and put it on social media, own it with pride and make sure it's perfect."

"Social media is a strong tool to put your restaurant's vision on display, it is a living, breathing extension of our business, so make sure it represented well," said Sasson.

A brand needs to be executed with precision, said Layne. He cautions against overdesigning and encourages restaurateurs to make sure all aspects of the design, brand, and image tie in together. "Those most successful manage to create a harmonious, total experience," he said.



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