

Staging the Experience Economy: Theme Restaurants in Klang Valley, Malaysia

Farah Adibah Che Ishak

PhD

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Royal Holloway, University of London

Declaration of authorship

I, Farah Adibah Che Ishak, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: 

Date: 13th September 2016

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Syukur, Alhamdulillah. Finally, I made it! I thank Allah SWT for giving me strength, blessing, determination and great health to complete my study. Earning a PhD is not about achievement, but it is about the journey that you embrace along the way. Indeed, in experiencing this memorable journey, I owed many people in many different ways who constantly supported and assisted me during the entire process of writing this thesis. These important people deserve a word of appreciation in my humble acknowledgements.

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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into the staging of experiences in themed restaurants in the Klang Valley metropolitan area in Malaysia. It is based on qualitative empirical research of three main sorts: semi-structured interviews with those involved in the production of theme restaurants (principally owners and managers but also in some instances specialists such as interior designers); focus group discussions with varied groups of Klang Valley theme restaurant customers about their experiences; and visual methods designed to document and evoke the material 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell, 2005) of the studied restaurants. Disciplinarily, the research develops 'critical hospitality management research' (CHMR) on the experience economy, informed by debates over the production of retail places and themed environments in Human Geography. Substantively, the thesis develops its arguments in four main empirical chapters: the first approaches theme restaurants as produced through marketing practices, focusing on theme concept development and the marketing and advertising media used by restaurants; the second concentrates on the material making of themed restaurants, with a specific emphasis on the designing of their 'dinescapes' (Ryu, 2005); the third extends the focus on restaurant materialities beyond decorative design towards their 'affective dinescapes', focusing in particular on the orchestration of diners' bodies and restaurant ambiance; and the fourth views theme restaurant experiences more from consumers' perspectives, tracing out a generic 'customer journey' from pre-visit preparations and expectations, to emotional responses during a visit, to post-visit evaluations and sharing practices (especially via social media). Conceptually, the thesis argues for understanding the theming of commercial hospitality spaces through four lenses: as a mode of 'introduction', signaling the product and experience on offer; as a mode of 'representation', using material decoration of the restaurant space to attach wider cultural meanings to the dining experience; as a mode of 'affect', engaging with consumers through the body and its physical senses; and as a mode of 'guidance', choreographing customer experiences.

Table of contents

Declaration of authorship	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	5
Table of contents	6
List of figures.....	9
List of tables	17
List of videos	18
Glossary.....	19
Abbreviations.....	20
1 Introduction.....	21
1.1 Theme restaurants and the commercial staging of experiences.....	25
1.2 Klang Valley, Malaysia.....	30
1.3 Thesis Structure.....	34
2 Hospitality management, the experience economy and themed environments: A contextual review.....	39
2.1 Critical hospitality management research	41
2.2 The experience economy and experiencescapes.....	52
2.2.1 The experience economy	52
2.2.2 Experiencescapes	60
2.3 Themed environments	66
2.3.1 Themed environments in the experience economy.....	66
2.3.2 Themed restaurants	70
2.4 Conclusion	73
3 Methodology.....	76
3.1 Research design.....	78
3.2 Ethical considerations	82

3.3	Interviewing	86
3.3.1	Sampling and selection of respondents	88
3.3.2	Conducting the semi-structured interviews	94
3.3.3	Recording and transcribing.....	96
3.4	Focus group discussions	98
3.4.1	Sampling and recruiting participants.....	99
3.4.2	Conducting focus groups	103
3.4.3	Recording and transcribing.....	105
3.5	Visual methods.....	105
3.6	Data management and analysis	109
3.7	Conclusion	120
4	Marketing and the emergence of themed restaurants in Klang Valley	122
4.1	Emerging Themes.....	126
4.1.1	Knowing the market	133
4.1.2	Personal Passions	139
4.2	Being different.....	147
4.3	Targeting customers.....	156
4.4	Reaching customers	161
4.4.1	Self-marketing	161
4.4.2	Influencer marketing	171
4.5	Conclusion	178
5	The material making of themed restaurants: Designing the DINESCAPE	179
5.1	The process of theme restaurant design	184
5.2	Material culture and the DINESCAPE	205
5.2.1	Special theme restaurant materials	207
5.2.2	International theme restaurant materials.....	236
5.3	Conclusion	251
6	Affective dinescapes: Ambiance, atmosphere and the theme restaurant	253
6.1	Engineering affects and ambiance	256
6.1.1	Affective engineering, architectural geographies and retail environments.....	256
6.1.2	Affective ambiance	259
6.2	Orchestrating bodies.....	261
6.3	Restaurant ambiances.....	281
6.3.1	Sonic ambiance:.....	284
6.3.2	Luminosity and ambiance:.....	290
6.3.3	Other aspects of ambiance.....	297
6.4	Affective control.....	301

7	Consuming themed restaurant experiences	306
7.1	Pre-visit.....	312
7.1.1	Deciding to visit	312
7.1.2	Price and expectation	324
7.1.3	Emotional expectations	327
7.2	During the visit	331
7.2.1	Affective dinescapes and consumer emotions	333
7.2.2	Customer journeys through experiencescapes	340
7.3	Post-visit	344
7.3.1	Evaluation and emotional value	344
7.3.2	Intentions to revisit	352
7.3.3	Remembering and sharing experiences	358
7.4	Conclusion	364
8	Conclusion	366
8.1	Research objectives.....	367
8.1.1	The marketing of themes and the marketing of experiences	368
8.1.2	Material design, management and staging of experiences.....	370
8.1.3	Affective dinescapes, atmospheres and ambiance	371
8.1.4	The consumer theme dining experience: A total customer journey	372
8.1.5	Functions of theming space.....	374
8.2	Future directions for research	379
	Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet	383
	Appendix 2 Consent Form.....	385
	Appendix 3 Interview Guide	386
	Appendix 4 Focus Group Guide	388
	Appendix 5 The Composition of Focus Group Participant.....	390
	Bibliography	392

List of figures

Figure 1.1	The science of socializing.....	22
Figure 1.2	The role of test tubes as theme materials as well as beverage container	23
Figure 1.3	Klang Valley area. Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia	30
Figure 1.4	The thesis structure	35
Figure 3.1	Summary of research design	82
Figure 3.2	Extract of list of restaurants in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2014)	93
Figure 3.3	Summary of visual data collected.....	108
Figure 3.4	Importing all interview transcripts into internal sources for easy viewing.....	111
Figure 3.5	Nodes developed and expanded through literature and emerged from data.	112
Figure 3.6	Highlighted data being coded into two different codes.....	113
Figure 3.7	Making memo or annotation for particular bits of data	113
Figure 3.8	Theme nodes for matrices columns	114
Figure 3.9	Creating participant nodes for matrices rows.....	115
Figure 3.10	Framework matrices view	116
Figure 3.11	Exporting matrices to excel	117
Figure 3.12	Printed matrices with manual analysis.....	118
Figure 3.13	Overall view of matrices with post-it-notes	118
Figure 4.1	Naili's Place: Large surfboard and fish mock-up feature the beach theme ambiance (Nurfamil, 2014)).....	127
Figure 4.2	Geographer Adventure: Interior with various materials presenting worldwide theming (Malaysianflavours, 2013)	127
Figure 4.3	T-Bowl: Ice cream dessert being presented in mini toilet bowl (Jerica, 2011)	127
Figure 4.4	T-Bowl: Toilet bowl seating for customers (Jerica, 2011).....	127
Figure 4.5	Geographer Adventure: Elephants' statues welcoming the customers (Geoventure, 2014).....	127
Figure 4.6	Dragon-i: Chinese's red theme ambiance with large, modern lantern and fengshui layout (Dragon-i, 2010)	129
Figure 4.7	Sahara Tent: Arabic theme décor and materials (Supermeng Malaya, 2015) .	129

Figure 4.8	Sweetree: ‘Hwahyejang’ or Korean traditioan footwear as part of decoration	129
Figure 4.9	Food served in silverware and layered with banana leaves in Indian theme restaurant (Wong, n.d.)	129
Figure 4.10	Dragon-i: Lion dance performance during the Chinese theme restaurant’s opening (Dragon-i, 2015).....	129
Figure 4.11	Pondok Malindo: Indonesian food is familiar to Malaysian cuisine	135
Figure 4.12	Chemistry Café: Mural of chemistry experiement set up connect the ambiance and the customers’ background	137
Figure 4.13	Upin Ipin: Two main characters of the cartoon series	138
Figure 4.14	Cowboy Café: The owner’s passion of cowboy made dream come true	140
Figure 4.15	Passage Thru India: The owner’s travelog being ‘painted’ on the wall.....	143
Figure 4.16	Passage Thru India: Indian woman doll.....	143
Figure 4.17	Palate Palette: Multiple types of locks on toilet door	146
Figure 4.18	Palate Palette: Colourful stairs giving ‘life’ to the formal type steps	146
Figure 4.19	Chemistry Café: Lab apparatus as mockup display	149
Figure 4.20	Chemistry Café:The ordering system at the counter merges the tagline of ‘the science of socializing’.....	150
Figure 4.21	Chemistry Café: The colour coded bands for drinks indicate the specified relationship status (Abdullah, 2014)	151
Figure 4.22	Sweetree: Cultural materials in Korean restaurant.....	153
Figure 4.23	Horizon Garden: Specially made props	154
Figure 4.24	Palate Palette: Unstandardized materials	155
Figure 4.25	Chemistry Café: A blog entry of the restaurant review (Eatdrinkkl, 2014a) ...	160
Figure 4.26	Garden Café: Restaurant’s website (Garden Café, 2015a).....	162
Figure 4.27	Garden Café: 360 view – a (Garden Café, 2015b)	162
Figure 4.28	Garden Café: 360 view – b (Garden Café, 2015b)	162
Figure 4.29	Garden Café: 360 view – c (Garden Café, 2015b).....	162
Figure 4.30	Garden Café: 360 view – d (Garden Café, 2015b)	162
Figure 4.31	Flora Kafe: The restaurant’s Facebook account posting pictures of customers in the resatruant and at the entrance to promote the place and ambiance (Flora Kafe, 2016).....	166

Figure 4.32	Promotion leaflet by Palate Palette	170
Figure 4.33	Promotion leaflet by Flora Kafe	170
Figure 4.34	Fisherman's Cove feature in a magazine (EAT, 2014a).....	175
Figure 4.35	EAT issue 8 magazine cover (EAT, 2014b)	175
Figure 4.36	Songket Restaurant: Awards received by the restaurant.....	176
Figure 4.37	Passage Thru India: Various recognitions received by restaurant	176
Figure 5.1	A sample design team for a major restaurant project (Baraban and Durocher, 2001, p. 32)	184
Figure 5.2	The phases of making and decorating a theme restaurant.....	185
Figure 5.3	Pondok Malindo: The overall seating layout in dining area	192
Figure 5.4	Pondok Malindo: The outdoor seating area offering a more relaxing dining experience	192
Figure 5.5	Pondok Malindo: The negative space underneath the stairs turned into a storage area	193
Figure 5.6	Pondok Malindo: The drinks preparation area underneath the stairs decorated to make use the negative space	193
Figure 5.7	Palate Palette: Artwork 1.....	204
Figure 5.8	Palate Palette: Artwork 2.....	204
Figure 5.9	Palate Palette: Artwork 3.....	205
Figure 5.10	Upin Ipin: The wall-size cartoon characters' stickers in the restaurant	208
Figure 5.11	Upin Ipin: The cartoon characters fill each wall in the restaurant	208
Figure 5.12	Upin Ipin: Own brand ice cream maker to attract the kids	209
Figure 5.13	Upin Ipin: Various types of books with the characters are presented	210
Figure 5.14	Upin Ipin: Varieties of merchandise are sold at the restaurant, offering a way to 'take away' the experience and to increase sales	210
Figure 5.15	Upin Ipin: Television screen showing the Upin Ipin promo and short series accompany the diners throughout their visit	211
Figure 5.16	Horizon Garden: The logo of the restaurant and its colour combinations.....	212
Figure 5.17	Horizon Garden: The restaurant painted with the corporate colour of the company	212
Figure 5.18	Wong Solo: The green colour of Wong solo is standard across other outlets, giving this restaurant a unique identity.....	213

Figure 5.19	Flora Kafe: Attractive restaurant entrance with floral decoration.....	215
Figure 5.20	Flora Kafe: Heavy flower decoration in the dining area	215
Figure 5.21	Flora Kafe: The ambiance inside the restaurant during the wonderland concept (Flora Kafe, 2013b)	216
Figure 5.22	Flora Kafe: Variation to white concept in floral theming (Flora Kafe, 2013a)..	216
Figure 5.23	Flora Kafe: A more urban and chic concept (Flora Kafe, 2011a)	217
Figure 5.24	Customers can upgrade their dining experience by requesting for special table setting (Flora Kafe, 2014a).....	218
Figure 5.25	Ayem Burger: One of the iconic theme props – cow skull	220
Figure 5.26	Ayem Burger: The welcome signage with horseshoes and old bikes pictures on to.....	220
Figure 5.27	Ayem Burger: Wooden and rustic cowboy signage with cowboy theme pictures	221
Figure 5.28	Ayem Burger: Photography corner where customers are free to wear vests, cowboy pants, boots, hats and accessories for memories.....	221
Figure 5.29	Ayem Burger: Guns are among the cowboy theme materials displayed on the wall.....	222
Figure 5.30	Ayem Burger: Swivel door purposely built to enhance the theme ambiance..	222
Figure 5.31	Chemistry Café: Staff wearing lab coats and looked like chemist in a lab	223
Figure 5.32	Chemistry Café: Ice blended drinks served in conical flask, to enhance the lab theme and lab dining experience for the diners in the restaurant	224
Figure 5.33	Chemistry Café: The white and brown sugar syrup served in syringe for customers to ‘inject’ into their drinks	224
Figure 5.34	Istana Bambu: The entrance and walkaway to the main dining area which was built from bamboo.....	225
Figure 5.35	Istana Bambu: Individual hut dining area offering a more privacy setting to the customers	226
Figure 5.36	Istana Bambu: Paddy field made the village scenery livelier when combined with the bamboo structures of the restaurant.....	226
Figure 5.37	Fisherman's Cove: The restaurant’s signage made of bamboo.....	227
Figure 5.38	Fisherman's Cove: Individual partitions for more private dining in the upper level dining area.....	228

Figure 5.39	Fisherman's Cove: Downstairs dining area catering to bigger groups of diners, with heavy use of netting	228
Figure 5.40	Fisherman's Cove: Bamboo and wood as the main theme materials being used in the structure of the restaurant, along with traditional hat decoration	229
Figure 5.41	Fisherman's Cove: The large nets give privacy for the diners from the passers-by, give a look of the ship, and contribute to the fisherman theme ambiance	229
Figure 5.42	Fisherman's Cove: Tanks filled with various fresh seafood for the customers to choose.....	230
Figure 5.43	Asmara Fern: Night view of the restaurant surrounding	232
Figure 5.44	Asmara Fern: Green entrance and roofed seating area awaits the customers	233
Figure 5.45	Asmara fern: Outdoor seating area surround by nature for customers who wanted to enjoy the soft breeze of air	233
Figure 5.46	Garden Café: Entrance gateway with colourful plants welcoming the customers to the restaurant.....	234
Figure 5.47	Garden Cafe: Option of roofed dining area for customers.....	234
Figure 5.48	Garden Café: Alfresco seating area surrounds with the water element and plants offer fresh air and calming ambiance	235
Figure 5.49	Garden Café: Customers are free to have a walk and enjoy the landscape surrounding the restaurant. There are a few seating areas and wooden swings for customers to relax in 'nature'	235
Figure 5.50	Bumbu Desa: Rod puppet figurines.....	238
Figure 5.51	Bumbu Desa: Rod puppet with various characters based on epic stories	238
Figure 5.52	Bumbu Desa: Rod puppet used to assist in food display and decoration	239
Figure 5.53	Bumbu Desa: The rod puppets displayed on the wall close to the seating area, so customers will have a closer view of the original figurines	239
Figure 5.54	Bumbu Desa: Wash area, decorated using the craft framed mirror, wooden materials and batik pillars, as a space to deliver the arts and culture of Indonesia	240
Figure 5.55	Bumbu Desa: The original tools used in food preparation of gado-gado	241
Figure 5.56	Bumbu Desa: Pictures of local people in daily life to enhance the village-like ambiance	241

Figure 5.57	Bumbu Desa: Specially designed uniform incorporate the Indonesia theme ..	242
Figure 5.58	Pondok Malindo: Staff wearing batik uniform originally from Indonesia	243
Figure 5.59	Passage Thru India: Three women with pot on head	245
Figure 5.60	Passage Thru India: Bullock cart's wheel	245
Figure 5.61	Passage Thru India: Horse with accessories	245
Figure 5.62	Passage Thru India: A man wearing an army uniform holding a spear	245
Figure 5.63	Passage Thru India: Wall paintings, colours and decorations inspired by the owner's journey to India.....	246
Figure 5.64	Passage Thru India: Various props and paintings showing the art and culture of India	246
Figure 5.65	Pondok Malindo: The paintings of wayang kulit [shadow puppet] characters hung on the wall to illustrate the Indonesian culture	247
Figure 5.66	Pondok Malindo: The educational-sharing space created in international theme restaurant to present the source of knowledge, arts and culture of the country.	248
Figure 5.67	Sweetree: The Korean arts props	249
Figure 5.68	Sweetree: Reading corner with book shelf full of Korean books and magazines	249
Figure 5.69	Sweetree: Cultural-exchange corner where customers are free to try on the traditional Korean costume and take a closer look at the Korean materials on the shelves.....	250
Figure 6.1	Pondok Malindo: Theme materials at the entrance.....	264
Figure 6.2	Bumbu Bali: Symbolic and affective theming materials outside the restaurant	265
Figure 6.3	Flora Kafe: Entrance with heavy flower decoration	266
Figure 6.4	Flora Kafe: Maximizing the space for seating by decorating the entrance and make it special.	267
Figure 6.5	Upin Ipin: Mini playground provided to ensure the kids were happy during their visit to the restaurant	270
Figure 6.6	Coliseum Café: The bar area with old wooden bar and original seating furniture	273
Figure 6.7	Coliseum Café: Dining area and its same table layout since 1921	274

Figure 6.8	Coliseum Café: The yellow lines to divide the dining and bar areas that mark the restriction for women to enter the bar space	274
Figure 6.9	Istana Bambu: Bersila seating in individual hut gives customers a relaxing and private dining experience	275
Figure 6.10	Wong Solo: Bersila seating in spaces separated by a woven bamboo screen .	276
Figure 6.11	Passage Thru India: The lower seating area was quite popular among the youngsters	277
Figure 6.12	Passage Thru India: Cushion and pillows to give comfort to the diners	278
Figure 6.13	Bumbu Bali: The element of nature and culture sculptures materialities	283
Figure 6.14	Passage Thru India: The specific area designated for the live performance....	287
Figure 6.15	Asmara Fern: The natural sound from the waterfall accompany the customer throughout the dining occasion.....	288
Figure 6.16	Paradise Inn: Lantern shaped lighting	292
Figure 6.17	Bumbu Desa: Decorative bamboo lamps to spotlight the food displayed	292
Figure 6.18	Bumbu Bali: Lamps made of bamboo.....	292
Figure 6.19	Fisherman’s Cove: Bamboo lamps in the shape of bubu (a type of fish trap in Asia’s traditional fishing method).....	292
Figure 6.20	Wong Solo: Bright lightings to accommodate family and kids coming to the restaurant	292
Figure 6.21	Pondok Malindo: Fretwork lamps symbolised the Indonesia arts	292
Figure 6.22	Istana Bambu: Picturesque night view	294
Figure 6.23	Istana Bumbu: Lights at each corner and covered with long sheer curtain give dramatic impact to the ambiance	294
Figure 6.24	Flora Kafe: Lighting as part of the luxurious, spectacular decoration (Flora Kafe, 2011b).....	296
Figure 6.25	Songket restaurant: It is necessary to install air-conditioners in restaurants when considering Malaysia's hot and humid weather.....	299
Figure 6.26	Bumbu Bali: The portable fan/air-conditioner ready in the restaurant to ensure customers feel the cool air and can comfortably dine indoors.....	300
Figure 7.1	Stages of customer experience	309
Figure 7.2	Foursquare website listing Flora Café (Anon., n.d.)	320
Figure 7.3	Blog review of Bumbu Bali (Sue, 2012).....	321

Figure 7.4	Blog review of Bumbu Bali (continued) (Sue, 2012).....	322
Figure 7.5	Food cooked and served in tajine pots (Eatdrinkkl, 2014b)	334
Figure 7.6	Customer expectation zones (Shaw and Ivens, 2002, p.40).....	350
Figure 7.7	Hierarchy of emotional value by Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden (Shaw et al., 2010, p. 35).....	351
Figure 7.8	How frequency of exposure to an experience leads to the ‘blight of the bland’	356
Figure 7.9	A tweet on visit to theme restaurant (Noona, 2015)	360
Figure 7.10	Checked-in at theme restaurant (Lala, 2015)	361
Figure 7.11	A post of a visit to Sweetree on instagram (Aliffoslan, 2015)	361
Figure 7.12	Video of birthday celebration at theme restaurant posted on Facebook account (Lala, 2015)	362

List of tables

Table 1.1	Principal statistics of food and beverage services by industry, 2010. Source: Adapted from Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM).....	32
Table 2.1	Illustrative examples of wider social science disciplines and debates being engaged by research into hospitality (adopted from Morrison and O’Gorman, 2008, and edited by author)	46
Table 3.1	Details of the participants for interview and duration of session	97
Table 4.1	Overview of theme restaurants.....	132
Table 4.2	Overall marketing strategies by themed restaurant	163
Table 4.3	Themed restaurant with websites address	164
Table 4.4	Themed restaurants' social media accounts	168

List of videos

*Play the videos through the attached CD

Video 4.1	Coliseum Café featured in Ho Chak TV Programme (Coliseum Café, 2014)	173
Video 4.2	Songket Restaurant featured in Jalan-jalan Cari Makan TV Programme (Songket Restaurant, 2012)	174
Video 5.1	Bumbu Desa: The video clip of the Indonesian village theme ambiance	243
Video 6.1	Istana Bambu: Big, dramatic and thematic entrance.....	263
Video 6.2	Chemistry Café: Design and seating arrangement in the restaurant.....	269
Video 6.3	Upin Ipin: The ambiance to attract the kids.....	271
Video 6.4	Passage Thru India: The lower seating style with soothing Indian music.....	279
Video 6.5	Istana Bambu: Sound of nature to accompany the village theme ambiance ...	280
Video 6.6	Bumbu Bali: The soothing music in Bali theme ambiance	282
Video 6.7	Garden Café: Plants and trees to divide the restaurant ambiance with the public area	290
Video 6.8	Flora Kafe: Comfortable and cosy dining ambiance.....	297
Video 6.9	Colesium Café: Street noise	302
Video 6.10	Fisherman's Cove: The disturbing/distracting neighbourhood	303

Glossary

Ayam Penyet	A fried chicken dish consisting of fried chicken that is smashed with the pestle against mortar to make it softer, served with rice, sambal chilli paste, slices of cucumbers, fried tofu and tempeh
Bersila	Sit with the legs crossed
Bubu	A type of fish trap in Asia's traditional fishing method
Gado-gado	an Indonesian salad of slightly boiled, blanched or steamed vegetables and hard-boiled eggs, fried tofu and tempeh, shrimp chips served with a peanut sauce dressing
Joget Rasa Sayang	A type of Malay dance
Martabak or Murtabak	Folded crepe filled with spices and meat
Onde-Onde or Buah Melaka	Dessert made of rice flour with palm sugar in the middle, roll into ball and covered with coconut flakes
Pecal Lele	A deep fried catfish dish consists of catfish served with traditional sambal chili paste, often served with fried tempeh and steamed rice
Soto Betawi	Traditional Indonesian soup made of braised or fried beef and offal coked in a coconut milk broth, with fried potato and tomato and served with plain rice and chips

Abbreviations

CHMR	Critical Hospitality Management Research
CJM	Customer Journey Mapping
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DBKL	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur or Kuala Lumpur City Hall (the local authority charged with the administration of Kuala Lumpur city)
FAFH	Food Away From Home
JJCM	Jalan-jalan Cari Makan (TV Program featuring foods and restaurants in Malaysia)
WOC	Word of Click
WOM	Word of Mouth

1

Introduction

You are in the Shah Alam district of Klang Valley (or of Greater Kuala Lumpur as it is sometimes known). It's really hot that afternoon and you are mingling with the city crowds, looking to find a place for lunch with your friends. There are lots of students about; this is an area with many colleges. You are aiming for a place offering tasty food, at an affordable price, and cosy enough to let you cool down from the heat. Your eye is caught, though, by something unusual. You see a sign for "Chemistry Café + Lab". Peering in the front door you see an array of laboratory apparatus. You are greeted by the warm and friendly owner. Your eyes catch a huge mural of a chemistry experiment set up on the wall. The overall look is a mixture of modern interior design and some sort of lab theme. You decide to text your friends and to tell them to meet you here. You approach the counter to order a drink while you wait, glancing at the desserts on display and making a mental note to try one of them later, maybe after the chicken carbonara that you pencil in for a main course. You order a "Lady Boss Chiller" (a coffee frappe) to sooth your heated body. Then, the cashier asks: "May I know which is your colour?" while pointing to the board in front of you. Labelled with the phrase "#Chemistry: The Science of Socializing", this board lists different colours that relate to various different relationship statuses. You pick "Green"; "Complicated".



Figure 1.1 The science of socializing

You pay and take a seat at the corner of the café. The air conditioned air feels good. Your feet start tapping the floor, following the pop melody playing in the background. You can smell freshly brewed coffee, as your seat is not far from the barista and the coffee machine. You find yourself gazing at the Periodic Table displayed on the wall, your mind wandering as you remember how your Chemistry teacher used to force the whole class to memorise the first 20 elements. You struggle now to name them. After a while, a waitress wearing a lab coat serves you your frappe; you are a little surprised that it arrives in a conical flask. There is a green band on the flask's neck; you look around and notice the coloured bands of your fellow diners. It feels a little cheeky to know these strangers' relationship statuses. You wonder what complications they imagine you have. Maybe it makes you seem deep and interesting! Along with the flask, the waitress hands you a syringe filled with a clear liquid. You ask what it is for; she tells you it is sugar syrup and you can 'inject' the sugar into the drink to your own taste. You quickly inject a little sugar and, transporting yourself back to school lessons, you dust down your somewhat rusty chemistry experiment skills and find yourself stirring the contents of the flask with a rotation of your wrist. It makes you smile. Your friends arrive and once they have settled and you have all ordered your food you find yourself sharing reminiscences of your school days. Everyone has something to laugh about.



Figure 1.2 The role of test tubes as theme materials as well as beverage container

Let us end this fictionalised narrative there. We will return to the Chemistry Café at other points, but for now the somewhat idealised account I have just offered can be used to introduce the key concerns of this thesis and the research upon which it is based. The Chemistry Café really exists; opened in 2014, it is one of a number of themed restaurants that have been developed over the last decade or so in the Klang Valley area as part of a growing and increasingly diversified hospitality sector providing consumers with eating out experiences. 'Experience' is a key word here. Although, in my fictional account, your reason for patronizing this venue was to have a meal with friends, the venue you chose offers much more than just a functional space in which to do this. It is a distinctive place. It has a concept – the chemistry lab – that has been decided upon by the proprietors and which gives the restaurant a distinctive identity or 'difference'. The restaurant provides food and drink, but the place has much else in it besides, a range of objects and 'props' that help to perform the restaurant theme (lab apparatus by the door, the periodic table on the wall, the conical flask in which you got your coffee, the lab coat worn by the waitress, and so on). It's a place with its own distinctive 'atmosphere', that you can sense: literally, when it comes to the cooling effect of the air-conditioning; more generally when you think about the music, the sense of youthful fun, or the breaking down of social barriers promoted by the relationship status declarations. It's also a stage where your own personal biography and circumstances shape your particular experience of the place: your memories of school days; your complicated love life; the friends you meet; all shaped the fictionalised experience I have projected on to you, my reader. In consequence, the account I have proposed is but one of many consumer experiences that could happen in this restaurant. Different diners might have different 'customer journeys' to, through and from the café (Norton and Pine, 2013).

1.1 Theme restaurants and the commercial staging of experiences

This thesis is an investigation into the staging of experiences in the themed restaurants of the Klang Valley area. It is concerned with how and why these places are produced and consumed. Three central concerns underpin its more specific analyses and arguments. First, it is concerned with the commercial production and consumption of *experiences*. Since Pine and Gilmore's promotional advocacy of an 'experience economy' where 'work is theatre and every business a stage' (1999), there is now a body of scholarship critically interrogating this idea. Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999, 2013) argued that consumer-focused businesses should see themselves not as producers of goods or services but as makers of experiences, memorable events that in some way transform the consumer. Their argument is, in essence, that experiences can be more highly priced and allow higher value and profit creation than goods or services. Researchers and professionals have long argued that restaurants are more than just a place and offer an experience to their customers (Josiam et al., 2004; Ryu and Han, 2011; Ariffin et al., 2011; Josiam and Henry, 2014). For some, developing these experiences involves a performative engagement with patrons (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), putting on an ever more impressive 'show' through theatrical labour (Crang, 1994). However, also important to the experience of eating out are elements of 'sensory experience', appeals to the customers' five senses through the interactions of taste, sight, touch, smell and hearing (Heung and Gu, 2012). According to Ariffin et al. (2011), the harmonising of the more 'tangible / physical elements' and the more 'atmospheric elements' is crucial to positive evaluations of dining out purchases / restaurants.

Second, this thesis is particularly concerned with the material *staging* of experiences. In other words, a principal concern of the thesis is the restaurant as a material setting or place that in itself plays a crucial and active role in experience production and consumption. Such an emphasis has begun to emerge within the experience economy literature in general, including through a focus on so-called 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell,

2005, 2010) and on the role of 'spatial design' within experience economy settings (Svabo et al., 2013). Within existing research on restaurants, various specific frameworks have been developed to approach them as material spaces. These are often presented in capitalised formats. Thus, there is the influential SERVICESCAPE model, a term initiated by Bitner (1992), that distinguishes three key dimensions of customer service spaces: ambient conditions; spatial layout and functionality; and signs, symbols and artefacts. More specifically on restaurants, Ryu (2005) introduced the DINESCAPE model, setting out a schema of material elements that constitute the restaurant experience. In many ways, this thesis is an attempt to develop Ryu's ideas into a fuller account of the production and consumption of experiences in restaurants.

In so doing, a third concern also underpins the thesis: *themed environments*. There is a broader literature on themed environments to which this thesis contributes, that I will discuss in Chapter 2 (see, for example, Gottdiener, 1997). For Firat and Ulusoy, the term thematization refers to "the patterning of space, activity or event to symbolize experiences and/or senses from a special or a specific past, present, or future place, activity or event as currently imagined" (2009, p. 777). In the context of this thesis, themed restaurants were of particular interest because they put great emphasis on their 'staging' of a dining out experience. For Beardsworth and Bryman (1999, p. 228) a theme restaurant is "an eating establishment which clothes itself in a complex of distinctive signs that are largely extraneous to the activity of eating itself". Puspita (2015, p. 291) further explains that the concept applied to a theme restaurant diverts the attention of customers from the food to other elements of the environment, involving heavy investment in décor and interior design (Noorkhizan et al., 2012). Various terms exist for theme restaurants as understood in this thesis. Among others, this includes: an atmosphere restaurant (Kivela et al., 2000); a fun experience restaurant or place of "eatertainment" (Josiam and Henry, 2014); and 'ethnic' (Ha and Jang, 2010) or ethnically themed restaurants (Ebster and Guist, 2005). Across these variations, all theme restaurants share similar goals – "to attract customers by promising a novel restaurant experience involving entertaining décor and casual

dining” (Weiss et al., 2004, p. 24). They focus on giving a distinct character to an environment (Munoz and Wood, 2009) through deliberate consideration and co-ordination of its various material elements (Lego et al., 2002; Gordon, 2007).

In pursuing these core concerns, the thesis has a particular disciplinary positioning. My own background is in hospitality, and specifically food and beverage, management research. In the interdisciplinary spirit of ‘critical hospitality management research’ (or CHMR), which is discussed further in Chapter 2, this study brought together that interest with insights from Human Geography. This cross-disciplinary combination shaped a primary focus on the production and consumption of theme restaurant *places*. In other words, the core concerns with the experience economy, the staging of experiences, and the theming of restaurant environments were seen through the geographical lens of place production and consumption.

This interdisciplinary combination of Human Geography and hospitality management research generates two broad contributions that the thesis makes to the CHMR field. First, the thesis brings theoretical insights from Human Geography on place into dialogue with the hospitality management research community. Engagements between CHMR and Human Geography are comparatively rare but have great potential (Lugosi, 2009). The thesis draws on Human Geography’s concern for places as social constructions in order to argue that attending to places of hospitality (both their material forms and social dynamics) is a powerful way to discern the social and commercial constructions of hospitality. Human Geography has understood that places make manifest social processes; this thesis argues that places of hospitality make manifest social processes of hospitality. More specifically, the thesis presents particular conceptual approaches to place and its production that have wider potential within CHMR. In outline these involve recognising: places as meaningful imaginations and representations (especially Chapters 4 and 5); places as material, built forms (Chapter 5); the more atmospheric and ambient elements of place (Chapter 6); and that places generate complicated emotional geographies for those

using / inhabiting them (Rose et al., 2010). Second, the thesis is notable within the CHMR field for its sustained development of an interpretive, qualitative methodology. There is a comparative paucity of qualitative studies within the hospitality management field. This is apparent both more generally and with respect to existing research on this thesis' more specific concerns, namely restaurant environments and experiences (e.g. Ryu and Han, 2011). Given the meaningful and experiential character of hospitality products, the comparative absence of qualitative work is a significant loss, limiting the capacity to understand their production and consumption. This thesis provides a sustained corrective exception, as it uses qualitative methods to explore the meaningful, affective and emotional aspects of theme restaurants.

Related to its core concerns and disciplinary positioning, the research reported in this thesis had one overall aim and four more specific objectives (which were deliberately highlighted in the Chemistry Café description with which this introduction began). The overall aim was to investigate the production and consumption of Klang Valley theme restaurant places. The more specific objectives, pursued in turn across the four main substantive thesis chapters, are:

1. To analyse theme concept development in Klang Valley restaurants, and its role in their marketing;
2. To analyse the material DINESCAPE (Ryu, 2005) of Klang Valley theme restaurants, and their role in the staging of dining out experiences;
3. To analyse the atmospheric, ambient and affective materialities of theme restaurants in Klang Valley;
4. To analyse the consumer experiences of theme restaurants in Klang Valley.

Theoretically, these objectives develop a broader argument about the role of themed environments in the staging of commercial experiences. In outline, the thesis presents four different perspectives on themed environments, each highlighting a slightly different role played by theming within the experience economy. The first casts

theming as a process of introduction, in which themes, in a manner similar to logos and brands, are short-hands or signs for the experience being produced and consumed. The second casts theming as a process of representation, understanding themed spaces as more than just singular signs of a product identity and instead as arrays of objects and materials that constitute meaningful environments and places that consumers are invited to inhabit. Here, then, theming is above all about the production of meaningful places that are characterised by their difference or 'elsewhereness' to the everyday space surrounding them. The third perspective developed in the thesis sees themed environments in terms of affect, arguing that theming involves more than representation; themed places play with the imagination through the body and its physical senses. In other words, here theming is understood in terms of the production of places that consumers experience and inhabit. Themes are not simply read and interpreted: they impress themselves on customers; they are felt. Fourthly, the thesis argues for an understanding of themed environments as experience guidance. Emphasising the co-production of experiences by both consumers and theme 'imagineers' (Chaney, 1997), this perspective recognises how themed environments are encountered within specific 'customer journeys' (Norton and Pine, 2013) and generate specific and varying customer experiences and feelings. Together, these four perspectives on theming extend existing literatures on themed environments and provide a conceptual framework to guide future studies on themed environments within the field of 'critical hospitality management research' (CHMR). Chapter 8 returns to these four perspectives as part of the thesis conclusions.

1.2 Klang Valley, Malaysia

As previously mentioned, this study took place in Klang Valley, a metropolitan area of Malaysia. Let me provide some introductory context of the area and the rationale for basing the empirical research there. Klang Valley is an enclave within the state of Selangor, on the central west coast of Peninsular Malaysia (Ali and Abdullah, 2012). Klang Valley (less frequently known by its new name of ‘Greater Kuala Lumpur’) extends beyond the more narrowly defined boundaries of Kuala Lumpur (the capital of Selangor and Malaysia). Specifically, it is officially defined as “the area covered by 10 municipalities, each governed by local authorities: DB Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), Perbadanan Putrajaya, MB Shah Alam (MBSA), MB Petaling Jaya (MBPJ), MP Klang (MPK), MP Kajang, MP Subang Jaya (MPSJ), MP Selayang, MP Ampang Jaya (MPAJ) and MD Sepang” (Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), 2010, p. 124). The following Figure 1.3 from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) maps these Klang Valley’s districts, illustrating the size of the area and the population of each of its parts (in 2010).

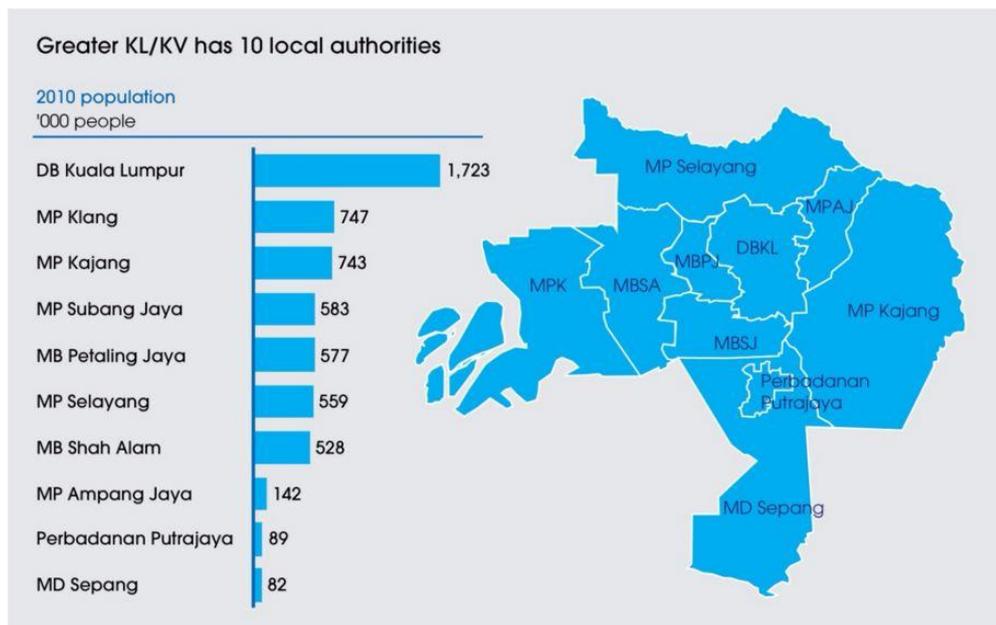


Figure 1.3 Klang Valley area. Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia

Malaysia in general, and Klang Valley more specifically, has a multi-ethnic population, constituting primarily of the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities (Josiam et al., 2007). In 2010, a report by Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) (2010, p. 124) stated that Klang Valley was home to approximately 6 million people, and contributed about RM263 billion to the nation's Gross National Income (GNI). This translates to 20% of the national population contributing 30% of the nation's GNI, suggestive of the economic dynamism and comparative privilege of the area, which in turn is manifest in a concentration of consumer culture developments.

In addition, these consumer cultures are not only shaped by the local population but by the tourists who travel to Malaysia. The expansion of the tourism industry in Malaysia has positively contributed towards the development of sub-sector activity in the hospitality industry, especially the restaurant sub-sector (Chang, 2006; Pin, 2014), lodging industries (Mohi, 2012), and recreational and leisure sectors as well as transportation. Data from Tourism Malaysia (2016) records the rising number of tourist arrivals in recent years: 15.70 million tourists in 1994 increasing to 27.44 tourists million in 2014, with net revenue increasing from RM 29.7 billion in 2004 to RM 72.0 billion for the year 2014.

In general, as Klang Valley has become the metropolitan centre for Malaysia's population, business activity and tourist attractions, this has led to rapid development of the areas hospitality sector, including restaurants. Economic growth and stability has enabled the urban populations to spend more on food, and more often than before (Ali and Abdullah, 2012). A report by the Department of Statistic Malaysia (DOSM) (2012) reports that there has been an increase in the number of food and beverage establishments in Malaysia as a whole from 82,325 in 2001 to 145,320 in 2010. The following Table 1.1 provides a statistical breakdown for food and beverage services across Malaysia in 2010.

Industry	Number of establishments	Total
Food services		118,277
Restaurants	44,148	
Cafeteria/canteen	3,923	
Fast food restaurants	1,621	
Food stalls	68,585	
Beverage services		14,660
Pubs, bar, coffee houses, cocktail lounges	1,620	
Coffee shops	7,556	
Other drinking places	5,484	
Beverage services	14,660	
Pubs, bar, coffee houses, cocktail lounges	1,620	
Catering services		12,383
Event/food caterer	2,022	
Other food activities	10,361	
	TOTAL	145,320

Table 1.1 Principal statistics of food and beverage services by industry, 2010. Source: Adapted from Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM)

The growth in these food and beverage services, including restaurants, reflects growing consumer cultures of eating out (Shamsudin and Selamat, 2005; Ali and Abdullah, 2012). The pattern of eating has changed, with fewer families sitting down to eat “three regular meals” a day at home (Shin, 1998; Zainuddin, 2012) and increasingly consuming food-away-from-home (FAFH) or dining out. The rapidly growing foodservice market today supported this phenomenon with constant product and service development aimed at attracting customers (Pin, 2014). Certainly, Klang Valley has a remarkable number of commercial places in which to eat out: from roadside stalls to fine-dining restaurants; from local fare to international offerings. The industry caters for workers to have breakfast in the morning; supplies lunches to workers, shoppers and school children in the afternoon; and serves families and other social groups for dinner and weekend activities (Ali and Abdullah, 2012). On an occasional basis, it is common for families and friendship groups to treat themselves by dining out or to celebrate special occasions at restaurants (Syed Marzuki, 2012).

Growing income levels have a significant positive correlation with increases in the consumption of FAFH (Fabiosa, 2008). Ismail (2012) further notes that improvement of household income often goes hand in hand with increases in daily working hours, which in turn makes Malaysians ever more busy and likely to eat out more frequently. Other researchers mention that as household income increases, total monthly expenditure on dining out also increases (Heng and Guan, 2007; Jaeger et al., 2005). This statement is also supported by Veeck and Veeck (2000), who agreed that the greater frequency of dining in restaurants can be associated with an increase in disposable income (see also Kivela, 1997). Statistics from DOSM (2012) report increasing expenditure on restaurants and hotels from monthly income: in 2005 being calculated as RM213 of RM1,953 income, in 2010 as RM239 per month from RM2,190 income.

Another important issue in understanding the consumer culture in Klang Valley is the additional number of women in the workforce. According to Kim (2002), as women's educational level increases, women's labour force participation increases, which in turn raises household income and reduces the amount of time available to prepare meals. The greater number of dual earner households leads to more households dining out to enjoy leisure, as well as to save meal preparation time (see Herbst and Stanton, 2007).

Klang Valley thus provides a valuable empirical setting for the research in a number of ways. It is an area where restaurants, including the recent developments in theme restaurants that are this study's particular concern, are part of a growing consumer culture, within which the experience of eating out is becoming increasingly popular. It is an area where there is limited existing research on the restaurant sector, and none on theme restaurants. Given the Euro-American focus of some of the principal writings on both the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013) and themed environments (Gottdiener, 1997) (though see Simpson, 2001, 2009), the Malaysian context has a particular value, allowing a development of these

ideas in a different cultural and economic context. The research sampling placed particular emphasis on exploring 'locally' originated forms of theming rather than branches of international themes (such as the Hard Rock Café branch in Kuala Lumpur), in part to ensure the local developments of theme restaurant ideas were emphasised (see Chapter 3 for more information on the purposive sampling strategy adopted).

1.3 Thesis Structure

The broad structure of the thesis and its eight chapters is presented in Figure 1.4. Specifically, following this Introduction **Chapter 2** sets out the rationale for the research through a contextual review of key literatures on hospitality management, the experience economy and themed environments. Most generally, then, the chapter begins by positioning the study within the wider emergence of a body of work known as 'critical hospitality management research' (CHMR). It is noted that a key aspect of CHMR is an engagement of managerial studies of the hospitality industries, such as the restaurant industry, with wider debates in the social sciences. In that context, the engagement of this study with work in Human Geography on the production and consumption of place is highlighted. The discussion also considers how CHMR has promoted qualitative, interpretive research on the hospitality industries, and how such work can combine critical insight with practical application. The second part of the chapter turns to the body of work on the 'experience economy', a notable focus for CHMR. The genesis of the literature is sketched out from the seminal work of Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999), and its application to the restaurant industry is explored. Two main arguments are developed. First, the 'theatrical' metaphors used within the experience economy literature are highlighted. Second, their extension through a focus on material 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell, 2005) is emphasised. The

argument here is that for all their ephemerality, commercial experiences are made through the materialities of place. Finally, in its third part the chapter provides an overview of existing research on themed environments in general and theme restaurants more specifically. Theming is cast as a material and symbolic production of place. Overall, then, Chapter 2 sets out the rationale for the study's interest in the production and consumption of theme restaurant places.

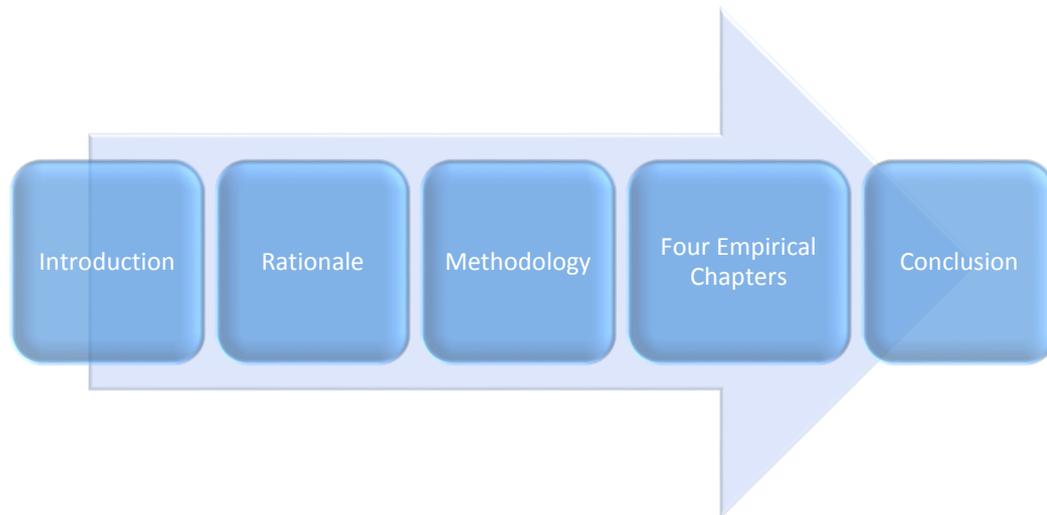


Figure 1.4 The thesis structure

Chapter 3 details the methodology of the study and its empirical fieldwork in Klang Valley. It sets out in detail the overall design of the research, the key methods and data collection procedures, and the approach taken to the qualitative data analysis. First, then, it narrates how the research topic was developed and how this led to the judgement that a broadly qualitative research approach was most appropriate. The consequent ethical considerations and their management are also outlined here. Second, the chapter introduces the three main strands of empirical research, the methods they used, and associated sampling strategies. These were: semi-structured interviews with those involved in the production of theme restaurant places and materialities (principally owners and managers but also in some instances specialists such as interior designers); focus group discussions with varied groups of Klang Valley theme restaurant customers about their experiences; and visual methods designed to

document and evoke the material 'experiencescapes' of the studied restaurants (both photography and videoing). Third, I explain the step-by-step process of data management and data analysis, including the use of Nvivo software. Overall, the chapter tries to give the reader a clear understanding of the empirical data, and the processes of its construction and analysis, that underlie the substantive chapters follow. It also aims to demonstrate to the hospitality management field how qualitative research can be both appropriate and rigorous.

Chapter 4 is the first of the four empirical chapters. It is focused in particular on the first research objective, namely 'to analyse theme concept development in Klang Valley restaurants, and its role in their marketing'. Conceptually, the analysis frames theming and theme concepts as a form of marketing, and marketing as comprising two principal objectives, namely to 'connect' together producers and consumers and to 'differentiate' products. Empirically, the chapter considers the emergence of concept / theme ideas, distinguishing those that stem from an understanding of the market / consumer from those that arise from their producers' more personal passions. It looks at how theming differentiates restaurants, i.e. makes them different, through entangling them with imagined elsewhere. More practically, it also considers the marketing and advertising media used by the studied restaurants. Overall, the argument is that we should understand hospitality places such as themed restaurants as produced in part through marketing practices and their geographies.

Chapter 5, the second empirical chapter, concentrates on the material making of themed restaurants, with a specific emphasis on the designing of their DINESCAPE (Ryu, 2005; Ryu and Jang, 2007). It addresses the second research objective, namely 'to analyse the material DINESCAPE (Ryu, 2005) of Klang Valley theme restaurants, and their role in the staging of dining out experiences'. After recapping on the idea of a restaurant 'dinescape', and relating this to the 'experiencescape' concept, the chapter's first section focuses on the complex, material process of designing a theme restaurant, using one case study restaurant as an exemplar (Pondok Malindo, an

Indonesian themed restaurant). The later parts of the chapter draw on a wider range of examples to consider the material dimensions of the 'dinescape' both in 'special theme restaurants' and in 'international theme restaurants', attending to the representational role of material artefacts for the latter in particular. Overall, the chapter analyses theming as a process of material management, and explores the role of material objects in representing restaurant themes.

Chapter 6 extends the focus on restaurant materialities beyond their decorative design and material objects, and towards what I term their 'affective dinescapes'. The analysis responds to very general ideas in Human Geography on 'affective materialism' (Anderson and Wylie, 2009) and 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009), and more specifically to work on the architectural geographies of affect and inhabitation (Kraftl and Adey, 2008), 'affective engineering' (Thrift, 2004) and on place and 'ambiance' (Thibaud, 2002). The chapter thus addresses research objective three, which was 'to analyse the atmospheric, ambient and affective materialities of theme restaurants in Klang Valley'. Having explained its approach and emphases, the chapter develops two main emphases. First, it looks at how restaurant materialities orchestrate their consumers' bodies, exemplified through the management of entrances, dining areas, and seating. Second, it examines restaurant ambiance, exemplified through discussion of sonic ambiance, lighting and luminosity, aroma, and thermal comfort. Overall, the chapter argues that theme restaurants stage their experiences through sensory, bodily and atmospheric materialities.

Chapter 7 seeks to view theme restaurant experiences more from consumers' perspectives. One potential criticism of focusing on the material production of themed experiences, whether through material objects or more atmospheric materialities, is that the differential responses of consumers, their own experiences and feelings, are occluded (Rose et al., 2010). Drawing on marketing literatures on 'customer experiences' (Shaw and Ivens, 2002) and 'customer journeys' (Norton and Pine, 2013), and the empirical data from the focus group discussions, Chapter 7 thus addresses the

fourth research objective, which was 'to analyse the consumer experiences of theme restaurants in Klang Valley'. It does so by 'following' consumers through their 'customer journeys' or varied points of contact with a restaurant, from pre-visit preparations and expectations, to reactions during a visit, to post-visit evaluations and sharing practices (especially via social media). In so doing the chapter also identifies some specific issues faced by theme restaurants, especially with regard to how to combine difference and novelty with repeat business.

Finally, **Chapter 8** offers a conclusion to the thesis, setting out a summary of the findings and arguments with regard to each research objective, reflecting on the limitations of the study, and proposing potential areas for future research that the current study has highlighted.

2

Hospitality management, the experience economy and themed environments: A contextual review

This chapter outlines key existing literatures upon which the thesis draws and to which it looks to contribute. In so doing, it also highlights several arguments and issues that provide the rationale for my research to be carried out. The chapter is structured into three main parts. The first section elucidates recent calls for 'critical' hospitality management research and shows how such calls are bound up with a concern for connecting studies of the hospitality industry into wider social-scientific bodies of knowledge. I relate this broader body of 'Critical Hospitality Management Research' (CHMR) to the development of this thesis and its linking of hospitality management to the field of Human Geography. The second section of the chapter considers the now substantial literature on the experience economy, developed around the seminal ideas of the management thinkers and consultants Pine and Gilmore (1999). I argue that the literature on the experience economy is an exemplary field within which critical hospitality management research is needed. More specifically, I argue for the contributions brought by an engagement with Human Geography and its interests in place, focusing in particular on the role of 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell, 2005) within the experience economy. Extending these foci on experiencescapes and experiential retailing, the last main section of the chapter outlines key aspects of the existing discussion relating to commercial themed environments, their production and consumption. I argue that themed environments in general, and themed restaurants more specifically, are a specific form of 'experiencescape', in being places that are materially and symbolically designed to stage consumer experiences and to shape their meaning.

2.1 Critical hospitality management research

Given its focus on the nature of the product being sold by restaurants within the Klang Valley area of Malaysia, this thesis sits within a wider body of work now known as 'Critical Hospitality Management Research' (or CHMR). Within accounts of contemporary economies and consumer cultures, the term 'hospitality' is increasingly used to refer to the umbrella of service sector activities concerning the offering of food, drink and accommodation (Lashley, 2000). Lashley (2000) argues that these service sector activities increasingly place 'hospitality' at their centre, looking to build on wider cultures and histories of host-guest relationships where the role of the host is to provide the guest with hospitable manners and feelings as well as caring for and assisting them, whether in private or commercial places. Brotherton (1999, p. 168) defines hospitality as "a contemporaneous human exchange, which is voluntarily entered into, and designed to enhance the mutual well-being of the parties concerned through the provision of accommodation, and/or food, and/or drink". The hospitality industries commodify this human exchange. In relation to this, Lynch et al. (2011) argue that the translation of hospitality into a commercial product results in an exchange that is not only a relationship between people but also founded in interrelations with objects and places. Lugosi (2008) further expresses that commercial hospitality is not only about offering food, drink and shelter but broadened to include dimensions such as entertainment and social intercourse. Here, then, hospitality providers are understood to engage their guests with a placed 'experience', rather than only delivering discrete products and services (Osman et al., 2014).

The growing economic importance of hospitality businesses within post-industrial societies (Bell, 1973) has been matched by the development of bodies of research and writing on 'hospitality management' (Watson, 2008). The notions of 'hospitality management', the 'hospitality sector' and 'hospitality industry' are now widespread.

Wood (2015) notes how the replacement of terms such as 'hotel management', 'hotel and catering management', 'hotel and restaurant management', 'food and accommodation management' by 'hospitality management' began in the 1980s, and may well have been associated with a desire by educationalists and academics to give the topic greater respectability. Based in business and management schools, and in sector specific educational institutions focused on tourism, catering and hotels and so forth, literature in hospitality management sought to increase the value of services given and diversify and develop the hospitality products offered. Research on hospitality management provided insight into various areas of managerial and organisational activity, including human resource management / staffing, finance, planning, marketing amongst others (Rivera and Upchurch, 2008). Given these varied foci, the work was interdisciplinary in many respects, but increasingly, as Lashley (2000) notes in the UK context, higher education institutions constructed hospitality as a distinctive, niche discipline, identifying hospitality as a serious and growing business area and one with great potential for future study. As Lugosi et al. (2009) document, hospitality management has emerged as a vibrant research area over the last four decades, with a growing number of studies being produced, and with a dual focus on shaping industry practice as well as developing bodies of academic work and debate.

As part of this development, one can see an evolution of two rather different strands of research on hospitality (Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008). On the one hand, there was work that continued to place an emphasis on 'management'. Focused on business and managerial practices (Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008) such work was closely related to commerce and industry. Methodologically, this body of work was largely characterised by an objectivist and positivist approach (Lugosi et al., 2009; Botterill, 2000). On the other hand, especially over the last decade, there has also been the emergence of a broader body of work focused on 'hospitality studies' (Lugosi et al., 2009). This wider study of hospitality explores its social, cultural, political and ethical dimensions, and is much more 'theory-oriented' in its engagements with wider

arguments and debates (Lugosi et al., 2009; Lashley et al., 2007). For example, the journal *Hospitality and Society*, launched in 2011, is an explicitly multidisciplinary forum for social science reflections on hospitality, its cultures and history. Work in this vein considers spaces of hospitality well beyond the hospitality industry (for instance, questions of migrancy, refugees and asylum are understandably a major area of interest; so too are other relations between hospitality and mobility) and often draws on philosophical and theoretical considerations (notably, work such as Derrida's essay 'of hospitality': see Still, 2012 for a general overview; see Dikec, 2002 for an application within geographical work on the spatialities of borders and the welcoming of strangers). Increasingly, scholars working on the hospitality industries argue for the reconnection of these streams, such that work on commercial hospitality can be informed by, and engage with, the wider thinking being done in hospitality studies. Lynch et al. (2011), for example, argue for the development of hospitality management research so that it engages both with business and commercial issues and recognises hospitality as a wider cultural phenomenon.

Recently, then, work on hospitality management is engaging with hospitality studies, to the mutual benefit of both streams. As Lashley (2000) and Slattery (2003) agree, whilst studies concerned with business and managerial practice and issues dominate the volume of research on the hospitality industries, this is beginning to be balanced by hospitality studies which "allow for the intellectual pursuit of the social dimensions, alongside those of an economic nature" (Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008, p. 217). This development has helped to counter earlier concerns about the vibrancy and maturity of the field, as when Taylor and Edgar (1999) argued that this industry has yet to mature or Jones (2004, p.35) concluded that "hospitality management research is on a slow train headed nowhere". The number of recent reviews of the field, often taking stock of its history, current concerns and future directions, speak to a very different contemporary view (see for example Rivera and Upchurch, 2008; Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008; Line and Runyan, 2012; Philips and Moutinho, 2014; Mohammed et al., 2015). More significantly, as these review papers identify the evolution of topics,

research gaps and offer suggestions for future research, they particularly highlight the growing 'criticality' in hospitality management research areas. In other words, it is through the confluence of hospitality management and hospitality studies that 'critical hospitality management research' (CHMR) is being forged.

The nature of this criticality is worth further consideration. For Lynch et al. (2011) a key aspect is the delimitation of the field and the opening up of previously neglected research areas. They propose several such areas for further exploration: historical approaches to hospitality; narratives of hospitality; the relationship between hospitality and (im)mobilities; cartographies and spatialities of hospitality; hospitality and virtuality; the Derridean notion of 'hostipitality'; the ethics and politics of hospitality; embodied hospitality; hospitality and materiality, hospitality as work; researching hospitality and methodological innovation; and 'inclusive hospitality'. I will return to some of these ideas below as they relate to my own research (e.g. on the spatialities of hospitality). Another feature of 'criticality' is a more explicit engagement with social theory, in order to unsettle, question and reconfigure the object of study. Wilson et al. (2008, p. 15) note the multiple approaches employed under the umbrella of critical tourism and hospitality studies, including postmodernism, poststructuralism, critical theory, critical realism, feminist/gender theory, race studies, and also the emergence of associated methodologies like qualitative research, interpretivism, ethnography, phenomenology, feminist research, memory-work, indigenist research and critical discourse analysis. In other words, the topics, approaches and methods of hospitality sector research have been opened up, and the aims of the work broadened beyond commercial or even consumer efficacy. Improving the profitability or the perceived quality of a hospitality product and setting is no longer the prime concern of critical hospitality management research. Other questions, concerned with why, how and to what effect particular commercial forms of hospitality come into being, are also being asked within the CHMR literature.

In reflecting on the emergence and current state of CHMR, Lugosi et al. (2009) identified eight current issues in hospitality management research: i) criticality, ii) ethics and advocacy, iii) scale, claims of legitimacy and research quality, iv) representation and the researcher, v) (inter)disciplinary affiliations, vi) audience, vii) institutions and institutional contexts, and viii) the relationship between management research and pedagogy. Rather than reviewing all of these, I want to focus on those most relevant to this research, its development, and my positioning of it within the CHMR field. In outline these relate to its disciplinary positioning, its intended audiences and forms of contribution, and its methodological and epistemological approach. Let me start with this research's (inter)disciplinary affiliations.

This research developed through a specific, though for CHMR not atypical, disciplinary biography. Prior to this PhD research, my professional training was within hospitality management. The PhD research explicitly engaged this training with wider social science thinking, in particular as represented within Human Geography. As noted above, the CHMR field is characterised by an engagement with the wider social sciences, including geography, anthropology, and sociology (see Lugosi et al., 2009). Table 2.1 (adopted from Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008) surveys some of the growing body of academic literature pertaining to hospitality with which CHMR has engaged.

There are debates over this interdisciplinary orientation to CHMR. Some doubts have been raised about the benefits it brings to the body of knowledge and its application, and whether it will divert and weaken the future direction and development of a research community and field focusing on the hospitality industry and hospitality issues (Lugosi et al., 2009). Overall, though, Lynch et al. (2011) suggest, it is felt that studies engaged with and from cultural theorists, geographers, philosophers, sociologists, theologians, linguists and other foreign-language scholars has added value and understanding to the CHMR field. In particular, in my view, linking research on the hospitality industry into broader fields enriches understanding and widens the

application of knowledge. This thesis draws from, and serves, both hospitality management and human geography. This yields a number of benefits, I suggest.

Field	Focus	Exemplary Authors
Anthropology	Observes current practices among the desert Bedouin of southern Israel and Jordan clearly indicating the importance and centrality of the hospitality practices to their way of life.	de Vaux (1961)
Archaeology	Interprets and excavates the use of commercial hospitality buildings and structures, in order to understand more about how people lived in historical locations.	Ellis (2004a, b)
Biblical studies	Explores the origins of hospitality demonstrating that hospitality is not a simple concept it contains deeply rooted cultural norms.	Matthews (1991, 1992)
Classics	Uses the theme of hospitality to give significantly richer understanding of the structure of the Homeric epics, by demonstrating that successive oral poets who redacted the Homeric poems used the concept of hospitality as a recurrent theme.	Reece (1993)
Deconstruction	Defines hospitality as inviting and welcoming the 'stranger'; however, this takes place on two levels: the personal level where the 'stranger' is welcomed into the home; and at the level of individual countries. Uses the conceptual possibility of unconditional hospitality to understand and to inform understanding of actual practices and policies of hospitality today in our world.	Derrida (1998, 2000)
Gender studies	Observes that symbols, verbal and non-verbal communication, and the value of sociability and physical attractiveness contributes to a sexualised work environment within the hospitality sector, that is likely to encourage and draw attention to gender-specific behaviours.	Brownell (2001)
Geography	Examines the production and consumption of hospitality, as well as considering the emergent nature of hospitality and the discontinuous production of hospitable space.	Lugosi (2009)
Philosophy	Pursues the reality and principles underpinning hospitality as a phenomenon.	Telfer (1996)
Post-colonial theory	Investigates the politics of hospitality at a more global scale, exploring issues including democracy, citizenship, social exclusion, xenophobia, and racism to reveal the ethics and politics of hospitality and the status of the stranger, visitor, migrant, asylum seeker, and refugee.	Ben Jelloun (1999)
Social history	Explores the historical role of hospitality in society, in particular in forming communities.	Heal (1990)
Sociology	Constructs and deconstructs the role, meaning, and symbolism of hospitality in society.	Goffman (1969)

Table 2.1 Illustrative examples of wider social science disciplines and debates being engaged by research into hospitality (adopted from Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008, and edited by author)

Most importantly, a ‘human geographic’ approach emphasizes where hospitality happens. Human geographers have long argued that place-making is a fundamental human activity, akin to the use of language, and hence central to all human endeavors (Sack, 1992). Engaging with human geography within CHMR thus emphasizes the dynamics of place and place-making and the role they play in the production and consumption of hospitality products. Human geographers are interested in hospitality as a placed activity. More specifically, geographical research on retail spaces – from shopping malls and centres, to department stores, supermarkets, and local shops – has made the case that consumption is both undertaken within and fashioned by distinctive settings (Goss, 1993; Miller et al., 1998; Mansvelt, 2005; Sack, 1992). Drawing on such work, this thesis contributes to wider CHMR scholarship by highlighting the status of restaurants as socially produced and consumed places (see also Lugosi, 2009b on bars). It argues that the forms of hospitality that they market do not simply occur somewhere, but come about through, or in other words are constituted by, the restaurant as a place. More specifically, human geography provides specific literatures and approaches – such as work on architectural geographies (Kraftl, 2010) or on affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009) – that assist the analysis of hospitality places (I detail these specific approaches more fully elsewhere in the thesis, as appropriate).

The engagement with human geography also shaped the research methodology, in ways noted more generally as characteristic of the CHMR field. I present a fuller account of my methodology and research practice in Chapter 3, but in outline the research was qualitative. Prior to the emergence of CHMR, quantitative research and positivist epistemologies were said to dominate hospitality management research (Jones, 2004; Taylor and Edgar, 1996). A large number of quantitative studies were published in hospitality journals, and the field became characterised by the claims to scientific credibility associated with statistical techniques (Rivera and Upchurch, 2008). The statistical analysis undertaken “rang[ed] from cross-tabulations to sophisticated multivariate techniques” (Crawford-Welch and McCleary, 1992, p. 157)

and included computational and mathematical approaches (Philips and Moutinho, 2014). Pointing to the strength of quantitative work, Mohammed et al. (2015), for example, notes how analyses of hospitality markets are heavily reliant on quantitative techniques involving regression analysis as well as descriptive analysis. Crawford-Welch and McCleary (1992) argue that despite the fact that qualitative studies have a contribution to make to the hospitality management knowledge base, credible findings demand methodologically-sound research, perhaps with multivariate techniques, to deal with the complexity of the industry. Generally, then, there was a wariness of qualitative methodologies in mainstream hospitality management research.

However, this wariness of qualitative work has been debated and challenged as part of hospitality research's movement on to a more critical path (Tribe, 2006). Ingram (1996) notes that the academic community is beginning to come to terms with qualitative methodologies as valid techniques with which to map the inherent richness of hospitality and tourism activities. Giving the example of work on hospitality management development (or 'MD'), Watson (2008) argues that the reliance on quantitative measurement can result in a failure to measure the effectiveness of 'MD', whereas qualitative study has the capacity to measure and describe personal and organisational learning. Lugosi et al. (2009, p. 8) see a relationship between the broader intellectual shifts of CHMR and a growing use of and interest in qualitative methodologies, given that "qualitative researchers emphasise notions of subjectivity, positionality, authenticity, aesthetic merit, reflexivity, morality and an overt ethical consciousness, reciprocity, criticality, political engagement, emancipation and polyvocality when discussing the merits of their craft (Lincoln, 1995; Denzin, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 2005a; Richardson, 2000)". CHMR has involved thoughtful emergence with traditions of qualitative research methodology (see, for example, Lugosi, 2009a on ethnography and hospitality research). Based in human geography, this research was informed by an institutional context where qualitative research practice sits alongside, and indeed is currently more common than, quantitative

research (Cloke et al., 2004). More specifically, for human geographers, qualitative methods have been central to understanding the social production and consumption of places and the experiences associated with them. On that basis, this thesis seeks to add to the body of qualitative work in CHMR. It recognises qualitative research as differently, but not less, scientific than quantitative studies. It recognises the need for qualitative research to be rigorous in its conduct and interpretation (see Chapter 3), and argues for its complementary role alongside quantitative work. Whilst quantitative research often focuses on empirical generalization, this project focuses on the critical development of our understanding of the relations between hospitality commerce and place (more generally, see Sayer, 1992).

Lugosi et al. (2009) emphasize that given qualitative research is not the traditional norm in hospitality management studies, it is important that researchers narrate qualitative findings in an open and reflexive manner. This may involve using first person narratives, which should not be equated with narcissism (Lynch, 2000). More generally, Lynch (2005) notes how criticality of thought means engaging with wider concerns for the 'crisis of representation' in social studies. 'Critical' thought emphasises the situated, partial and constructed nature of research: "recognition is given to how investigators and their characteristics determine knowledge" (Lynch, 2005). The ways of presenting research are part of the process of constructing social knowledge. Recognising this does not equate to a reduction of research knowledge to the purely subjective. Rather, in this thesis the use of first person expression, and attention to specific cases in depth, represents a more interpretive, hermeneutic epistemology, in which academic knowledge is developed through engagement with the world, contributes to a broader interpretive community and its debates, and in turn shapes future empirical engagements and practice.

The audiences for CHMR work are multiple. Zampoukos and Ioannides (2011) highlight the economic importance of the hospitality industries globally, their importance within labour markets (Leiper, 1999), and the consequent relations between

hospitality research and business needs. Hospitality and tourism education is offered at many higher education institutions locally and globally (Kwong and Law, 2008; Lee et al., 2004), and there is increasing demand from potential students seeking to pursue their degree in this field (Madanoglu and Martin, 2003). Traditional hospitality management research developed in the context of hospitality education institutions preparing their students for successful careers and helping the industry solve its problems (Goldsmith and Zahari, 1994). Under the banner of CHMR, the interests in hospitality research are broadened. No longer only concerned with providing useful knowledge for business application, there is also an emphasis on better understanding the economic and cultural dynamics and consequences of commercial hospitality. In this thesis, my adoption of a CHMR approach involves recognising multiple audiences. In my view, the confluence of hospitality management and hospitality studies in CHMR (Morrison and O'Gorman, 2008) benefits both the academy and industry practitioners. It also involves complex relationships between these parties. Positivist understandings of hospitality management research view the academic, scientific study of the industry as uncovering objective truths and laws that can then be applied in practice. Qualitative, interpretive, critical research is based on a more dialogic view. The everyday knowledges of those involved in the topic being researched are not simply replaced by a scientific knowledge. There are two-way exchanges between practitioners, lay people and academics. For example, in this study detailed research with restaurateurs and consumers is used to document their practices. This teases out knowledge they already possess, and through the qualitative research process translates it into forms that can be shared with others and enhance reflection on practice. That sharing in part involves gaining access to someone else's knowledge (in this study, for example, allowing restaurateurs to learn from others' practices and to hear from consumers about their expectations and experiences); but it also involves engaging with and developing conceptual ideas, thus translating everyday knowledges into forms that can be disseminated more broadly, for example through hospitality education. CHMR maintains a strong engagement with those involved in the

hospitality industry, but enriches their understanding of the sector through combining close attention to practice and wider ideas that allow us better to understand how hospitality is produced and consumed.

In summary, then, this thesis is intended as a contribution to the growing critical hospitality management research (CHMR) literature. Two main contributions can be emphasised at this point. First, the thesis is notable within the CHMR field for its sustained development of an interpretive, qualitative methodology. Chapter 3 elaborates on this methodology but for now it is important to emphasise the comparative paucity of qualitative studies within the hospitality management field. This is apparent both more generally and with respect to existing research on this thesis' more specific concerns, restaurant environments and experiences (e.g. Ryu and Han, 2011). Given the meaningful and experiential character of hospitality products, the comparative absence of qualitative work is a significant loss, limiting the capacity to understand their production and consumption. This thesis provides a sustained corrective exception, as it uses qualitative methods to explore the meaningful, affective and emotional aspects of theme restaurants.

Secondly, the thesis brings theoretical insights from Human Geography into dialogue with the hospitality management research community. Engagements between CHMR and Human Geography are comparatively rare but have great potential (Lugosi et al., 2009). In particular, this thesis develops CHMR insight on a key geographical issue: how the production of hospitality is bound up with the production of place. As will be more fully articulated in later chapters, this thesis is designed to extend the existing CHMR literature on this issue both conceptually and substantively. Conceptually, the thesis draws on Human Geography's concern for places as social constructions, products of specific cultural and economic dynamics. In consequence, it makes a wider argument: namely that attending to *places* of hospitality (their material forms and social dynamics) is a powerful way to discern the social and commercial constructions of hospitality per se. Places make manifest social processes; places of hospitality make

manifest social processes of hospitality. In other words, exploring restaurants as places is an approach that opens up their forms of hospitality for critical study through analysis of spatial forms and processes.

More specifically, the thesis presents some particular conceptual approaches to place and its production that have wider potential within CHMR for this task. In outline these involve: a) recognising places as meaningful imaginations and representations, and arguing that restaurants and their marketing can be understood in terms of their imaginative geographies (Chapters 4 and 5); b) recognising places as material, and often built, forms, and arguing that the meanings of restaurants / hospitality settings can be read from their spatial design and material decoration (Chapter 5); c) recognising that the materialities of place include more atmospheric and ambient elements, and arguing that these placed 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson, 2009) are crucial aspects of the production of hospitality products (Chapter 6); and d) recognising that places generate complicated forms of feeling and emotional geographies for those using / inhabiting them (Rose et al., 2010), and arguing that restaurants need to be analysed in terms of these consumer feelings (Chapter 7).

2.2 The experience economy and experiencescapes

2.2.1 The experience economy

In parallel with the development of the CHMR literature, the idea of the 'experience economy' has also played a central role in connecting research on hospitality management into wider, interdisciplinary debates. The argument of the experience economy literature is that for a variety of industries the purpose today is to create a particular kind of product, 'experiences' (Kociatkiewicz and Kosera, 2009). The term

'the experience economy' was first coined by the management thinkers and consultants, Pine and Gilmore (1999). They posited an economic evolution or progression through four stages of capitalist production: i) a commodity based economy (focused on the extraction of fungible, or interchangeable, materials with particular characteristics); ii) a goods based economy (based on the making of tangible goods with distinctive features); iii) a services based economy (focused on the delivery of intangible services that provide additional benefits to consumers); and iv) an experience economy (focused on the staging and sensing of memorable experiences). (In more recent renderings of their account, Pine and Gilmore have updated this model and posited a fifth stage, where businesses are focused on guiding consumers through processes of self-transformation, and experiences are not just performed for consumers, but co-produced with them; see (Pine and Gilmore, 2013). Pine and Gilmore thus present the experience economy as a new economic era (Azizi, 2005) but, especially given the absence of serious historical analysis in their account, this serves primarily as a rhetorical device to promote a focus on experience production as a new management concern (Jakob, 2012). In other words, they do not so much historically document the experience economy emergence as argue for its adoption as a business model. In particular, they promote the experience economy as a means to increase the value of products. As an illustrative example, they anecdotally point to the relative values of coffee as a commodity (sufficient beans to make one cup), a good (instant coffee or ground beans), a service (a cup of coffee, served to you in a coffee shop) and as a memorable experience (a cup of coffee at a café in St Marks Square, Venice, for example). In their argument, converting commodities, goods and services into experiences is a way to produce value and profit (Sundbo and Sørensen, 2013).

But what are 'experiences'? The humanistic geographer Tuan (1977) understood experience as a compound of feeling and thought. Experience economy writers, Sundbo and Sørensen (2013, p. 2), likewise emphasise the sensual and the cognitive in their definition of experience as:

... something that happens in people's minds, it is determined by external stimuli and elaborated via the mental awareness that people have from earlier experiences, mental needs (such as self-realization, un-stressing, avoiding everyday life through escapism) and personal strategies. Experience can be released by stimuli that affect all the senses.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) likewise define experience as a bundle of sensory stimuli that engages the customer and delivers a sensory feeling and a lasting memory. To them, the experiences staged must be outside daily routine to leave a memory. In addition, Addis and Holbrook (2001) suggest that experiential consumption of a product tends to evoke strong aspects of fantasy and fun, yielding feelings and emotions able to lead to a meaningful experience; "meaningful experiences often comprise a complex of emotions that occur simultaneously or successively" (Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011, p. 241). In essence, the argument made in much of the experience economy literature is that commercial businesses can increase the value of their products by making them 'experiential' because 'experiences' are of value to consumers, both through their immediate sensual enjoyment and their wider meaning and memorability (Berry et al., 2002).

A further strand of Pine and Gilmore's argument here is that businesses focused on the production of experiences are able to achieve 'mass customization' (see in particular Pine and Gilmore, 2000). In other words, in the experience economy large scale economic production can also be personalised for each customer. Walls et al. (2011) argue that customers today seek unique products and services, and that forms of consumption that create not only an ordinary experience but memorable experiences fit this quest. Memorable experiences, even if staged by a large scale business organisation, are inherently unique and personal. Johnson and Kong (2011) contend that any consumed experience is perceived personally, being derived from a personal point-of-view and existing purely in each customer's body and mind. Thus, no two people have exactly the same experience of an experiential product (Pine and

Gilmore, 1998). As Clarke (2010, p. 448) puts it: “customers rarely have the same experience, even though it is the same experience they are experiencing”. According to Jortberg (2001), in his review of two books by Pine and Gilmore (*The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*, 1999; *Markets of One: Creating customer-unique value through mass customization*, 2000), this focus on the personalization of products is central to Pine and Gilmore’s conception of the experience economy. Important too are ideas of ‘authenticity’, for an experience that is genuinely personal is also authentic. As Kociatkiewicz and Kosera (2009) note, in the experience economy customers are characterised as looking for authenticity in the products, services and experiences for which they pay. In Pine and Gilmore’s phrasing: “Organizations today must learn to understand, manage and excel at rendering authenticity” (Gilmore and Pine, 2007, p. 3), such that customers engage and feel an experience personally, on an emotional, physical, spiritual and/or intellectual level (Tung and Ritchie, 2011).

There are, of course, different types of experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) propose four main kinds of experiences within the experience economy, namely aesthetic, educational, entertaining, and escapist. According to them, an emphasis on entertainment and aesthetics entails a more ‘passive participation’ from consumers, with the customer not affecting or influencing the experiential outcome (eg: viewing a performance, visiting an art gallery). In contrast, the educational and escapist dimensions of the experience economy involve more ‘active participation’, whereby consumers play a key part in their subsequent experience (eg: in edutainment, in enjoying theme park).

In their initial accounts of the experience economy, Pine and Gilmore (1999) mobilise a theatrical metaphor to describe the production process: ‘work is theatre and every business a stage’, they proclaim. In offering an experience, a company uses services as the stage and goods as props to engage and connect with consumers in personal, memorable ways (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). This theatrical metaphor emphasises how

every action by the experience stager contributes to the total experience being staged. Customer contact, 'on stage' staff have a particularly visible role, but as in a theatrical production the 'actors' are not the totality of the show. Everyone is responsible in making the show successful and unforgettable to the customers. In Grove, Fish and Dorsch's (1998) analysis, actors (service personnel), the audience (customers) and the setting (physical environment) are all vital in staging an experience. Pine and Gilmore (1999) mobilise the theatrical metaphor to discuss the dramaturgical, scenographic and narrative techniques that underpin the production of experiences. Disney theme parks are among the first and best examples of experience design (or 'imagineering') (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999). The innovative use of technology, themes and storytelling have been central to Disney's success in performing emotional and social experiences for their main target market, families (Norton and Pine, 2009). The theatrical nature of the experience economy thus posits a particular kind of commercial geography: on the one hand, characterised by behind the scenes processes of production and organisation that underpin a performance; and, on the other hand, characterised by presence in the event of the performance, with customers paying for the time they spend with the company which staged the experiences for them (Gilmore and Pine, 2007).

These ideas of a theatrical experience economy have been taken up across a range of economic sectors, including those associated with hospitality. In the tourism sector, Mehmoteğlu (2011) is indicative of a wider body of work that has advised the tourist industry to create and 'stage' experiences (here surveyed across four dimensions of feeling, learning, being, and doing). Ali, Ryu and Hussain (2015) interestingly extend the application of the experience economy idea in the tourism industry through an emphasis on what they term 'creative tourism', which offers tourists active participation in traditional crafts/handicrafts, gastronomy, perfume making, porcelain painting, dancing and so on (see also Hung et al., 2014; Richards and Wilson, 2006). Lorentzen (2009) relates such tourist economies to the wider political economy of cities and urban development. Drawing on earlier work on 'experiential consumption'

(notably, Holbrook and Hirschmann, 1982), retail environments are another key area of concern (Verhoef et al., 2009). Sherry et al.'s (2001) study on ESPN Zone is a notable example in its documentation of the lived 'retail theatre' experience in these spaces, emphasizing the performative, co-creative, hybrid and multisensory nature of the phenomenon.

Certainly, the concept of staging memorable experiences is not new to hospitality and tourism studies, where various scholars have highlighted such issues from different angles and perspectives (see for example: Andersson, 2007; Hosany and Witham, 2010; Hung, Lee, and Huang, 2014; Quan and Wang, 2004; Ali, Ryu and Hussain, 2015). As one of the niche sectors under the hospitality umbrella, the restaurant industry too has also seen a number of studies focusing on the role of theatrical performance and experiences in delivering food and beverages to customers (e.g. Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999; Lego et al., 2002; Borghini et al., 2009). Pine and Gilmore themselves highlight the success and sustainability of the world's first theme restaurant, The Hard Rock Café, from its opening in London in 1971 till today, as an exemplar of the need to stage experiences for customers (Gilmore and Pine, 2002), and more generally illustrate their argument by pointing to 'entertainment' restaurants like Planet Hollywood and Rainforest Café (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Lagan (1999 cited in Lynch, 2010) claims that these type of restaurants engage and entertain their customers through their environments, making them willing to pay more for the foods served. More generally, there is a widespread argument that restaurant businesses need to embrace the experience economy in the context of ever more demanding and discerning customers and maturing markets. Writing in the Chinese context, Ali and Amin (2014) argue that as the restaurant industry evolves and becomes more sophisticated, customers are more familiar with the products and services offered by the producers and thus a competitive/low price alone is not a viable option for producers anymore (Ryu et al., 2012). In the restaurant businesses, restaurant operators have to be creative and innovative in staging experiences in order to be competitive and capture the market, it is argued. Offering a unique and memorable

dining experience becomes the norm, and as Andersson and Mossberg (2004) accentuate, dining out activities are increasingly framed as not merely for nutritional need purposes but also for social and leisure fulfilment. Azizi (2005, p. 6) further argues that apart from the food and beverages offered, “other elements of the dining event can create a holistic, hedonic, emotional and memorable consumption experience.”

Wider social scientific research on restaurants and the consumer cultures of ‘dining out’ is less explicitly promotional of the experience economy model, but chimes in multiple ways. Warde and Martens (2000), in their UK based sociological analysis, suggest that eating outside the home is no longer as strongly motivated by questions of convenience and utility as it once was, and instead is more strongly associated with the pursuit of pleasure and variety (see also Finkelstein, 1989). De Rezende and Rodrigues Silva (2013) draw on empirical research on marketing materials in both the UK and Brazil to posit various ideal types of ‘experience encounters’ offered by restaurants. Their typology deliberately contests the association of the experience economy with only the most extreme and unusual environments, covering what they term as ‘authentic’ environments (with an emphasis on heritage and cultural-ethnic connections), ‘relaxed’ environments (where comfort is key), ‘all you can eat’ environments (where the offer of unlimited food is paired with a fun, informal ambience), ‘as home’ environments (where customers are very familiar with the business, its owners and staff, and feel part of a family setting), ‘efficient’ environments (where speed, cleanliness and consistency / standardization are valued) and ‘distinction’ environments (where exclusivity, luxury, high standards and high prices are emphasised). Their overall argument is that the variety of restaurants is best understood in terms of the various kinds of experiences they seek to offer.

The theatrical metaphor deployed by Pine and Gilmore (1999) also has clear parallels in social science research on restaurants. Approaching the subject matter from the perspective of workplace geographies and labour process debates, Crang’s

ethnographic account of Smoky Joe's restaurant – entitled 'it's showtime!' -- is notable for the emphasis it places on ideas of performance, dramaturgy and staging (Crang, 1994). Others place greater emphasis on the physical environment and its design, rather than the performative work done by staff, in producing an unforgettable dining experience for customers (Chen and Guan, 2008). Edensor and Falconer's (2015) account of the London restaurant, Dans Le Noir?, where customers eat in the dark is a fascinating case study of one extreme example. More generally, though, the mushrooming of atmospheric eating-places has been related to the experience economy and a consumer demand for extraordinary places with extraordinary experiences (Scott et al., 2009; Wardono et al., 2011, 2012). Also important is work that emphasises the role of customers in co-producing the experiences of commercial hospitality spaces such as restaurants and bars (e.g. Lugosi, 2009), thereby opening up the theatrical metaphor beyond its narrow application to environments where staff 'put on a show'.

In summary, then, the idea of the experience economy emerged within management studies, building on earlier marketing research on experiential consumption. Positing the theatrical production of memorable sensations and meanings (experiences), it has clear parallels with, and has been adopted within, research on hospitality settings such as restaurants. A 'critical hospitality management research' (CHMR) approach to the experience economy should seek to place its somewhat self-promotional claims within the wider context of social science research that more critically considers the importance of experiences to the commercial and consumer cultures of eating out.

2.2.2 Experiencescapes

I outlined above how seminal accounts of the experience economy (notably Pine and Gilmore, 1999) are based on a theatrical metaphor, in which 'every business is a stage'. I now want to reflect on that metaphor further. In particular, given my earlier argument that this thesis is positioned within CHMR literatures via an engagement with Human Geography, and its concern with the social production and consumption of place, I want to turn more directly to the geographies of this theatricality. Specifically, I want to highlight existing writings that have emphasised the role of place, of the stage itself, within experience economies. The notion of the 'experiencescape', coined by the anthropologist Tom O'Dell (2005), is particularly helpful in this regard.

O'Dell (2005) argues that the production and consumption of place is central to the experience economy. He notes how commercial experiences occur in a range of spaces, including retail stores, museums, shopping malls and restaurants (see Bitner, 1992 on the idea of servicescape), and at various scales, including larger areas such as an amusement park or city (Jernsand et al., 2015). These spaces matter, he suggests, and they matter through their materiality. In tune with the wider social science recognition of material cultures and materiality over the last decade or more, the idea of 'experiencescape' emphasises the material production of seemingly immaterial experiences. O'Dell (2005) uses the term to highlight how ephemeral experiences are produced through the manipulation of material culture and the organization of material spaces. His focus is on 'landscapes of experience' where producers strategically plan, lay and design the spaces in which experiences are staged and actively consumed (O'Dell, 2005, p. 16). As Cederholme (2012) phrases it, O'Dell is emphasising the economic and cultural importance of *places for experience* as well as the more established concern of tourism scholars, *places to experience* (i.e tourist attraction places like beaches or villages).

Especially in his later monograph on spas – framed as a ‘cultural economy of hospitality, magic and the senses’ -- O’Dell (2010) also emphasises the role of material culture within these ‘places for experience’. In so doing, he elaborates on Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) rather limited discussion of the role of ‘props’ in the staging of an experience. O’Dell (2010) details how it is through the use of materials in the spa that a relaxing and memorable experience is performed. Indeed, central to the spa product is an understanding of the role played by various materials in rejuvenating the body and soul. These materials are worked with, and in relation to customers’ bodies, through various spa rituals and exercises. As O’Dell (2010, p.73) narrates it:

The rites of affectation performed in contemporary spas invoke an array of substances that are designed to mobilize external powers and transfer their regenerative potential into the body. Muds, for example, are spread out along the surfaces of bodies, and their different qualities are said to seep into the skin. Oils are used in a similar manner, and can even be coupled with the use of heating blankets that are said to further facilitate the ability of the oils’ properties to penetrate the body. In other cases, rituals are designed to recharge bodies by setting them in motion through gymnastics and aerobic exercise, or alternatively by bringing them to a standstill in moments of meditation. And of course, all the while bodies are massaged, rubbed, touched, and stroked.

Drawing on the wider theorisation of Lefebvre (1991), O’Dell (2005) uses the notion of experiencescape to emphasize that since space can be measured, quantified, observed and described, then its physical materialities can also be manipulated, planned and designed to affect the people consuming it. O’Dell (2007, p. 42) explains that places “can become more lucrative, creative, and socially cohesive if they can be organized as informally relaxed, but stimulatingly fun and playful arenas of focused productivity”. Svabo et al. (2013, p. 316) also emphasise the importance of spatial design within the experience economy, defining experiential commerce as “a process

where people undergo the influence of things, environments, situations and events, and a wide range of materials play active roles as mediators of experience”.

However, like O’Dell, Svabo et al. (2013) are wary of adopting a crude spatial determinism, where people’s actions and experiences are completely controlled by the spatial design of the place they are in. Rather, they too view experiencescapes in more relational terms, where “places, buildings and objects are constituted in complex and heterogeneous interrelations – as are humans” (2013, p. 315). As Jernsand et al. (2015) highlight, attending to the physical and social surroundings of experiences helps us to understand how they are “complex, interactive and situated” (Jernsand et al., 2015, p. 100). This means that experiencescapes do not simply enact the manipulative power of commercial actors over consumers. O’Dell (2005) is at pains to indicate the dual roles of both producers, in staging the landscape of experience, and consumers and their active participation. Giving an example of escapist experience in the tourism industry, Hosany and Witham (2010) also emphasize ‘active participation’, and stress the role of this participation in producing ‘highly immersive’ and ‘completely engrossed and absorbed’ experiences.

Since experiences are highly personal, subjectively perceived, and intangible, the customer’s involvement in producing the experience is to be expected (Alsos et al., 2014). Increasingly, the co-creation of experiences is being emphasised (Jernsand et al., 2015). As O’Dell (2005, p. 131) puts it, “the trick is to provide a series of units or modules that people can mix and match as they please and thus become the producers of their own experiences”. For Svabo et al. (2013, pp. 321-322), one can helpfully differentiate the notion of designing experiences from an emphasis on designing for experiences:

It is not possible to design experiences since they can never be fully predicted or controlled as they depend on co-producing the performance of visitors and the interrelations of entities. Yet it is possible to design for experiences: actual

experience emerges as visitors (consumers/users) are engaged with spatial designs and with the social situations that ritualize and help shape experiences.

Likewise, Sherry et al. (2001) explain how the ESPN Zone retail space is designed to facilitate varied co-productions by consumers. Here, the company staged various “experience realms” (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, p. 30) targeted at different customer segments, and customers were free to choose the offerings which engaged their senses and accommodated their individual realms of experience.

Generally, the role of an experiencescape is to act as a place which takes customers to a new or different milieu and away from their routine environment. The experience of the place creates emotions in the person experiencing it (Lorentzen, 2009) rather than simply a rational process of consumption (Lugosi and Walls, 2013). This was highlighted in early work on Disney’s imagineered theme parks. Carson (2004) outlined how Disney’s active engagement of ‘guests’ through a network of images, sounds, events and commodities, helped their theme parks create (and re-create) a whole new world in every visit. Bryman (1999, p. 67) emphasised how the parks’ spatial separation was part of the unique experiencescape offered to their guests:

It is not a theme park in itself, in that it is a vacation resort at which the visitor is expected to spend a large amount of time; the idea has been to turn into a total holiday destination, rather than a place to visit as part of a visit to the region.

In part, then, the new ‘worlding’ engineered through the experiencescape is an imaginative movement, to a place clearly symbolically signalled as being different and apart. Lasansky (2004), for example, stresses architecture’s function in representing the meaning of places and the importance of such symbolism within the tourism industry. But the taking of the consumer ‘elsewhere’ is not just an imaginative and

symbolic matter; it happens in an embodied way too. Thus O'Dell (2010) asserts that layout, design and material organization play a crucial role in framing the symbolic meaning of the spa experience (for example, in relation to ideas of the 'natural'), but also in producing the feelings of relaxation and meditative mental states that detach the customer from their daily life in an embodied sense. He particularly describes how the spa's environment provides a space which can transport the guests to another calming dimension, engaging them with the mystical, magical and spiritual through:

...providing guests not only with the feeling that they have left a world of problems and pressures behind them, but that they have even entered a new and somewhat special place that is empowered with a unique aura, potentially capable of healing stressed bodies and burned-out souls (O'Dell, 2010, p. 65).

More generally, Sundbo and Sørensen (2013) discuss the importance attached to 'immersion' within much of the experience economy literature, given that it is through immersion that memorable, transformative experiences are staged, and affirm that the success of immersive experiences comes about through the strategic use of both architecture and interior design.

The concept of experiencescape clearly has resonance within the food hospitality industry. Food itself is an obvious example of how immaterial feelings, emotions and memories are made through sensory engagement with material culture (for a general account see Sutton, 2001). As discussed above, it has also long been recognised that the experience of 'eating out' involves far more than just the food, with the dining place and environment vital (Finkelstein, 1989; Horwitz and Singley, 2004). Moreover, both food and restaurants have been discussed in terms of their capacity to transport diners "into some other world" (Campbell-Smith, 1967 cited in Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999, p. 247). Lego et al. (2002) claim that with authentic food offered in authentic restaurant settings, customers today have the opportunity to be in diverse places and taste the world through dining out (Cook and Crang, 1996). As I will discuss

in greater depth later in the thesis, the experiences offered by restaurants are produced through combinations of food, spatial design and décor, management and performance of sociality, and overall ambience, and take diners 'elsewhere' (see, for example, Matus Ruiz, 2012, on Mexican restaurants in Amsterdam, Madrid and San Francisco). They are experiencescapes.

This thesis makes a significant contribution to the CHMR literature through further developing this recognition. Hospitality management studies have begun to engage fruitfully with wider experience economy ideas, in particular through the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999), but they have yet to develop in depth an engagement with theorisations of experiencescapes. Hospitality management studies engaging with the spatial design of restaurant spaces have instead emerged from a wider ambition to codify and measure the qualitative product aspects of the service and experience economy, using, for example, the well-known SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Models that emphasise the role played by the physical environment within hospitality delivery processes or encounters include: the TANGSERV model (Raajpoot, 2002), which “develop[s] a scale... for measuring tangible quality in food service industry... captur[ing] ambient factors such as music and temperature; design factors such as location and seating arrangement; and product/service factors such as food presentation and food variety” (p.109); and the DINESCAPE model, introduced by Ryu (2005) and developed in later co-authored papers (e.g. Ryu and Jang, 2007; Ryu and Han, 2011), which seeks to codify and measure the “man-made physical and human surroundings, not the natural environment, in the dining area of an upscale restaurant” (Ryu and Jang, 2007, p.5). These approaches are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5, but at this juncture it is important to note important limits to such models in comparison to O’Dell’s cultural-economic interpretation of experiencescapes (O’Dell, 2005, 2010). For example, Ryu and Jang (2007) propose the notion of ‘DINESCAPE’ to capture customers’ perception of the dining area. They identify six key dimensions: facility aesthetics, lighting, ambience, layout, table settings, and service staff. In so doing, the DINESCAPE model thus accords with the

broader 'experiencescape' concept, but is focused narrowly on hospitality management audiences and the provision of a 'tool-kit' of environmental elements to consider in restaurant theming, design and operation. This is a valuable objective but provides limited analysis of exactly how material settings relate to customer experiences and limited theorisation of why they matter. In his study of spas, O'Dell (2010) analyses the production of affect, the role of material culture and the central role of the body in places designed for experience. In their work on restaurants, hospitality researchers such as Ryu and Jang (2007) ignore these processes in favour of descriptive accounts of elements that can then be measured and quantified. A key contribution of this thesis is thus to develop the concerns identified in models such as the 'DINESCAPE' via a richer engagement with wider experience economy concepts and broader theorisations of how and why placed experiences are produced and consumed. Chapters 5 and 6 in particular are devoted to this task.

2.3 Themed environments

2.3.1 Themed environments in the experience economy

As we have seen, the places and environments where companies deliver their products and services are a growing focus for management literatures concerned with the successful delivery of customer experiences (Jortberg, 2001). These places are recognised as something more than a mere stage for production and consumption (Svabo et al., 2013) and instead as a key, constituent element of a total consumer experience (Senthil et al., 2012). Pre-dating the discussion of experiencescapes discussed above, the idea of 'themed environments' was an important part of how place featured in early accounts of the experience economy. For example, Pine and

Gilmore (1998) proposed that a defined and consistent theme was a necessary first step in creating a commercial experience.

The work of Mark Gottdiener, especially his book *The Theming of America* (Gottdiener, 1997), is a useful entry point to the substantial literature on commercial themed environments. He defines themed environments as:

socially constructed, built environments that are designed to serve as containers for co-modified human interaction ... [they are] material forms that are products of a cultural process aimed at investing constructed spaces with symbolic meaning and at conveying that meaning to inhabitants and users through symbolic motifs (Gottdiener, 1997, pp. 4-5).

Theme parks, amusement parks, shopping malls, museums, sports venues, restaurants and even airports are among the entities which apply theming in their presentation (Gottdiener, 1997; Sherry et al., 2001; Wood and Munoz, 2007). Of course, investing spaces with symbolic meanings and motifs is not new (Lynch, 2010); humans have long created environments endowed with signs and powers (Gottdiener, 1997). However, according to Gottdiener (1997), the trend of commercial theming really took hold in the USA in the 1960's, and was focused on the differentiation of consumer spaces. The use of symbols and motifs had long provided distinction or variation within the built environment of consumer culture, but was now developed into a stronger thematic coherence. As Firat and Ulusoy (2009, p. 777) put it, themed environments involve "the patterning of space, activity or event to symbolize experiences and/or senses from a special or a specific past, present, or future place, activity or event as currently imagined". Key, then, to a themed environment is the production and consumption of an imagined elsewhere.

With respect to the production of themed environments, Gottdiener's (1997) approach is a semiotic one, focusing on the symbolism deployed through architecture

and decoration. Bitner (1992) helpfully avoids an overly narrow conception of the symbolic, suggesting a focus on three dimensions - 'ambient conditions', 'spatial layout and functionality', and 'signs, symbols and artefacts'. In relation to this, Lorentzen (2009) accentuates that the production of thematic places involves physical planning, construction and maintenance in order to create attention. Furthermore, Munoz et al. (2006) add that the selection and placement of cultural artefacts such as the artwork, photographs, newspaper clippings, and musical instruments contributes to the staging of a themed environment. Given the complexity of the process, the responsibility for planning, sketching, creating and staging a theme environmentally falls beyond the role of any one person. It involves a team of expertise. Nonetheless, Lego et al. (2002) refer to 'reality engineers' as the collective name for the designers, marketers and managers who perform these tasks. Chaney (1997) uses the term 'imagineers' to denote the architects and designers who use their symbolic vocabulary in creating these total environments.

The themes deployed and developed in this environmental 'imagineering' come from multiple sources. In each case, though, the logic is for the theme to offer a distinctive and different place. Munoz et al. (2006) outline how producers often utilize popular media symbols to characterize themed places and their experiential environments. Here, everyday space becomes transformed into a staging of fiction and fantasy. Commercial space takes on the qualities of the creative worlds produced in media from literature to film and television. Others have highlighted how the past provides resources for theming, sometimes in transcultural contexts where other cultures are presented through renditions of their traditions and heritage (Schlehe et al., 2010). Human Geographers, and others, have pointed to the theming of commercial spaces through simulacra of other places, creating what Hopkins (1990, p. 2), in his study of West Edmonton Mall, described as landscapes of "myths and elsewhere". Theming thus often entails transporting consumers to a specific time or place to which they otherwise would not have the opportunity to go (Munoz et al., 2006). Generally, as Gottdiener (1997) emphasises, this 'transportation' operates within a particular

emotional register, in so far as commercial space themes are focused on being enjoyable and entertaining. Themed environments are rarely serious or deliberately dull or troubling, but aim to be cheerful, pleasant and exciting.

Also important within the literature on commercial theming is work on 'brandscape's'. Described by Klingmann as the "architecture of the experience economy" (2007, p. 1), brandscapes offer an experience which is clearly and exclusively related to a particular brand (Ponsonby-McCabe and Boyle, 2006) and has the power to attract customers who are attached to that brand (Soloman, 2003 in Rahman and Cherrier, 2010). Foster and McLelland (2015) note that a themed retailer applying a brandscape strategy uses a specific brand message to dictate the design for the retail space and atmosphere, adding that they pull together the atmospheric elements and merchandise arrays within this unified themed environment. Kozinets et al. (2002) argue that most branded flagship stores stage a branding theme in their retail environment. Meamber (2011), for instance, gives the example of Disney's environmental engineering in creating its unique consumption experiences. Generally brandscapes are illustrative of how companies use themes "to craft a unique and powerful identity" (Lego et al., 2002, p. 62).

Of course, as Gottdiener (1997) acknowledges, any understanding of the production of themed environments needs to be matched to an analysis of their active consumption. For Gottdiener (1997, p. 5), the consumption of themed environments "involves the way individuals or groups use or interpret the constructed space by imputing some meaning or meanings to it that guide their behaviour". Themed environments are designed to direct this use and interpretation, in particular through the utilization of a multidimensional system of signs which affects all human senses (Firat and Ulusoy, 2009). These multisensory offerings encourage customers to immerse themselves (Lugosi, 2014) within the theme environment staged in the space. However, the engineering and evaluation of experiential milieu are neither independent nor separate processes, rather intertwined and interrelated (Munoz et

al., 2006). Themed environments, and their atmospheres, may be staged with the purpose of evoking a certain experience and feeling in the mind of the consumer (Foster and McLelland, 2015) but this is not a mechanical process. For instance, the consumption of a themed environment may not necessarily involve the buying of goods/services; Foxall et al. (1998) highlight that customers may initially be attracted to the environment just to be in the place and consume the environment, not to make any purchase.

In summary, themed environments are a notable type of 'experiencescape'. They reflect how, in the context of consumer cultures that present diverse retail alternatives (Kozinets et al., 2002), retailers are focusing on the atmospheric elements to create a more memorable and attractive consumer experience (Gottdiener, 1997; Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The combination of architecture and human performance are staged carefully to create desires to enter and stay (Sherry et al., 2001). Through various practices of imagineering – decoration, affective engineering, architecture, the use of materials and props – themed places perform an escapism, transporting customers away from their daily life, routine and environment.

2.3.2 Themed restaurants

The contemporary restaurant industry has been identified as a key sector within which themed environments have been constructed, drawing on well-known and accessible cultural themes from music, sports, films, geography, as well as history (Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999). Studies have also shown that a specialization of food and dining experiences can play a significant role in the wider theming of retail experiences (Borghini et al., 2009). Beardsworth and Bryman (1999, p. 228) define a themed restaurant as “an eating establishment which clothes itself in a complex of distinctive

signs that are largely extraneous to the activity of eating itself". The authors also argue that theme restaurants initiate a hybrid form of consumption, where they sell both food and fantasy as a package (Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999). Wood and Munoz (2007) coin the term 'eatertainment' to describe this hybridity.

I will discuss specific facets of past work on themed restaurants as appropriate in substantive chapters, but an initial overview may be helpful at this stage. The emergence and flourishing of theme restaurants has been documented since the 1980s, since when the varieties of theme employed and the number of outlets has multiplied (Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999). The Hard Rock Café - the first theme restaurant, a 'living museum of Rock n Roll memorabilia' themed through its exterior displays, its soundscapes and props staged in the restaurant (Foster and McLelland, 2015) – is often called upon to illustrate this expansion; launched in London in 1971 it had 58 outlets by the middle of 1996 and was reportedly acquired for \$410 million by the Rank Organisation in June of that year (Murray, 1996 cited in Beardsworth and Bryman, 1999, p.239). Theming is often related to chain or franchise restaurants, given that a theme allows for replication in multiple outlets – other notable examples include Planet Hollywood, Harley-Davidson Café and Rainforest Café -- but individually owned restaurants can also look to differentiate themselves by adding to the density or variety of their symbolic décor and emphasising their experiential, performative elements (Moench, 2009). For Ryu and Han (2011), a theme atmosphere can play a critical role in creating a memorable dining experience. For Beardsworth and Bryman (1999), the process of such an experiential theming involves the use of variety of devices, including physical artefacts, sound, decor, logos, menu terminology, uniforms and merchandise. Matus Ruiz (2012) provides a fascinating account of Mexican themed restaurants outside of Mexico (in California, Madrid and Amsterdam), developing the idea of 'affective foodscapes' to focus in particular on how tropes of 'Mexican-ness' are built into restaurant spaces and experiences.

Notwithstanding such studies, there is a comparative lack of research on theme restaurants that this thesis corrects. In so doing it contributes to broader understandings of themed environments as well as to restaurant culture more specifically. With respect to the former, key extensions and developments of existing scholarship on themed environments are both conceptual and substantive. Notably, in developing its account of themed 'experiencescapes' the thesis moves beyond a purely semiotic or representational account of theming, adding to those works that have extended Gottdiener's (1997) original formulations through greater attention to spatial design, corporeal orchestration and affect (Chapter 6 in particular develops this argument). Empirically, studies of themed environments predominantly concern themselves with larger corporate efforts of Imagineering (whether in large malls, retail brandscapes or, of course, theme parks such as Disney's) and thus this thesis' focus on smaller-scale businesses provides a useful complement. Likewise, its attention to the role of theming in the restaurant cultures of the Klang Valley metropolitan area in Malaysia extends the generally Euro-American focus of past studies of themed environments, joining other examples – notably Simpson's studies in Bangkok and Macao (Simpson, 2001, 2009) – of research on Southeast Asian or Asian settings.

With respect to restaurant studies, generally the thesis seeks to connect hospitality management research on restaurants with wider analyses in the social sciences deploying more interpretive methodologies (for a collection of such studies, see Beriss and Sutton, 2007). More specifically, this research's focus on theme restaurants complements the predominant themes in cultural studies of restaurants, such as the production of ethnic cuisines, the interweaving of culinary and cultural authenticity, and feeding desires for heritage and nostalgia (e.g. Berris, 2007; Brightwell, 2012; Chi and Jackson, 2011; Hubbert, 2007; Jochnowitz, 2007; Matus Ruiz, 2012; Vadi, 2016; Yano, 2007). In exploring the restaurant as an experiencescape (O'Dell, 2005) the analysis develops existing work on restaurants as performative spaces (Crang, 1994; Jochnowitz, 2007). And in its focus on the spatial design of restaurants this thesis addresses the principal area for future work identified by Herzfeld (2007) in his

commentary on existing anthropological research. In sum, the thesis provides an original contribution to an emergent body of work concerned with the place of restaurants in broader consumer cultures, and adds to the limited corpus of studies concerned with themed, 'eatertainment' (Wood and Munoz, 2007) spaces.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some of the chief bodies of research related to this study of theme restaurants in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. It progressed from a general positioning of the study within the field of Critical Hospitality Management Research (CHMR), via a consideration of the work done in management, consumer and hospitality studies on the experience economy, to more specific work on themed retail and restaurant environments. By way of conclusion, I want to draw out the principal trajectory of my argument by working backwards from the most specific to the broader literatures to which I hope to contribute.

First, then, let me begin with theme restaurants specifically, and themed environments more broadly. Here, my reading of the literature highlighted how theming has dual quality, captured in its description as 'imagineering'. On the one hand, and as emphasised by Gottdiener's seminal work (1997), it is concerned with symbols, meanings and imaginations. Theme restaurants are enterprises in which the production and consumption of meanings enhance the production and consumption of food. It is, then, about the imaginary. On the other hand, theming is also about a material engineering of a retail environment. As operationalised by something like the DINESCAPE model (Ryu and Jang, 2007), theming works through the material form and composition of consumption spaces such as restaurants. Theming brings together issues of meaning and materiality. In my own analysis these are foregrounded at

different points in the thesis: Chapter 4, for example, pays particular attention to the marketing discourses and imagery of the studied restaurants, Chapter 5 turns to their material design.

Second, this combination of meaning and materiality relates to theme restaurants' concerns with customer 'experiences'. Engaging with wider literatures on the so-called 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and its geographies, this chapter sought to better frame the implications of restaurants changing from a focus on feeding the body to feeding the soul (Pillsbury, 1990) and providing a product that fulfils both bodily needs and emotional wants (Firat and Ulusoy, 2009). I developed three main arguments in this regard. I suggested that a focus on 'experiences' is a way to combine attention to meaning and materiality in themed environments, through a dual focus on embodied sensory immersion as well as meaningful memories. At different points in my own analysis I will foreground these dual elements (for example, in Chapter 6 I focus on the material 'atmospheres' of themed restaurants and their embodied 'affects'; in Chapter 7 I focus on how consumers relate to theme restaurants within wider projects of identity making and leisure practice). I also highlighted how the experiences in theme restaurants are actively produced and actively consumed, with consumer experience inevitably varied and not entirely controllable. This thesis is particularly concerned with the production of experiences in theme restaurants (exploring various facets of this across Chapters 4, 5 and 6) but also attends to consumer accounts of experience and uses of these environments (especially in Chapter 7). Finally, I drew out a specific interest in 'experienescape' (O'Dell, 2005). Here, I suggested that it is valuable to understand that the socio-material production and consumption of place is central to the experience economy. The theatrical metaphors of Pine and Gilmore (1999) have been well-documented in the experience economy literature. Many, including Pine and Gilmore (2013) themselves, have developed this metaphor by emphasising how 'experience businesses' involve more than putting on a show for an audience, often having a more immersive character. Also vital, I suggest, is to take the process of 'staging' seriously, as O'Dell's focus on

experiencescapes achieves. This thesis is designed to add to literatures on experiencescapes, most fully in Chapters 5 and 6 through their focus on the design and material production of theme restaurant experiences.

This focus on the production and consumption of places in the experience economy emerges in part from the study's wider positioning across the fields of hospitality management and human geography. In this chapter I argued that this interdisciplinarity should be seen within the wider emergence of the CHMR field and linked to its confluence of a hospitality management focus (with an emphasis on shaping business practice) and a hospitality studies focus (with an emphasis on understanding the wider social and cultural dynamics of hospitality). I see this thesis as a contribution to literature in CHMR, and in particular those strands of it that have engaged with geographical concerns with the production and consumption of places.

3

Methodology

This chapter sets out the methodology employed in constructing, documenting and analysing the empirical data required for the research. It begins by detailing the processes of research design and ethical consideration undertaken in preparation for the fieldwork in Klang Valley. It then turns to the principal methods deployed within the fieldwork, discussing: the semi-structured interviews undertaken with restaurant owners, managers, staff and designers (including the purposeful sampling strategy directing these); the focus group discussions convened to explore consumer experiences of themed restaurants (including an outline of group compositions); and visual methods, in particular the photographic documentation and videoing that I used to investigate the material design and atmospherics of restaurant spaces. In the last part of the chapter I then elaborate on my analytical methodology. This discussion explains my use of Nvivo 10 software within the data management and analysis, as a process of 'computer-aided qualitative data analysis' (CAQDAS). I present this section via a detailed step-by-step account of the approach taken to analysis, interpretation, discussion and report writing. Overall, my methodological approach is qualitative and designed to better understand the processes of place production and consumption involved in Klang Valley's theme restaurants. As noted in Chapter 2, the adoption of qualitative research designs and practices was for long somewhat marginalised in mainstream hospitality management studies, though it has been promoted and developed as part of the development of the critical hospitality management research (CHMR) field. On that basis, this chapter is intended both to explain the research process to the reader ahead of the analyses and interpretations offered in subsequent chapters, and to offer an example of the potential appropriateness and rigour of qualitative research to the wider hospitality management community.

3.1 Research design

The process of research design was concerned with developing the project and organising the research activity, including data collection (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Figure 3.1 below provides an overview. The earliest stages of the research were devoted to refining the topic to be studied, and narrowing it down to the aim and objectives set out in Chapter 1. Central here was the engagement with the research literatures discussed in Chapter 2. To recap, at the broadest level this preparatory work identified the potential for hospitality management studies to be enhanced through wider interdisciplinary engagement and specifically the value of Human Geography's interests in the production and consumption of place to understandings of hospitality. The review of existing research also highlighted the potential economic importance of producing experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), particularly within the hospitality sector, and how emergent work on 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell, 2005) extended the 'theatrical' spatial metaphors central to the 'experience economy' literature and emphasised the spatial and material production of experiences. Thus, the research topic developed into a concern with the role of place and spatial design in staging consumption experiences within the hospitality sector.

This interest was then further focused into an empirical concern with themed restaurants in Klang Valley. My interest in restaurants had been long standing and reflected in my research career and training prior to the PhD (for example, my Masters dissertation provided a quantitative survey of dining out trends in Klang Valley associated with various types of food and beverage establishments including fine dining restaurants, ethnic restaurant, fast food places, cafeteria and street food stalls). As a key site of commercial hospitality, and a setting long portrayed through the theatrical metaphors of the experience economy approach (Crang, 1994), restaurants were also concluded to be an excellent setting for developing these broader insights. My focus on the Klang Valley setting was in part practical – allowing the use of existing 'field' knowledge and potential research contacts, and fieldwork in a setting where

other responsibilities such as child care could be managed – but also reasoned through a critical evaluation of existing work – ensuring a corrective to the predominantly Euro-American focus of existing work on experiencescapes and a setting with a dynamic and developing restaurant sector.

The focus on theme restaurants was developed a little later, after further initial survey empirical work on restaurant provision in the study area. Conceptually, existing understandings of themed environments (e.g. Gottdiener, 1997; for a fuller review see Chapter 2) suggested that themed restaurants were exemplary of wider concerns for experiencescapes, insofar as themed environments involve “the patterning of space, activity or event to symbolize experiences and/or senses from a special or a specific past, present, or future place, activity or event as currently imagined” (Firat and Ulusoy, 2009, p. 777). Indeed, themed restaurants seemed to be particularly prominent examples, offering rich examples of how experiences are materially staged through place. Empirically, by this stage of the research development process I had also established that Klang Valley was witnessing the emergence of a growing number of design intensive restaurants, marketing place, environment and ambiance as much as, if not even more than, food and service. Initial surveys of these restaurants, drawn from online marketing, listings and reviews in particular, allowed me to assess numbers (conservatively) and develop an initial typology of ‘experience’ types. This typology was threefold: ‘special themed restaurants’, ‘international themed restaurants’, and ‘ethnic / culturally themed restaurants’ (the last of these including restaurants selling experiences associated with Malaysia’s multicultural ethnicities, in particular ‘Malay’, ‘Chinese’ and ‘Indian’). Prior to fieldwork, the research project was focused especially on the first two of these restaurant ‘types’. This was in part a practical decision, taken to create a ‘population’ size appropriate to the study’s resourcing and timeframes. It was also a theoretically informed decision, taken in the light of the difficulty of delimiting more design intensive themed spaces within the ‘ethnic themed restaurant’ database (where, for example, the presence of ethnicised

staff and customers might be central to the restaurant experience but not a facet of 'theming' in the sense of environmental design).

Having developed the research topic, aim and objectives, it was possible to determine the most appropriate research methods and approach. The research topic determined the methodology used. More generally, I would argue that selecting a method that is appropriate for the research questions is more important than deciding whether to favour quantitative or qualitative research a priori; choosing between quantitative and qualitative research, or deciding how to combine them, should depend on what one is trying to find out (Silverman, 2010). In this research, the main objectives of the study – to explore the staging of theme ambiance with regards to the DINESCAPE elements (Ryu and Jang, 2007) (necessitating engagement with the restaurant owners ' / managers' points of view), and to understand the consumption experience and consumer behaviour at theme restaurants (necessitating engagement with customers' points of view) – suggested that a qualitative research approach should be developed. The decision to choose this type of research reflected a number of considerations. Firstly, it related to qualitative research's capacity for providing detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience (Marvasti, 2004). According to Merriam (2009, p. 13), qualitative research allows us to understand "the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world". It also supports the "explorations of meanings, perceptions and understandings" (Horn, 2012, p. 119). To state the obvious, this was of particular value given this study's focus on the commercial production and consumption of experiences. Winchester and Rofe (2010) also highlight that individuals experience the same events and places differently; the opportunity given to them to be heard in qualitative research avoids their valuable experience being silenced or excluded. Horn (2012) further claims that qualitative approach is frequently used when the subject area is not well defined or is not well understood by current theory or research, owing to a new setting / context or little research on the particular area. Taking into consideration the limited literature

on theme restaurants in Malaysia, the qualitative results of this study are designed to frame future study. In a nutshell, it can be said that qualitative research is:

an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world (van Maanen, 1979, p. 520).

More specifically, given the aim of exploring the topic from two perspectives – the restaurant owners' / managers' and the customers' – I judged that interviewing and discussion methods with such people would be a way to understand the process and phenomena. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note, qualitative research interviews attempt to understand the world from the participant's point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations. As the history, process and justification in developing each theme restaurant was unique, individual interviews with the owners / managers were carried out to give room to the interviewee to express, share and narrate their exclusive stories freely. On the other hand, focus group interviews were found to be more suitable in gathering the information from the customers' points of view, allowing participants to share their experiences in theme restaurants and their understanding of their place within wider consumer cultures. In addition, given the conceptual focus on the staging of restaurant experiences, qualitative methods also provided options for directly engaging with restaurants as places and experiencescapes. In particular, visual methods were deployed to this end, allowing the documentation of spatial design, the various elements of the 'DINESCAPE' (Ryu and Jang, 2007), and an evocation of the wider sensory experience offered by the restaurant.

I will outline these three main research strands – semi-structured interviews with restaurant owners / managers, staff and designers; focus group discussions with consumers of various sorts; and visual methods focused on the restaurant as a

material and atmospheric place – in more detail below. First, however, I need to discuss one further aspect of the ‘research base’ I established prior to the fieldwork, namely my consideration of ethical issues (see Figure 3.1).

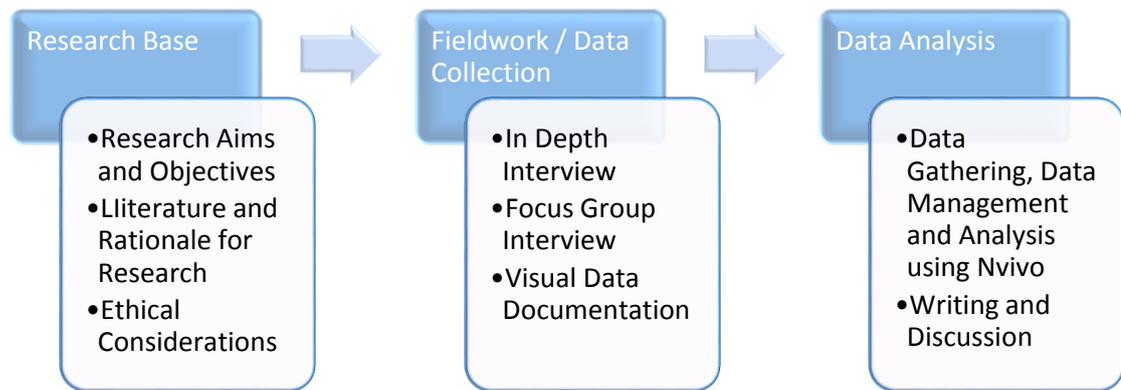


Figure 3.1 Summary of research design

3.2 Ethical considerations

According to Annas (2001, p. 62), the word “*ethics* comes from the Greek *ethos*, which means character, and was translated into the Latin *mores* (from which we have morality), which also means character, custom or habit”. Hammersley and Traianou (2012, p. 16) also define ethics as “the study of what researchers ought and ought not to do, and how this should be decided”. It is noted that research ethics has long been an important topic among qualitative social researchers in their methodological reflection, discussion and disagreement (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). Ethical considerations were an important part of this study’s research process, from the very start of the study to the final report.

Early elements of ethical consideration centred around the process of ethical review at my home institution, Royal Holloway University of London (RHUL), undertaken before conducting the research and starting the data collection. Alongside a fieldwork

risk assessment, this was undertaken around the time of the first annual of the research by my supervisory team, and used the University's then current documentation (since replaced by an online review system) to focus on questions of informed consent, data security and use, power relationships to those researched, and avoidance of harm. I was also required by RHUL to complete the Student Leave of Absence Request Form as the collection of data was in Malaysia. Intended for researchers whose fieldwork is outside the UK, this process ensured institutional insurance and legal protections were in place during the fieldwork period.

A central concern of the ethical review process was informed consent from research participants. As part of the process I therefore prepared information sheets to be given to potential participants of various sorts. Since consent to participate in research is only meaningful if those research participants know exactly what they are consenting to (Dowling, 2010), the Participant Information Sheets that I produced detailed the overall purposes of the research, what participants could expect during the interview or focus group discussion, how these sessions would be conducted, how long they would take, proposed methods of recording, and my contact details should any further information be needed. So, at the beginning of each interview or focus group discussion, I explained all these details regarding the study, and outlined the confidentiality of the data given via restricted access to the original data (solely to be made by myself and secured via password protection etc.) and the reproduction of the data and analysis in the thesis and future research or publications. Participants were then given a Consent Form; by signing it, they agreed that they had read, and were satisfied with, the information given about the research, that they understood that their participation was a voluntary action and they could withdraw from the research at any time, and that would allow the future use of the data by the researcher in academic publications and presentations (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A template Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are presented in Appendix 1 and 2.

Another important ethical consideration is the issue of participant confidentiality. Confidentiality in much qualitative research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed, because in a qualitative study (e.g. an in-depth, semi-structured interview), the participant's statements from a private setting may appear publicly thus raising questions about protection of their privacy (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A common response is to anonymise research participants. In addition, as anonymisation can be a strategy to maintain privacy, "it may also serve to protect people from harm – such as public embarrassment or financial or physical threat" (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012, p. 126). There are various ways of ensuring the anonymity of informants, including using pseudonyms and masking other identifying characteristics in the written version of research (Dowling, 2010).

This study adopted this principle of anonymisation, but there were important complications and nuances that need to be outlined. For focus group participants I was able to anonymise fully, providing simply basic demographic information for the group and quoting anonymised participants via a coded acronym. However, with respect to the restaurants and those involved in their development and management, preserving the anonymity of the participants and places involved in the study was more complicated. As Hammersley and Trainanou (2012) highlight, participant anonymity varies considerably across research studies, depending on the topic investigated as well as the nature of people and settings studied. They explain that:

In some cases, they [research participants] may be immediately recognisable by a wide audience; and in more cases, they will be identifiable by people in the local setting, or be discoverable by those who have the necessary expertise and sufficient motivation. Preserving anonymity is especially difficult where people and/or places are very distinctive, such as people who play prominent roles in small recognisable communities (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012, p. 127).

This point is supported by Dowling (2010) who claims that sometimes it is impossible to ensure anonymity. She gives the example of O'Neill's (2001) research on the Australian-based transnational BHP (Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited), where he identified both the firm and the executives with whom he spoke. To a lesser extent, the same situation was confronted in this study, given that the theme restaurants participating in the research were identifiable due to: i) the limited number of theme restaurants in the study area (Klang Valley, Malaysia); ii) the distinctive theme and features of the restaurants themselves; iii) in some cases, there being only one or a small number of restaurants with that particular theme; iv) the theme of the restaurant often being manifested in part through its name; and v) the necessity / preference for using visual data to analyse and present the spatial design of the restaurants (which conflicted with a simple strategy of pseudonymisation). Thus, it was hard to anonymise the theme restaurants studied. On that basis I developed a two pronged approach. With regard to specific interviewees, I have not divulged full names, instead only identifying respondents as a 'representative' of a particular restaurant. With regard to the restaurants, I opted to use the real name of the restaurants (or part of it to maintain the two or three word systematic naming). I did this because it was advantageous and necessary for the reader's understanding of the empirical materials. During the discussion on particular issues, the use of restaurant names means I can discuss the themes in detail and support them with interview quotations and visual data. Restaurant names used help the reader to understand the issues being discussed without being confused with respect to which theme restaurants are being referred to. However, with confidentiality and avoidance of harm concerns in mind, this naming was combined with a careful consideration of the selection of materials and data being used in the thesis. I avoided any information that was obviously commercially sensitive or offered participants only on the basis of confidentiality. I avoided the use of materials that might cause embarrassment or harm (e.g. statements that might offend others), unless they were necessary for the wider argument, in which case I also anonymised the restaurant location (i.e. thereby

providing full anonymity in these specific instances). In sum, I sought to undertake the research with respect for its participants at the same time as ensuring an objective and clear presentation of materials for the reader.

3.3 Interviewing

Interviewing is one of the principal methods in qualitative research. As Patton (2002, p. 4) notes, qualitative data often consists of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions feelings, and knowledge” and data conveyed through words have been labelled qualitative as compared to quantitative which present the data in numbers (Merriam, 2009). A number of methodological reflections have sought to define qualitative interviews (in many diverse ways) and to highlight the strengths of this method. Dunn (2010, p. 101) states an interview is “a data-gathering method in which there is a spoken exchange of information”. De Marrais (2004, p. 54) defines the interview method as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study”. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 2) extend this definition by adding that “the research interview is based on the conversations of daily life and is a professional conversation; it is an inter-view, where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and interviewee”. Interviews, then, construct qualitative data in an interactive process that allows the researcher to better understand the interviewee’s understandings and experiences of the topic in hand. Dunn (2010) asserts interviewing as an excellent method for gaining access to information about events, opinions and experiences and Merriam (2009) elaborates that interviewing is necessary, and particularly helpful, when researchers are interested in past events that are impossible to observe first hand.

In this research project, interviewing was therefore undertaken in order to access the experiences of key people involved in the production of theme restaurants, namely restaurant owners, managers (where development and operation was not he preserve of owners) and designers (in a few cases, where external design expertise had been used and could be accessed). Given the interactive nature of interviews, in each case the data generated was shaped by interviewees' own concerns for self-presentation (individually and, even more so, for the business). With some exceptions, the tone of conversations tended to be focused on the positive ambitions of the business, with any failings less readily discussed. For the purposes of this research, this positive, promotional tone should be noted but was not fundamentally problematic. My concern was with accessing the commercial ambitions and practical processes bound up in the production of theme restaurants. These were topics that respondents were happy to discuss within an interview. Their responses moved well beyond the rhetoric of their promotional material in explaining both their own intentions and the work undertaken to achieve these. Interviewing the participants produced information regarding the initial development of theme restaurants, its detailed processes, the duration and cost of the project, as well as the design elements, materials and psychological considerations taken into account in seeking to stage a themed experience. The participants were content to 'walk down memory lane' and narrate the history of their place making. As they did so, answering the questions that I asked made them enthusiastic, excited and at times reflective and critical. The interviews took them well beyond the kind of public information that I could access and the sort of information that a shorter form questionnaire survey could have achieved. Of course, in comparison to a questionnaire survey individual interview sessions are time extensive (for conduct, transcription and analysis) and produce data that can be less readily empirically generalised. As Patton (2002) affirms, qualitative methods of interviewing produce a wealth of detailed information about a limited number of people or cases, which increases the depth of understanding but reduces empirical generalisability. Instead, such case study focused work aims to deliver a conceptual

understanding of process (in this case, the processes of theme restaurant place production) that aid understanding more generally.

3.3.1 Sampling and selection of respondents

The principles and procedures used in sampling are often associated with quantitative surveys (Mason, 2002), which normally use randomly selected respondents from a specified population and within the specified (dedicated) number, aiming for generalisation and an avoidance of bias (Marvasti, 2004). Conversely, qualitative research requires less technical requirements with respect to sampling but no less consideration. Patton (2002) advises that qualitative inquiry depend on what is needed in the way of knowledge, on the purpose of the research, on its significance and for whom, and on logistics and resources. He also emphasizes the richness and detailed information achieved from the smaller number of participants and cases used in qualitative study and how this increases the depth of understanding of the situations studied.

As qualitative study seeks to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the informants, it is important to select participants who will yield the most valuable information. This is called 'purposeful sampling', a "non-probability method in which the selected cases are related to the purpose of the study" (Horn, 2012, p. 106). Patton (2002, p.230) reinforces that purposeful sampling involves "focusing on the selecting of information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study". As well as being termed purposeful sampling, qualitative researchers have also labelled this as purposive or judgement sampling (Bernard, 2000).

Bradshaw (2010) argues that when researchers focus and narrow down their research interest, as well as having a strong background and deep understanding in the study

area, it then becomes clear how to choose the participants to be involved in the study. However, this process perhaps needs more explicit elucidation. One key notion for providing more clarity to this process is the idea of 'criterion-based selection', where qualitative researchers construct a list of characteristics or attributes that the participants in the study must possess (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993). According to deMarrais (2004), the common criterion-based strategies used in selecting participants include: i) comprehensive selection – used when the population within the criteria is small and all cases falling into a particular category are included in the study (deMarrais, 2004; LeCompte and Preissle, 1993); ii) network selection – used when the participant who fits the selection criteria refers the researcher to others who fit the same criteria too; iii) typical-case selection – used when the researcher sets out criteria that are typical of a larger group and selects cases with these attributes; iv) unique-case selection – working with participants who are unique in some way, and of research interest because of their uniqueness; and v) reputation-based case selection – used when the case selection relies on the recommendations of others.

Turning to this research project, I applied a purposeful sampling procedure with a comprehensive criteria selection strategy. The selection of theme restaurants potentially to approach for the study was based on their possession of a few key criteria: possession of a strong theme concept, heavily decorated and designed in relation to this theming, as well as staging the ambiance through dinescape elements (such as the playing of music, levels of lighting, layout and other design elements). I explain more about how this process operated in practice and the kinds of restaurants therefore included in the study in the following paragraphs. In terms of the selection of interviewees in relation to these restaurants, given the study's aim of exploring the staging and making of themed places and ambiances, the owners and managers of these restaurants were the key participants to involve, selected their ability to supply initial intentions and detailed histories of development. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) note, participants/interviewees should be experienced and knowledgeable in the area

researchers are interviewing them about, offering “expertise in regards to the topic” (Lichtman, 2014, p.296).

Having identified the group of people I should interview, there then arose the question of determining how many participants would be suitable for the research. Perhaps reflecting my prior training in quantitative research, it concerned me that methodological reading concluded that there was no certain number that could answer this question. As a rule of thumb, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note that in many interview based studies the number of interviews tends to be around 15, more or less 10 (so 5-25), due to a combination of duration of research and a law of diminishing returns. My own practice in this regard was to develop my ‘purposeful sample’ through both advanced planning and research – in essence, ‘mapping out’ the potential sample of interviewees so that the interviews actually sought and undertaken could be set in the context of this wider scene and properly represent evident patterns within it – and on-going reflection – above all on ‘theoretical saturation’, monitoring when new interviews stopped yielding significantly new data and issues. Let me elaborate.

The search for and recruitment of the participants involved several phases. I started with desk research via the internet, looking for information regarding theme restaurants in Malaysia, specifically in the Klang Valley area. I did this whilst I was still in the UK, before departing to Malaysia for the fieldwork. As briefly outlined earlier, this led me to narrow down my research to three restaurant types: the **special theme restaurant** (eg: toilet theme, garden theme, chemistry lab setting, cowboy theme), the **international theme restaurant** (eg: Indonesian, Japanese, Korean theme), and the **Malaysia’s cultural / ethnicity theme restaurant** (eg: Malay, India and Chinese theme). Within this database, given my research focus on the staging of experiences and the creating of theme ambiance, I highlighted selections that placed an emphasis on spatial design and the production of a themed place. This included, for example, reviewing the extent to which the ‘DINESCAPE’ elements (Ryu and Jang, 2007), such

as theme materials, colour combinations, seating arrangements and music / 'aural architecture', were being used. This desk research used internet search engines to find restaurants' websites, Tourism Malaysia's website and booklets with their information on dining places (see Figure 3.2), suggestions from friends, family and acquaintances in Klang Valley, as well as 'snowballing' (i.e. following suggestions) from food blogs and recommendation websites such as TripAdvisor and Foursquare. I also kept an eye on social media posts (on Facebook, Twitter) which on occasions also led me to theme restaurants that had not cropped up through other methods. (I should also add that the process of restaurant identification continued in the field, as interviewees and others suggested important cases to consider, or I encountered potential cases in situ, or discovered closures of venues. Thus, the database of potential interviewees and cases to study was a 'live document', being worked through the empirical phase of the research). Having established this database, I studied the brief history and other information about the restaurants, looked for online comments from customers, and sought to judge spatial design elements from the pictures and descriptions available. This database listed restaurants according to their types (re: the threefold typology above), contact details (to contact the owners/managers in advance), address (to determine they are within the Klang Valley area) and directions (to ease visits to the restaurants). Each entry was then linked to a separate file with the contextual information on the restaurant that the desk research had yielded.

From the first desk based search, the total number of all three types of restaurants was 50. I determined that this was too large a number for in-depth qualitative research on them. On that basis, and in conjunction with refining the research objectives (as discussed above), I narrowed down the selection of participants to the 'special' and 'international' type theme restaurants only. This produced a total of 21 theme restaurants as potential participants (of which, eventually, 20 agreed to participate in the research). Next, then, I started to approach the restaurants via their official email address, introducing myself, explaining the research and attaching the Participant Information Sheet. I did this before flying to Malaysia for the fieldwork with the

intention of gaining approval and being able to schedule interviews ahead of time. However, most of the emails either bounced back to me or received no reply. On that basis, I realised that face to face contact would be key, and that I should seek to recruit interviewees within an initial phase of fieldwork focused on visiting restaurants in the database.

I therefore started the fieldwork in January 2014, armed with the restaurants database and focused on visiting restaurants. If the owners/managers were there during my visit, I approached them, introduced myself and briefly explained my research and asked whether they might be interested in participating (using the Participant Information Sheet as appropriate). If they were willing, we then arranged another date and time for the interview session. Usually, they preferred to be interviewed between 2 to 4 pm at the restaurant, as the lull in customers at this time of day allowed better concentration, whilst the restaurant location allowed them to show me aspects of the space as appropriate. On a few occasions, my initial approach produced an agreement to be interviewed straight away, as the time suited them; just in case, I visited prepared with the necessary consent documentation, recording devices, interview schedule and note book in hand! If the owners or managers were not present, I updated my database by taking advice on who it was best to contact and by gaining contact details. Sometimes this involved returning at another time, sometimes phoning or emailing. As this initial phase of fieldwork progressed, I developed my approach. In particular, I found that dining at restaurants ahead of approaching the owner or manager for an interview could help. In part, I think, this was because it let them better understand that my interest in their restaurant was coming from the experience that it offered and because it reduced the sense of being approached by a stranger / researcher who had just arrived at their restaurant and was just seeking information from them.

Spice of India, Starhill Gallery

LG9, Feast Floor
Starhill Gallery
181 Jalan Bukit Bintang
55100 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2141 7857

Japanese**Kampachi Pavilion KL**

Lot 6.09.00, Level 6
Pavilion Kuala Lumpur
Jalan Bukit Bintang
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2148 9808
Website: www.kampachi.com.my

Kofuku

Sari Pacific Hotel Kuala Lumpur
Jalan Putra
50350 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 4042 5555 / 4049 4412 / 4413

Sagano

Level 1, Renaissance Kuala Lumpur Hotel
Kuala Lumpur East Wing
Corner of Jalan Sultan Ismail & Jalan Ampang
50450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2162 2233
Website: www.krenaissance.com

Tatsu

InterContinental
Jalan Ampang
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2782 6118

Ten Japanese Fine Dining

A-G-1, Marc Residence
Ground Floor, No.3, Jalan Pinang
60450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2162 9999
Website: www.tenrestaurant.com.my

Wasabi Bistro

Mandarin Oriental Hotel
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2163 0968
Website: wasabibistro.com/Malaysia

Watami

C4.04.00
Connection Level 4
Pavilion Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2141 6671
Website: watami.com.my

Zipangu

Level 1, Shangri-La Hotel
Jalan Sultan Ismail
Tel: 03 2074 3900

Korean**Onsemi**

Lot 2-3A
2nd Floor, Intermark Mall
The Intermark
348, Jalan Tun Razak
Tel: 03 2161 2461
Website: www.onsemi.com.my

Warisan Kohiang

Clubhouse in Kampung Warisan
Condominium
Jalan Jelatek
54200 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 4251 0492

Middle East**Al-Amar**

Lot 6.10, Level 6
Pavilion Kuala Lumpur
168 Jalan Bukit Bintang
50450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2166 1011

Babylon

32 Jalan Jati
Off Jalan Bukit Bintang
55100 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2142 9720
Website: http://babylonkl.com

Hadramawt

7 & 7A, Block B
Chulan Square
Jalan Raja Chulan
Tel: 03 2142 2744

Naab

130, Jalan Bukit Bintang
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2143 3949
Website: www.naabrestaurant.com

Sahara Tent

41-43, Jalan Sultan Ismail
Bukit Bintang
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2144 8310
Website: www.saharatent.com

Tarbush (Arabic and Lebanese)

LG 16, Starhill Gallery
Jalan Bukit Bintang
55100 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2144 6393
Website: www.tarbush.com.my

Thai**Chakri Palace**

Lot 417B, Level 4, Suria KLCC
50088 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2382 7788
Express: 03 8890 1616
Website: www.chakri.com.my

Flying Chillies

T219, Third Floor
The Gardens
Mid Valley City
Kuala Lumpur

Juara Tomyam Kampung Baru (Thai)

No 2 Jalan Puan, off Jalan Raja Uda
Kampung Baru
50300 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 016-970 6822
Website: azziyadah.blogspot.com

Variety**Acme Bar & Coffee (Fusion)**

Ground Floor, The Troika
Jalan Binjai
50450 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2162 2288
Website: www.acmebarcoffee.com

Atmosphere 360° (Malaysian)

TH-02, Menara Kuala Lumpur
No.2, Jalan Punchak
off Jalan P. Ramlee
50250 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2020 2020

Athena (Mediterranean)

3rd Floor, Pavilion Kuala Lumpur
168, Jalan Bukit Bintang
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2141 5131
Website: www.athena.com.my

Blu Med (Italian and Spanish)

27-G Ground Floor
The Boulevard
Mid Valley City
Lingkaran Syed Putra
59200 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2201 5081
Website: www.blumed.com.my

Bosphorus (Turkish)

6.33, Level 6
Pavilion Kuala Lumpur
Jalan Bukit Bintang
55100 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2142 4000
Website: www.bosphorus.com.my

Etoile Bistro (French)

Equatorial Hotel Kuala Lumpur
27 Jalan Sultan Ismail
50250 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2031 1133

Flam's (French)

41, Changkat Bukit Bintang
Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 2145 8333
Website: www.flams.com

Figure 3.2 Extract of list of restaurants in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2014)

In total, I visited 49 theme restaurants for initial site reviews, documentations, sometimes meals, and (where possible) discussions about possible interviews. After the first and second visits, as well as approaching owners/managers through email and phone, 20 of them agreed to participate, with a mixture of 13 'special theme' and 7 'international theme' restaurants. Apart from interviewing the theme restaurant owners/managers, I also wanted to interview some restaurant interior designers, aiming to get the view from these professionals about the 'staging' process. For one of the international theme restaurants participating in the study, I was able to gain an introduction to their restaurant designer and interview them separately. I also interviewed another freelance interior designer with considerable experience of restaurant design in Klang Valley. Involving these design professionals in the research helped in supplying more information on the process, including procedures that some owners/managers were less directly involved in (such as local government rules and regulations and the technical underpinnings of and limits to restaurant design). Ideally I would have liked to interview more designers, but often owners / managers were reluctant to pass on details (sometimes they had not engaged a single designer, sometimes they were located outside of the area / country). Overall, though, I did gain some data from the perspective of restaurant designers, which was especially useful in Chapter 5.

3.3.2 Conducting the semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview involves the researcher having a list of initial questions or topic areas, often referred to as an 'interview guide' (Bryman, 2004), that is then used within a more conversational exchange. Dunn (2010) notes that the guide may be a simple list of keywords or concepts intended to remind the researcher of discussion topics, or it can be fully worded questions, but the emphasis is on giving freedom to

decide the sequence and precise wording of questions through the course of the interview whilst ensuring systematic rigour and consistency (Patton, 2002). Personally, I found that the interview guide was a very helpful tool, reminding me about the topics to be covered or information needed and preventing me from getting lost in the interesting stories told by the participants, whilst at the same time allowing sufficient flexibility so I could respond to, probe and follow insights that emerged from the respondent's talk. Appendix 3 shows the interview guide that I used during the fieldwork, which consisted of both pre-determined initial questions and themes to be discovered.

I started interview sessions by handing over the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and briefing the participants regarding the research and other important items stated in the documents. Once the participants signalled understanding (e.g. once I had answered any queries they had), I then gave the consent form for them to sign and explained the consent procedures. The PIS advised interview sessions would be recorded. However, to make it clear, at this stage I asked again for their permission (the details of the recording process are explained in section 3.4.3.). Before beginning the interview I also asked participants whether they would prefer to converse in Malay or English; this enhanced the ability of participants to convey their ideas and to describe the reality of their experience as fluently as possible.

In my questioning I behaved as a 'cultural stranger', asking them to explain matters to me (Weiss, 1995) even if I was familiar with some of the answers through previous discussions or background readings. My aim was to create an exchange that could explore participants' experiences through their own accounts. However, it was also important to show interest and engagement in them and their restaurant, so as appropriate I would use the information gained in advance to shape questions and to probe further on initial answers. Broadly, the interviews nearly always started with some general relaxed chat to ease the interviewee's nerves; then came sets of questions where I asked the participants to tell the history of their theme restaurant

and theme restaurants in the city more generally; and then the discussion narrowed down to specific aspects of spatial design. The interviews concluded with a 'debriefing' (i.e. a check that they were happy with the process, whether they had more they wished to discuss, etc.), thanks, and a token of appreciation (a small souvenir from London, given my UK base for the work).

3.3.3 Recording and transcribing

According to Dunn (2010), the two main techniques for recording qualitative interviews are audio recording and note-taking. Using an audio recorder is often recommended as it frees the interviewer to concentrate on the topic and the dynamic of the interview (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this study, all interviews were recorded using a Olympus LS-5 voice recorder (audio - recording in .mp3 format), a personal smart phone Samsung Note 2 (audio - recording in .mp3 format) as well as Sony HDR-CX405 Camcorder (video - recording in .MOD format). The recordings were compatible for the CAQDAS software later used in transcription and analysis. There were three reasons for using multiple devices. First, different devices work effectively in different settings; by using all three, I ensured that at least one captured the voice clearly. Second, it served as a backup, in case any device malfunctioned or ran out of battery (Dunn, 2010). Third, the video record helped in the process of transcription, as audio recording does not keep a record of non-verbal data, such as gestures, body language and any additional information onsite (Dunn, 2010). However, an oft-cited drawback in using audio recording devices is that their use may influence the participants to change the content of their answers. Marvasti (2004, p. 55) suggests that:

Respondents tend to shift their speech to a more formal tone as soon as the tape recorder is turned on. It sometimes seems as if the 'on' button on the recorder activates a particular persona. Fortunately, this tendency gradually dissipates several minutes into the interview as they switch back to their 'normal' selves.

To counter this disadvantage I began with small talk and built rapport with the participants, aiming to distract them from the 'being-recorded-mode' and to warm up the discussion. This made them more comfortable, less nervous and able to share their experiences freely. The interview sessions lasted about 60 minutes on average (the shortest being 13 minutes, the longest 90). The following Table 3.1 provides details of the restaurants that participated in the interviews and the duration of the interview.

	Name of Restaurant	Theme	Subtheme	Duration (min)
1	Bumbu Desa	International	Indonesia	48
2	Wong Solo	International	Indonesia	84
3	Pondok Malindo	International	Indonesia	90
4	Palate Palette	Special	Colours	50
5	Bumbu Bali	International	Bali	54
6	Paradise Inn	International	Chinese	32
7	Flora Kafe	Special	Flower	90
8	Sweetree	Special	Korean	58
9	Upin Ipin	Special	Cartoon	72
10	Fisherman's Cove	Special	Fisherman	33
11	Passage thru India	International	India	43
12	Songket Restaurant	Special	Songket	38
13	Coliseum Café	Special	Retro	13
14	Yankie's Hut	Special	Village	20
15	Garden Café	Special	Garden	31
16	Horizon Garden	Special	Garden	59
17	Asmara Fern	Special	Garden	32
18	Istana Bambu	Special	Bamboo	60
19	Chemistry Café	Special	Lab	48
20	Ayem Burger	Special	Cowboy	61
			TOTAL	1016

Table 3.1 Details of the participants for interview and duration of session

Once the interview sessions had been recorded in the .mp3 format, they were then transferred onto my computer and transcribed into text form for later use in analysis. A transcript is a written “reproduction of the formal interview which took place between researcher and informant” (Minichiello et. al, 1990, cited in Dunn, 2010, p.120) and “a translation from one narrative mode – oral discourse – into another narrative mode – written discourse” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 178). In this process, I used the Nvivo 10 software to aid me. The software is compatible with both audio and video recordings and its features ease the process. The use of a foot pedal sped up the progress of transcribing, allowing me to play, pause, rewind and fast-forward the recordings using my foot whilst keeping both hands free to type. Dunn (2010) estimates that a 60-minute interview will require at least four hours of transcription (if one is a fast typist); personally it took me approximately 6 to 7 hours to transcribe an hour of interview recording, though I became quicker as I progressed. I transcribed in the language of the interview where participants conversed in either Malay, English or a mixture of both languages. Translation from Malay to English only occurred within the data analysis and writing processes (which I discuss later in this chapter).

3.4 Focus group discussions

Historically, focus groups owe much of their popularity to marketing researchers and political candidates, as they wanted to gauge the consumers’ or constituents’ opinions regarding a particular product or issue (Fontana and Frey, 2000). However, Bosco and Herman (2010) claim that human geographers prefer to use this method as it is a complement to the theory-rich and critically informed geographic research that has emerged in the last few decades. The authors note that:

Focus groups are particularly appropriate for examining the complex socio-spatial practices and discourses that are the focus of much contemporary work in human geography (Bosco and Herman, 2010, p. 195).

In particular, then, focus group discussions allow participants to articulate socio-spatial practices and discourses. In terms of practices, group discussions provide a format in which participants can share their experiences, which can enhance individual recollection. In terms of discourses, group discussions have been promoted by the geographer Peter Jackson for their ability to uncover both the discursive 'repertoires' in cultural circulation (i.e. our way of way of talking and thinking about a subject matter) and our 'discursive dispositions' (i.e. our varied relationships to these repertoires) (Jackson et al., 2001, p. 180). Focus group discussions offer a space for both shared ways of talking about issues and expressions of difference, debates as well as consensus within a group (Horn, 2012). They have become an increasingly common method across human geography and the social sciences more generally (for further overviews on their use in these contexts see Bloor et al., 2001, Conradson, 2005 and Hopkins, 2007).

3.4.1 Sampling and recruiting participants

In this study, focus groups sessions were conducted in order to investigate consumer understandings and experiences of themed restaurants in the Klang Valley area. These sessions were also intended to provide further materials on consumer behaviour issues, both in relation to how people react within the theme dining environment and how that dining experience relates to pre- and post-visit practices.

As with the interviews detailed above, in designing the groups and recruiting participants I again used a 'purposive' or purposeful sampling strategy (Cameron,

2010). I aimed for groups of consumers with some existing interest in and knowledge of theme restaurants. My aim was not for groups that would provide a representative sample of the wider consumer population, but rather for groups that had particular, diverse investments in the emergence of theme restaurants locally. The groups were not designed as a form of market research with statistically representative consumers. In line with other geographical research on consumer cultures (Jackson et al., 2001), the focus group method was instead used to access the discourses through which theme restaurants are consumed. In terms of sampling, this meant that the groups were recruited around specific but variable criteria including professional knowledge of theme restaurants and customer experience of them. My purpose in recruiting the groups, then, was to generate informed and engaged discussion, rather than to represent a representative range of all the possible consumer perceptions of theme restaurants in the Klang Valley area. In addition, practical logistics also shaped the groups. The focus group research had to take place in a set time period at the end of my fieldwork in Malaysia, which could not be extended due to impending maternity. This resulted in the groups being recruited largely through established networks that I possessed, as time constraints prevented me developing groups from social institutions and settings with which I had no existing contacts. Nonetheless, I am content that the group participant sampling met my main purpose, namely informed discussion that would generate common discursive responses to the theme restaurant phenomenon.

With group work, there is also a further issue associated with recruitment and participant sampling: whether to look for homogeneity of participants within a group, to assure that the data obtained is representative of a definable group, or to generate a diversity of opinion for discussion, through an explicitly diverse group. Cameron (2010) believes that the answer should be largely determined by the purpose of the study. She gives the example of Bedford and Burgess's (2002) experience of conducting research on environmental responsibility, where they had participants with similar experiences in each group but a range of different groups (in their case,

suppliers, retailers, regulators, consumers and advocates), which they describe as “ensuring homogeneity within the group and heterogeneity between them”. In defending this norm, Morgan (1996) argued that intra-group homogeneity contributes to a climate where participants can speak freely in an atmosphere of mutual respect, as people tend to feel comfortable with others with whom they share some similarities.

Sensitive to this advantage, I therefore formed focus groups of participants with shared experience(s) of theme restaurant(s) but diverse in their background. There were eight groups in total:

- **One group of participants working in the hospitality industry** who combined experience as a customer and as a person within the same industry. This group composition was designed to seek opinion from people ‘inside’ the food and beverage industry who were familiar with the nature of hospitality business and would have a more professional perspective in evaluating the restaurant ambiance and be more expressive in sharing their consumer experience. This was a group of 5 participants.

- **One group of ‘food hunters’,** who have a deep interest in ‘food hunting’ activity and actively visit restaurants, particularly theme restaurants, in order to consume the unique ambiance as well as new food and beverage on the menu. As they have a lot of experience in visiting and trying out new food places, the insights of such ‘food hunters’ are valuable in comparing and commenting on themed restaurants. The shared importance of novelty to both theme restaurants and to the consumption habits of this group also suggested potential for this aspect of market dynamics to be explored within such a group. There were 5 participants in this particular group.

- **One group of food bloggers**, where participants own a food blog or actively reviewed the visited restaurants on the net, and had experience of visiting various types of restaurants and giving feedback regarding their visits. Once more, as a type of ‘expert consumer’, their detailed comments and reviews are particularly useful in understanding the success or failure of ambiance staging, from the customer’s perspective. 4 participants agreed to participate in this group.

- **Two groups of ‘professionals’**, which I defined as participants who combined professional social status (holding high academic qualifications and professional jobs) with knowledge and experience of restaurant management. Their insight thus benefited from general customer experience and professional expertise. There were 10 participants of this kind, with 5 of them in each group.

- **Three groups of students**, as part of a younger demographic that were a key target market for theme restaurants. In comparison to ‘professional’ customers, as well as providing a different age group this set of participants were also seen as likely to pay greater attention to questions of cost. 15 participants contributed their feedback to this study and were distributed evenly across 3 groups of 5 members each.

Researchers also debate the appropriate size of a group. As Patton (2002) notes, focus groups usually consists of six to ten participants, which is an optimum size (Gill et al., 2008). Cameron (2010, p.159) believes that “too few participants per group (fewer than four) limits the discussion, while too many (more than ten) restricts the time available for individual participants to contribute”. Bloor et al. (2001) add large groups can be chaotic and hard to manage for the moderator too. Based on this best practice guidance, this study’s groups ranged from four to six participants. Each group session lasted between one and two hours (Cameron, 2010), which proved an ample duration

for maintaining level of interest, covering all topics and giving each individual time to participate. Participants were recruited through posts on social media, other social networks and direct approach (e.g. to food bloggers). After getting a response or upon being approached by them, I made sure that they fitted the selection criteria and started to sort them according to groups. The final participants were then selected and contacted through email, phone and private message to arrange a group meeting place, time and date.

3.4.2 Conducting focus groups

It is important to choose an appropriate place for focus group sessions: appropriately quiet (to allow discussion), but also comfortable and easily accessible to the participants. The sessions were conducted in classrooms, meeting rooms and offices where these locations were closed rooms to give privacy and no/less disruptions (eg: noise, people walking around, etc). Tables and chairs were grouped so that participants were facing each other, in order to ease discussion and communication. Participants were given nametags to help both participants and me (as the moderator) to converse; calling out the participants' names through the session not only created a more relaxed and personal environment but also helped voice recognition in the transcription process.

The focus groups sessions all started with an overview of the research and the role of the focus group in the research (Cameron, 2010). In briefing the research, I showed the participants a few pictures of local theme restaurants, partly to convey the definition of theme restaurants in the study, partly to help trigger their memories of dining at these places. Participants were then handed the PIS, any necessary clarifying discussions took place, and consent forms were completed. At the same time, I set up

the recording devices, after everyone had given permission and agreed to be recorded.

As with the individual interviews, the group discussions were also structured by a guide or schedule. The first part of the discussion focused on participants' experience sharing to theme restaurants. This gave each participant some time to talk and to take an active role within the group. The later parts of the discussion were shaped by the information given by the participants, and drew out wider issues from their individual accounts, upon which all could comment. The sessions were conducted as open conversations in which each participant was welcomed to comment, ask questions, or respond to comments by others (Folch-Lyon and Trost, 1981). As a moderator, I kept my interventions to a minimum during the debates and let the participants actively discuss the issues aroused. My role was to direct the discussions in relation to the focus group guide (see Appendix 4). In these steering interventions it was important to use words that made sense to the participants, rather than falling into academic or technical terms (Patton, 2002). During the first group session, I strictly used English medium in the discussion, but this proved unhelpful, making the participants uneasy and limiting their conversation. In the subsequent groups participants were free to communicate in whichever language they preferred. Each group discussion was ended by a brief summary from myself as moderator, providing a sense of completion and allowing participants to clarify or correct the summary (Cameron, 2010). All participants were given a token of appreciation for taking time to attend and for their contribution; food and drinks were also provided at most sessions.

3.4.3 Recording and transcribing

Cameron (2010) strongly suggests audio-recording focus groups because discussions usually cover a lot of material which makes notation and subsequent recollection impossible. The recording devices that I used in focus groups sessions were the same that I used for the interview sessions, which were two audio recorders and one video recorder. In addition to the importance of recording with multiple devices explained above, the use of multiple audio recorders also allowed me to place each device at one end of the group so that it could clearly capture the voices of participants within its range. As focus groups involve a number of people often talking in rapid exchanges, the use of video was helpful, allowing the researcher to check who was speaking during transcription of audio files and to observe what other group members were doing (Horn, 2012). At the same time, I also took short notes during the sessions, focused on the reactions of participants; I also used this note-taking activity to signal to the group the value I was placing on their contributions and to pace the discussion (Merriam, 2009). The average length of each session recorded was 60 minutes, with a total duration of 489 minutes for the 8 focus groups sessions. Similar to the interview process, the next step after recording was to transcribe the recordings into text to initiate the analysis process. Again, the use of Nvivo software eased and sped up the process. Each session was transcribed into its own file and named accordingly. However, I used a different heading (Heading 2) format for each participant's acronym names in the transcripts.

3.5 Visual methods

The third principal strand of qualitative research in this study was not focused on the construction of data with human participants (through interviews and focus groups) but on engaging directly with themed restaurants as material places, through the use

of visual methods. Within both Human Geography, and other social sciences such as Sociology, there has been a renewed interest in visual data as a way to engage with everyday spaces and lives, in particular through photography and video work. In Human Geography, for example, Hunt (2014) discusses the potential of photographic practice in researching urban spaces, proposing a focus on material textures that can evoke the feelings and experiences of place. Coles (2014) used photography to document the material fabric, design and ambiance of Borough Market, a farmers and fine foods market in central London. Garrett (2011) provides an assessment of the value of what he terms 'videographic geographies', emphasising in particular the use of digital video as a multisensory, ethnographic method, echoing the influential arguments of Pink in her books on 'visual ethnography' (2013) and 'sensory ethnography' (2015). Various authors have also discussed how visual methods such as photographing and videoing can be used in combination with more talk based methods such as interviewing, including to evoke the affective qualities of experience that are hard to articulate verbally (for example, Latham, 2003; Spinney, 2015). Beyond Human Geography, Schroeder (2002) discusses photography as a way of 'capturing' experience, concretizing lived existence in pictures. The sociologist Back (2007) paradoxically argues for photography as a way to 'listen' to the world. Such conceptual arguments have been developed in tandem with a reinvigoration of the methodological literature on the use of visual methods in social research (Banks, 2001; Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Pink, 2013, 2015; Rose, 2001).

The methodological literatures emphasising photography and video vary in their emphases. Some treat photography and video primarily as forms of data construction and documentation (Markwell, 2000). Others place more emphasis on their 'creative' potentials, allowing the researcher to produce creative visual outputs that can evoke their subject matter for audiences (Hunt, 2014). Relatedly, there is much debate over whether such visual methods should be associated with 'naturalist' claims to show the world as it really is. Crang (2010) notes the danger that the use of a camera or video is attached to a problematic idea of "pure vision – vision that is uncorrupted by

secondary connotations of knowledge and cognitions” (Kearnes, 2000 , p. 338). In contrast, Crang (2010) argues that visuals are directive. Like Rose (2001), he stresses that visual images construct particular ways of seeing social issues and spaces. Like Hunt (2014) on photography and Simpson (2011) on video, he emphasises that visual data may be better understood as evocative rather than transparent, discussing how visual media can be used to access the multisensory, emotive ‘atmospheres’ of places.

In this study, visual methods were used in a documentary way. Photography and video were deployed as a means to engage with the materialities of themed restaurants and their ‘experiencescapes’ (O’Dell, 2005) and ‘DINESCAPE’ (Ryu and Jang, 2007). Photography was particularly suited to documenting the material design and decoration of the restaurants. Video, through combining visual and sonic data in a moving text, was particularly suited to documenting the multi-sensory, atmospheric and performative qualities of the places. Videos, in particular, have been recently used by human geographers to present the affective experiences of place (Simpson, 2011).

Practically, during the interviews with the restaurants owners/managers I sought permission to undertake this visual documentation of the restaurants. The photos taken were particularly focused on the materials that portrayed the theme and elements of the restaurant DINESCAPE, such as the décor, lighting, seating, layout, menu and furnishings. Discussion and analysis of this data comes to the fore in Chapter 5. Short video clips were also produced, particularly focused on capturing and evoking the ambiance in the restaurant, through other material elements such as the music played (the soundscape or aural architecture of the restaurant), the lighting level, and the embodied interactions of people (staff and customers). This video footage attached was intended to document the ‘live performance’ of the restaurant theme. This data comes to the fore in Chapter 6 as well as Chapter 5. The timing of this visual work had to be carefully considered. For the photographic documentation it was better to work when the restaurant was quiet, so that material features could be photographed without disturbing customers. In contrast, for the video documentation

it was sometimes helpful to record at busy times, when the restaurant was providing its 'full experience'. Precise timings were discussed with participants and decided on a case by case basis. In total, my database included 1,580 pictures and 161 short videos, with an average of 75 pictures and 7 videos (at average 20 seconds each) for each restaurant. Figure 3.3 shows in summary the kinds of visual data collected in this study.

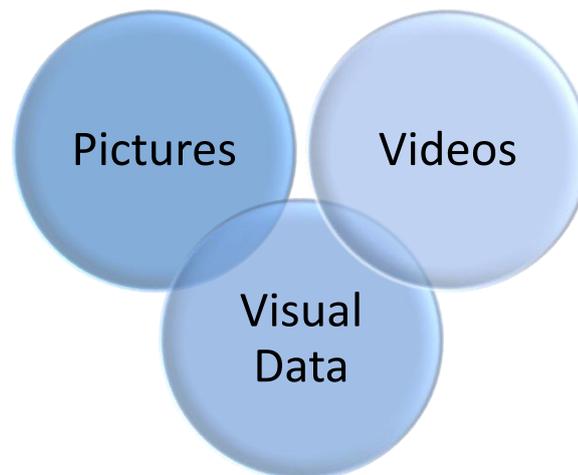


Figure 3.3 Summary of visual data collected

In summary, visual materials were important data in this research, not as fixed representations but as the products of visual methods for engaging, 'touching' and 'connecting' with the places being studied (Crang, 2010). Within the thesis, this visual data performs various roles (Marvasti, 2004): sometimes illustrating the written text and verbal data collected in interviews or group discussions; sometimes standing in their own right as key forms of evidential data; sometimes being important within the process of analysis and interpretation (for example, detailed comparison of the visual data was important in allowing me to identify similarities and differences between the 'DINESCAPES' of the restaurants).

3.6 Data management and analysis

Data analysis, the process of 'making sense out of the data' (Merriam, 2009), is a central component of any research methodology. For Creswell (2009) such analysis involves various stages of management, interpretation and representation, including preparing the data for analysis (e.g. through interview transcription, organising, filing and categorising documents and text, converting data into usable formats), conducting various analyses, taking stock of these so that one can understand the data, and presenting the data (in memos, drafts and texts for dissemination). There is now a well-established literature that discusses qualitative data analysis within the social sciences. Influenced in particular by ideas of 'grounded theorising' and various sorts of data 'coding' (see Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), the adoption of explicit processes for analysis has become an expected part of rigorous qualitative research (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Over the last twenty years, computer software packages (CAQDAS: computer aided qualitative data analysis software) have become increasingly important within many forms of qualitative data analysis (Silver and Lewins, 2014).

Practically, this study produced large volumes of qualitative data, in multiple formats. Initial data management involved storing data in restaurant specific folders (including the audio interview recordings from the two devices [both .mp3 and .mp4 format], the video interview recording [.MOD format], photographs [.jpg format] and short videos of the restaurant ambiance [.MOD format]). Interview and focus group transcripts were completed after the period of fieldwork and filed within the restaurant folders (.docx format). Back-up copies of the dataset were made using multiple hard drives and cloud storage such as Google Drive, Dropbox as well as the university's Y: drive. All data were protected with a username and password for security. Analysis of the data was aided by using the Nvivo 10 (CAQDAS) software. Nvivo10 was chosen as it is compatible with the various formats of data produced in the fieldwork (including the audio, video, image, text, and pdf files produced),

comparatively easy to use in my experience (supported by series of specialist training workshops), and was freely supplied by my university. Horn (2012) refers to Nvivo as the most frequently used software for qualitative data analysis and praises its combined functionality for data coding, analysis and representation. I personally found this software more user friendly than another option, Atlas.ti. I carefully considered cautionary tales about the use of CAQDAS software; Schiellerup (2008), for example, points to the dangers of becoming overwhelmed by data codes and sub-codes and losing sight of the real purpose of analysis, namely to understand the data and present that understanding to others. However, perhaps because of Nvivo 10's user-friendly interface, I found this less of a problem and found it a very helpful tool for the management of data during the analysis process.

'Content analysis' is a general term for a number of different strategies for understanding qualitative data, looking to determine its meanings, trends, relations and core consistencies (Patton, 2002). Krippendorff (2013, p. 24) views content analysis as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter)". In order to achieve this goal, content analysis requires an examination of the data for the existence and frequency of concepts/themes, where the dominant concepts/themes in the text are categorized into 'codes' (Franzosi, 2004). For example, in analysing a written transcript, the underlying principle is to identify the occurrence of selected terms within the text that can be implicitly or explicitly related to the concepts/themes/codes. This is a recursive process, with concepts/themes/codes emerging through the detailed analysis of the text. For some, this qualitative analysis has a quantitative element, in so far as frequency of appearance indicates importance; Jupp (2006, p. 40) emphasizes that "the number of times that a particular item is used, and the number of contexts in which it appears, are used as measures of the significance of particular ideas or meanings in the document". However, in my own analysis I was also conscious of how infrequently mentioned ideas might also be important, so I avoided simply prioritising the most frequent codes.

Let me illustrate the process with reference to the transcripts of the interviews with restaurant owners/managers. As the transcription process was done using Nvivo, compiling and organizing all the transcripts documents (with the right labelling) into the internal source window made the text visible and easy to read (refer to Figure 3.4). Initial thoughts on the content had also been gathered during the interview and transcription processes. Reading through the entire data set before starting the coding process also helped in triggering ideas, identifying possible patterns. Then, it was crucial to repeatedly and actively read each transcript, looking for meanings, patterns and themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

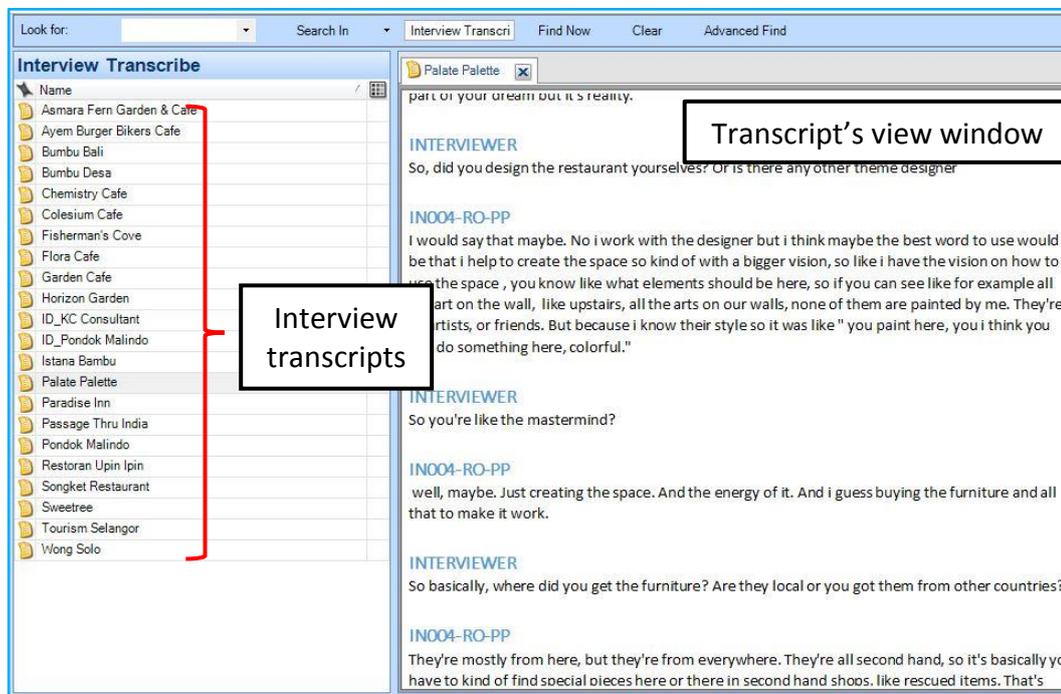


Figure 3.4 Importing all interview transcripts into internal sources for easy viewing

The next step was the development of codes, or nodes as they are termed in Nvivo. The development and definition of categories and codes was in part inspired from my wider literature reviews (Tobi, 2014), a deductive approach. They were also generated from the transcripts themselves, an inductive approach. In parallel with generating the list of codes, I also constructed groups as a higher order of headings, a process of abstraction that helped to see broader connections and issues (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Practically, during coding Nvivo allowed me to highlight, drag and drop portions of the transcript text into the relevant nodes. Figure 3.5 shows the DINESCAPE codes created through the literature (e.g. Ryu and Jang, 2007) and then expanded inductively after going through the transcripts. In addition, during the coding process, the same bits of text can be coded into two or more codes (vital given that one particular part of a text can carry different meanings). The following Figure 3.6 illustrates how the highlighted bit of transcript (in black framed box) coded into two different codes.

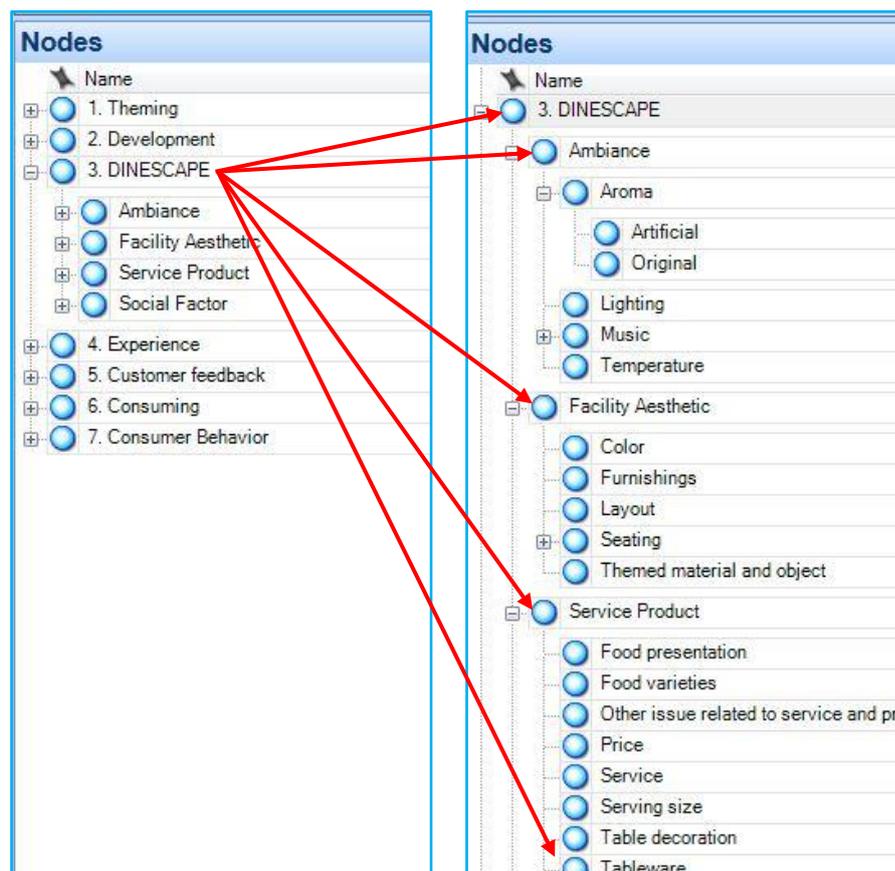


Figure 3.5 Nodes developed and expanded through literature and emerged from data

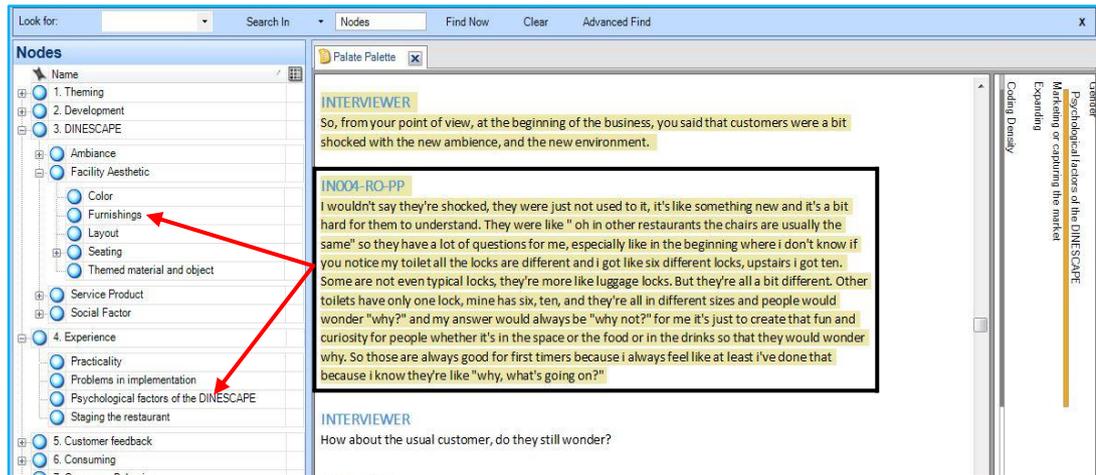


Figure 3.6 Highlighted data being coded into two different codes

Throughout the reading and coding of the interview transcripts, I used Nvivo 10's annotation function for analysis memos, in which I recorded particular insights, ideas that lay behind the codes created, or issues that I was struggling to accommodate within the node structure (Schiellerup, 2008). Figure 3.7 shows a view of some Annotation text, appearing in the bottom area of the Nvivo 10 interface / screen, in relation to the transcript text highlighted in green. This annotation function also let me include non-verbal data (e.g. from the video recording) where this was necessary or helpful.

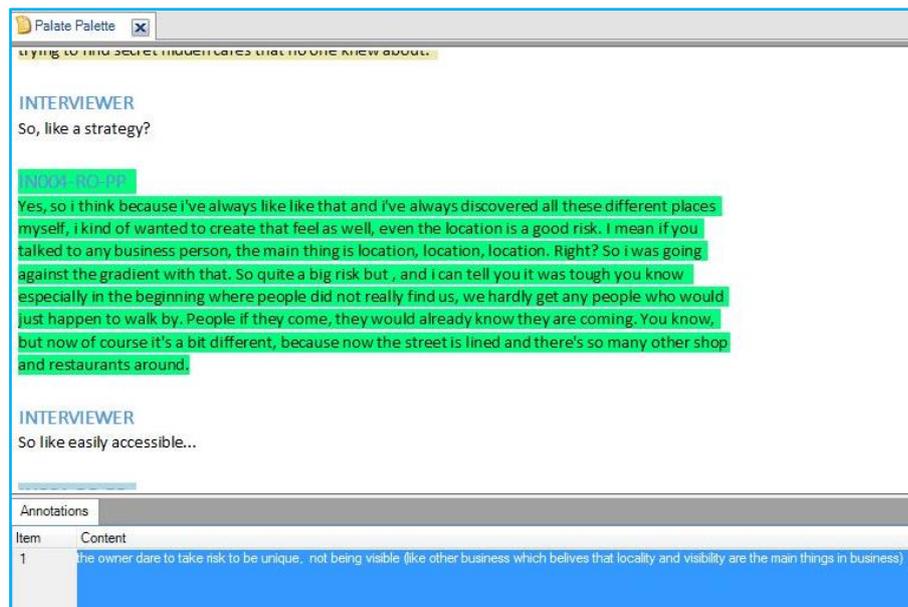


Figure 3.7 Making memo or annotation for particular bits of data

Analysis of the focus group transcripts was undertaken with a similar logic (Negri and Thomas, 2003) but given the multiple participants in each discussion I used Nvivo 10's framework matrices as a way of summarizing and analysing the data in two-by-two matrix tables (Macfarlan, 2014). Miles et al. (2014, p. 113) describe matrix construction as a creative yet systematic task that furthers the understanding of the substance and meaning of a database. In my case, it condensed the large volume of transcripts materials into more manageable quantities and helped me to gain insight and familiarity with the data, generally and specifically. Framework matrices provide a way to summarize or condense the materials in a grid that has rows for case nodes (e.g. participants in focus group) and columns for theme nodes. Each cell in the grid represents the intersection of a case and theme, where I entered text or made a summary. Hence, the first process was to identify the themes (or nodes in Nvivo) for the rows and columns to be displayed in the matrices. In this kind of process there is no single 'correct' matrix; rather the task is to build a matrix that helps to give answers to the questions asked in the research. As Miles et al. (2014, p. 114) advise, "adapt and invent formats that will serve you best". Thus, for the focus group discussion analysis underpinning Chapter 7 I developed the theme codes and sub-codes that in a recursive process of refining the key concerns and structure of the chapter (see Figure 3.8).

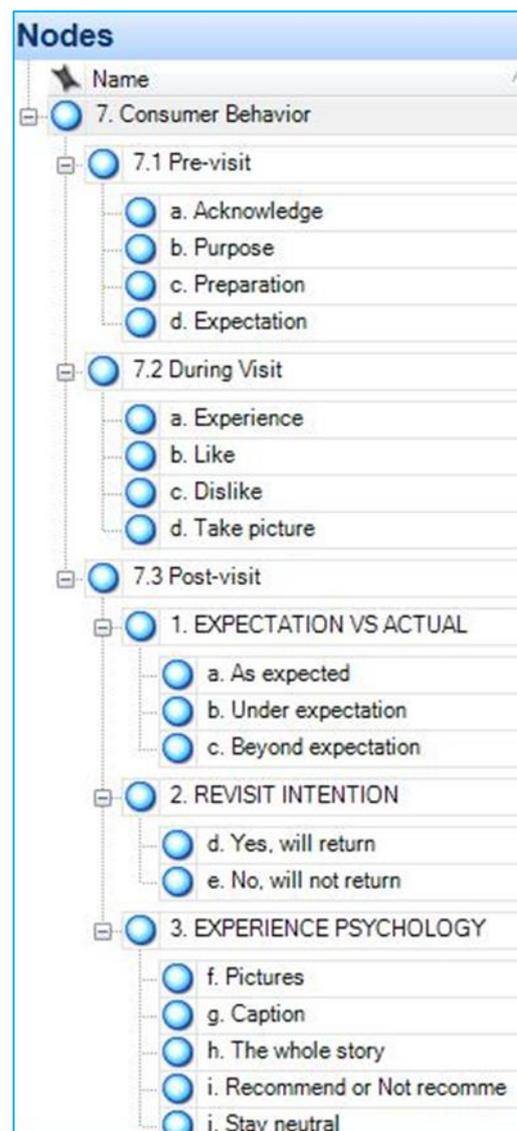


Figure 3.8 Theme nodes for matrices columns

In order to be able to handle data from each participant, as well as from within a whole group, I first created each participant within a group as a 'case node'. In other words, for the transcript of a focus group discussion with five participants, I extracted it into five different case nodes, each representing one participant (see Figure 3.9) and accumulate all conversation made by the particular participant. A case node of moderator also created both to combine what I spoke and separate it from the participants' conversation.

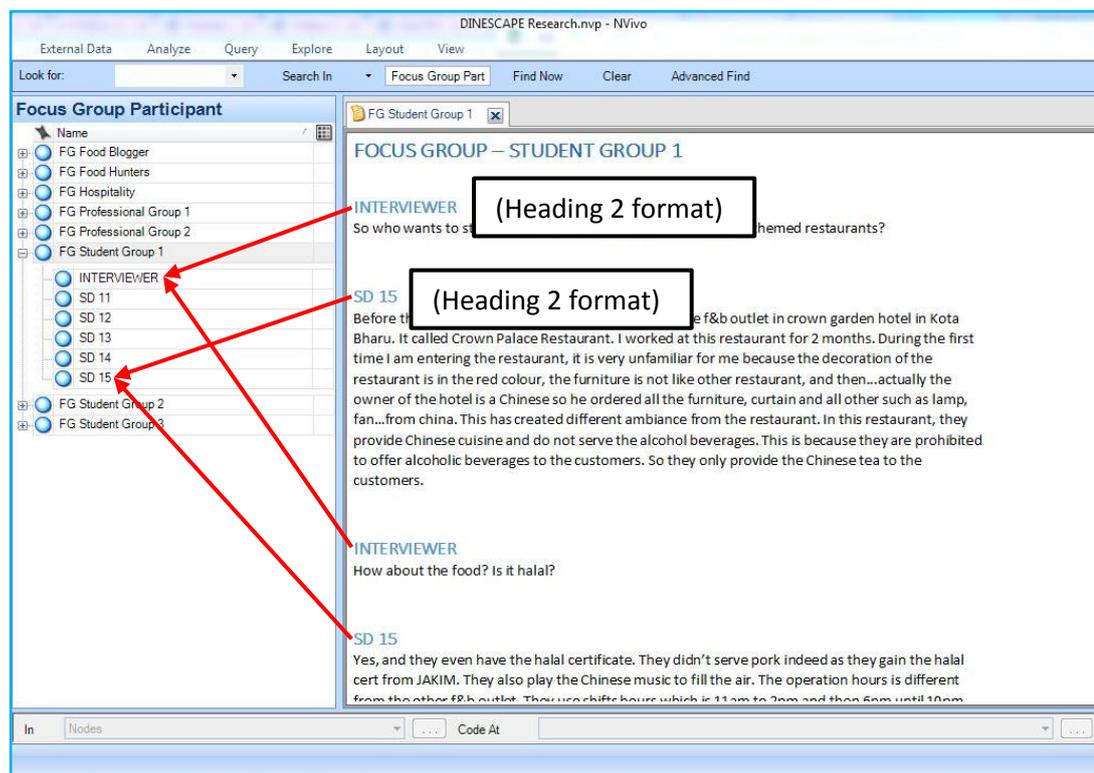


Figure 3.9 Creating participant nodes for matrices rows

Then, I created the framework matrix in Nvivo, selecting the participants for rows and selecting appropriate theme nodes for the columns in the *New Framework Matrix* dialog box. Within the framework matrix, clicking on a cell produced an associated view of the data at this intersection. For example in Figure 3.10, the associated view on the right side shows what SD 12 participant said about her 'experience' (the theme node) during a visit to a theme restaurant. Summaries were composed of this data,

which could then be scanned to allow me to generate a broader understanding across the group discussions without having to keep returning to individual transcripts.

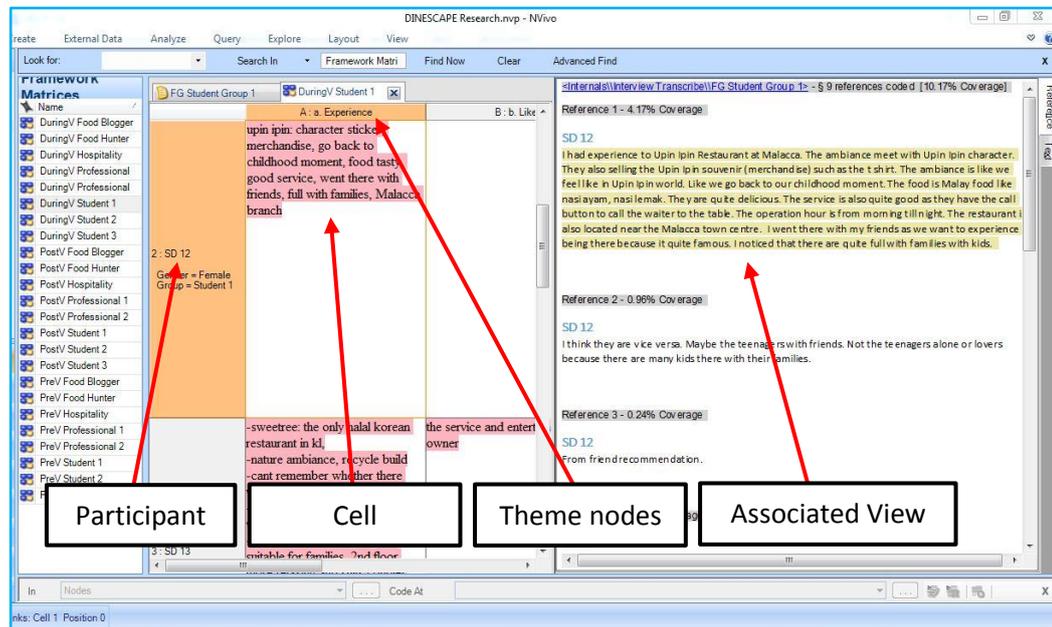


Figure 3.10 Framework matrices view

As Callanan (2013) emphasizes, framework matrices summarize qualitative data into a matrix display which facilitates both ‘within case’ and ‘across case’ analysis. I produced 24 framework matrices altogether – with eight group discussions and each sub-divided into the three main grouped thematics presented in Chapter 7. Finding it difficult to jump back and forth across these matrices on screen, I printed them out to and I also exported them into Excel (see Figure 3.11). For each theme, I glued the matrices from different groups together. After that, I worked on the matrices by viewing them again and again, developing my interpretation from the summaries as well as referring back to the original content of the transcripts. I wrote my ideas and interpretations on the matrices or used colourful post-it-notes (see Figure 3.12 and Figure 3.13).

PRE V - STUDENT 1				
	A : a. Acknowledge	B : b. Purpose	C : c. Preparation	D : d. Expectation
SD 14	<p>she is aware that TGI friday is a popular restaurant. but particularly, she knew about the restaurant and found more information about this restaurant through blog reading</p> <p>opinion: special menu created based on the theme but basically its just an ordinary menu but with extraordinary/theming-based name.</p>		<p>she knew that the price will be expensive but she can accept it as it is an occasional visit</p>	
SD 13	<p>her friends recommend the restaurant</p> <p>opinion: they charge me to cover the cost for decoration</p>	<p>for assignment</p>	<p>she looked for information on the net about the restaurant before pay a visit</p>	
SD 15	<p>she doing internship at the restaurant</p>			<p>she prefer to go with friend with the same interest as she anticipate to create a more exciting moments and feeling</p> <p>to her as a student, food price in theme restaurant is expensive</p>
SD 12	<p>her friends recommend to go to this restaurant</p>			<p>she prefer to experience the ambiance with her family</p>
SD 11		<p>didnt specified why but she went there with friends</p> <p>prefer to go with family to experience it too</p>		<p>she prefer to experience the ambiance with her family</p>

Figure 3.11 Exporting matrices to excel

	A : a. Acknowledge	B : b. Purpose	C : c. Preparation	D : d. Expectation
1	<p>opinion on theme restaurant: focus more on the decor but not the food taste/quality</p> <p>opinion: good location</p> <p>opinion: staff problem. local vs foreigners, you have to have interest in customer service</p> <p>opinion: personally think there is no restaurant with the decor and food quality at the same level</p> <p>opinion: theme restaurant attract crowd for the first visit. taste of food will be the major role in convincing them to revisit</p> <p>friends recommendation and meet client</p> <p>tv advert</p> <p>tv programme</p> <p>hospitallity people might accidentally know about these restaurant</p>	<p>the selection of restaurant is depend with whom i am at the time.</p> <p>special occasion</p> <p>opinion: theme restaurant is for high end people entertaining guest, go occasionally</p> <p>why people try international cuisine: bcoz restaurant offer promotion, so enjoy the privilege</p> <p>educate the family about international cuisine</p> <p>2 good point - relate to sukarela → Dony - if there is not only to cater them but to get education about culture</p>	<p>look for halal cert restaurant</p> <p>look for truly halal cert from jakim due to various issue arise</p>	<p>① Price - expensive pricey - judge on the crowd - being told cheaper</p> <p>② Ambiance - beautiful great - Price in website</p> <p>③ Experience - As read / being told - eg: Johnny Rocher - excited</p>
2	<p>opinion: there is no theme restaurant with heavy decoration all year round</p>	<p>selection of restaurant based on who i bring along</p> <p>some people are adventurous on food, and some look at the price before entering</p> <p>depends on who with me. if a girl - romantic place then</p>	<p>look for halal cert information of the restaurant</p> <p>sometimes halal is just an opinion. so need to make sure on this</p>	
3	<p>opinion: hygiene and food quality is important, worth spend</p>	<p>like to try new food</p>		

Figure 3.12 Printed matrices with manual analysis

	A : a. Acknowledge	B : b. Purpose	C : c. Preparation	D : d. Expectation
1	<p>word of mouth, was in eye on</p> <p>often rate really want to go, looks beautiful pictures</p> <p>look for decor and ambience</p> <p>recommened in various program, a local food restaurant</p> <p>normally those recommendation</p>	<p>invite with family</p> <p>celebrate anniversary etc. not on regular basis, will depend on budget and time</p> <p>good because of the food, make it special, good ambience is a bonus</p> <p>notable for reason, special occasion</p> <p>looking at the menu, food, and ambience</p> <p>2 good point - relate to sukarela → Dony - if there is not only to cater them but to get education about culture</p>	<p>look for halal cert restaurant</p> <p>look for truly halal cert from jakim due to various issue arise</p>	<p>① Price - expensive pricey - judge on the crowd - being told cheaper</p> <p>② Ambiance - beautiful great - Price in website</p> <p>③ Experience - As read / being told - eg: Johnny Rocher - excited</p>
2	<p>opinion: staff problem. local vs foreigners, you have to have interest in customer service</p> <p>opinion: personally think there is no restaurant with the decor and food quality at the same level</p> <p>opinion: theme restaurant attract crowd for the first visit. taste of food will be the major role in convincing them to revisit</p> <p>friends recommendation and meet client</p> <p>tv advert</p> <p>tv programme</p> <p>hospitallity people might accidentally know about these restaurant</p>	<p>why people try international cuisine: bcoz restaurant offer promotion, so enjoy the privilege</p> <p>educate the family about international cuisine</p>	<p>look for halal cert information of the restaurant</p> <p>sometimes halal is just an opinion. so need to make sure on this</p>	
3	<p>opinion: there is no theme restaurant with heavy decoration all year round</p>	<p>selection of restaurant based on who i bring along</p> <p>some people are adventurous on food, and some look at the price before entering</p> <p>depends on who with me. if a girl - romantic place then</p>	<p>look for halal cert information of the restaurant</p> <p>sometimes halal is just an opinion. so need to make sure on this</p>	
4	<p>opinion: hygiene and food quality is important, worth spend</p>	<p>like to try new food</p>		

Figure 3.13 Overall view of matrices with post-it-notes

The final stage of data analysis is the writing process. Data and interpretations are not simply written down or up they are written through. Writing the empirical chapters in the thesis involved not just the transcription of statements from one or more respondents but rather the analysis and interpretation of data in order to identify what was meaningful in these discussions (Stewart et al., 2007). As such, writing is part of the analysis process. For Strauss (1987), writing is central to the third stage of coding (what he termed 'selective coding'), whereby initial thematic codes, and annotations about their relationships, are translated into narrative texts directed at particular audiences and in the context of existent literatures. However, there is no standard format for reporting and writing qualitative research (for general discussions of options, see Holliday, 2007 and Wolcott, 1990), and it usually depends on the research purpose and audience's interests (Merriam, 2009). In writing the empirical chapters, I presented the findings of the interview inquiries through selected quotes or in the form of dialogues (where necessary), to evidence the interview content underpinning my analysis (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Focus group data too is presented through quotations of dialogues on identified thematic issues. The visual data are also organised primarily thematically, with written text being used to position the photos or videos within the wider analysis, whilst also allowing the reader the ability to engage those materials directly (see Rose, 2001, on how images can be both illustrative but also evocative). Predominantly, then, text is composed in relation to the themes that emerged through the processes of data analysis. At times, however, I present particular examples of restaurants in more depth and in a more sustained narrative on particular thematic issues (Wolcott, 1990). This 'case study' style of description allows particular issues to be explored in more depth and counters a concern raised about thematically coded qualitative writing, namely that it decontextualizes data from its original places.

3.7 Conclusion

In ending this chapter, I will not summarise or repeat its discussions of research design, ethical consideration, research strands and methods and data analysis. Rather, I want to adopt a written style common to many guides to research practice and method, namely small pieces of advice and guidance to pass on to other hospitality management researchers who are considering working with a similar qualitative methodology in studying restaurants. I focus these on undertaking qualitative research with restaurant owners/managers as well as participants for focus groups:

- 1. Keep on searching for and recruiting potential participants.** Once the research objectives are refined and the sample (participants) is identified, persistence is necessary! It is normal to face failure in the early stage of participant recruitment. Potential participants may be reluctant to participate for many reasons (e.g.: they may not be the right person, they may be busy, they may be restricted from disclosing any information and the researcher will need to approach others first, or they simply not be interested) but this shouldn't be taken personally. Through experience, researchers will get the momentum in recruiting them.
- 2. Try various methods in contacting/approaching the participants.** Researchers must not rely on just one way to reach the participants. Think of various methods to get the opportunity to contact them to introduce your study. Researchers can try to send Email, telephone, fax, use the comment page on a website, message in social media or undertake a series of visits to the restaurants. It is important for the researcher to be able to speak to the participants; don't assume that no response is refusal; do not stop trying until you get the answer.

- 3. Get to know the participants' background beforehand.** It is important to be prepared before the interview session. Research the participants' profiles. This enhances your credibility and helps you to convince the participants that they are the right informants for the study.
- 4. Use comfortable language.** Encourage the participants to use the language that they comfortable to communicate in. In this way, they will freely express their feelings and thoughts and not limit their conversation. Avoiding academic language also helps to close the gap between the researcher and the participants.
- 5. The questions may be repetitive but the answers are not.** At some point, researchers may become bored in asking the same questions during interviews or group discussions. However, please bear in mind that every participant is unique and researchers might be surprised by one unique answer. Moreover, if answers do become increasingly familiar this tells you that are reaching the point of 'theoretical saturation' where you are ready to complete your fieldwork.
- 6. Do spend, it's an investment.** In the process of recruiting commercial hospitality participants, it might cost the researcher money; however, it is a good investment. In my experience of approaching possible participants in theme restaurants, I found that it was a good practice to spend a little bit at the restaurant during the first visit, not only so I knew their products but so I could spend time observing the dining ambiance as well. With this information, I can bring it up during the interview so that the participants know that I am interested in their restaurant. I am also able to ask for more information regarding particular things that I noticed. It makes for a more detailed and respectful discussion.

4

Marketing and the emergence of themed restaurants in Klang Valley

This chapter is the first of four analysing empirically the production and consumption of themed restaurant environments in the Klang Valley. Here I pursue this analysis by thinking about themed restaurants and / as marketing practices, as ways of communicating a hospitality product to potential consumers. Substantively, the chapter develops through four main sections, concerned respectively with: the emergence of theme ideas; the use of themes to market 'difference'; the key target markets identified by informants; and the advertising methods used to reach them. This account draws particularly on the research's semi-structured interviews with restaurant owners and managers (see Chapter 3 for further information). Before turning to this substantive discussion, however, it will be useful to set out my broader argument and approach with respect to themed environments as a form of marketing.

This approach is underpinned by three broad emphases. First, I see marketing as a process that attempts to connect together producers and consumers. Second, I view marketing as a process that seeks to differentiate products. Third, I see theming as a form of marketing, that seeks to connect products to consumers and differentiate them through the production of imagined elsewhere. Let me elaborate. The ethnographic explorations of the relations between marketing and modernity by Norwegian Anthropologist Marianne Lien provide a useful starting point (Lien, 1997; 2000). Lien's empirical focus is on the frozen pizza marketing and advertising campaigns of a company she calls Viking Foods, selling within the Norwegian market. In particular, she looks at how their pizza brands are given distinctive qualities through different national associations or themes. Viking market 'Italian', 'American' and 'Norwegian' pizza brands, each marked out by appropriate semiotics in their packaging and advertising (rather obvious in the Italian and American cases – from *il Tricolore* to the Statue of Liberty, more complex and subtle in representing a 'Norwegian' pizza for the Norwegian market). These national themes in turn associate these frozen pizza products with different qualities -- 'authenticity' for the 'Italian' pizza, 'modernity' for the 'American' pizza, as the 'folkepizzaen' (the 'people's pizza')

for the 'Norwegian pizza' – each of which is designed to position them within different consumer segments of the market.

Lien's detailed account offers three more general insights upon which I have drawn. First, she understands marketing as a strategic process of connecting production to consumption. Marketing is not simply a process of informing consumers about a product nor persuasively selling it to them. It is a process that (re)shapes both production and consumption, changing what is made (e.g., in Lien's case, the material form and ingredients of the frozen pizzas, as well as their packaging and brand names) and who consumes it and how. In this, Lien's empirical study (1997) matches wider theorisations of marketing as a crucial component within the wider lives of commodities and 'circuits of culture' (notably, see du Gay et al., 1997). For my study, this means recognising theming as a form of marketing that impacts on both the production and consumption of restaurants. Second, Lien (1997, 2000) understands marketing to be centrally concerned with 'differentiation'. In her empirical study, Viking Foods theme their pizzas with different national associations in order to differentiate them and to avoid the advertising of one variety simply taking sales from another of their brands. Marketing is about making products different, a process of social and commercial communication that transforms commodities into 'commodity-signs' (Goldman, 1992; Goldman and Papson, 1998) and thereby counters a sense of uniformity. Theming is marketing, as it seeks to turn restaurants into commodity-signs with distinctive qualities represented by the chosen thematic. Thirdly, Lien's study is particularly interesting for showing the potential role of place and place ideas within marketing practice. In Lien's case, it is ideas of national place that are central (see in particular Lien, 2000). As introduced in Chapter 2, existing work on themed environments also emphasises the use of place related symbols and motifs (Gottdiener, 1997; Munoz et al., 2006) and the "the patterning of space... to symbolize experiences and/or senses from a special or a specific past, present, or future place... as currently imagined" (Firat and Ulusoy, 2009, p.777). In other words, themed

environments, like Lien's pizza brands, use place associations to differentiate themselves within the market.

Also relevant here are wider debates about the relationships between marketing, branding and geography. At its simplest, branding is the marketing process of making brands, where brands are "an identifiable kind or variety of good or service... constituted of values or 'equity' (Aaker, 1996) – such as associations, awareness, loyalty, origin and perceived quality – that are imbued to varying degrees and in differing ways by spatial connections and connotations" (Pike, 2009, p.619). The geographer Pike draws on wider brand theory (e.g. Goldman and Papson, 1998) to argue that marketing increasingly looks to do more than sell a particular product, and instead is concerned with establishing brand identities and the values with which they are associated. Like Lien, he too argues that this process often involves an association with geographically constituted forms of difference, a process he terms 'geographical entanglement' (Pike, 2009). Taking examples such as the British Newcastle Brown Ale beer brand, Pike (2011) shows how brands are made through imaginative associations with places, even as their material economies of consumption, and often production, involve mobility and de-territorialisation. In the influential writings of Lury, brands are understood as 'interfaces' or 'hyperlinks', 'media-objects' that connect a product to other times and spaces (Lury 2004, 2011). Brands, then, are centrally concerned with the production and mobilisation of place. There are clear parallels between this understanding of brands and themed environments. Themed environments likewise try to enhance goods and services, and increase awareness of them, through associating them with meaningful, sign-laden themes, in a process characterised by 'spatial connections and connotations', to use Pike's phrasing (2009, p.619). In Chapter 2 I noted the relations between themed environments and 'brandsapes' (Klingmann, 2007), but these go beyond retail outlets themed around a brand (e.g. ESPN Zone, Disney Store) and include a wider shared logic. Themed environments are a form of branding.

4.1 Emerging Themes

It may be useful to remind the reader of the types and categories of theme restaurants involved in this study, in terms of the thematic associations made. The Klang Valley area has a number of design intensive restaurants, marketing place, environment and ambiance as much as, if not even more than, food and service. As noted in Chapter 3, initial surveys of these restaurants, drawn from online marketing, listings and reviews in particular, allowed me to develop an initial typology of 'experience' types. Two such types then became central to this study: 'special themed restaurants' and 'international themed restaurants'.

With regard to the former, in Klang Valley there are a lot of themed restaurants which escape easy categorization. They are unique in theming, heavy in decoration, and sometimes innovative and creative in staging an ambiance for customers. These 'special themed restaurants' usually attract customers who are curious about their unique theming. There is, for example, a toilet themed restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, the 'T-Bowl Concept Restaurant', opened in 2009 in the Sungei Wang Plaza, where seats are made from toilet bowls, tables are made of bathroom sinks and surrounds / counters, and food is served in small toilet bowl themed crockery. The linking of a food space to a toilet space may disgust some, but also makes the place an attraction to others. It is certainly memorable. There is also a restaurant with a beach theme (the 'Naili's Place'), located in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the Sentul area of the downtown city. Entering the restaurant takes customers out of the city to beach scenery and decoration. A boat, fishnets, seafood mock-ups, and huts take the diner elsewhere. The 'Geographer Adventure Restaurant and Bar', in the Puchong area of the city, is themed around experiences of world travel and discovery. The restaurant is decorated with a mixture of pictures and props from all over the world, with a strong association to both colonial exploration and contemporary parallels in the tourism industry. There are trees and plants hanging from the ceiling, a large imitation elephant head on the wall, small motorbikes placed on the shelves, and of course, the

atlas map as decorative device. The following pictures serve these special theme restaurants' features.



Figure 4.1 Naili's Place: Large surfboard and fish mock-up feature the beach theme ambiance (Nurfamil, 2014))



Pictures clockwise:

Figure 4.2 Geographer Adventure: Interior with various materials presenting worldwide theming (Malaysianflavours, 2013)

Figure 4.3 T-Bowl: Ice cream dessert being presented in mini toilet bowl (Jerica, 2011)

Figure 4.4 T-Bowl: Toilet bowl seating for customers (Jerica, 2011)

Figure 4.5 Geographer Adventure: Elephants' statues welcoming the customers (Geoventure, 2014)

The second main type of themed restaurant considered in this study are 'international themed restaurants'. As Malaysia has received an increasing number of foreign tourists from abroad, the demand for international cuisine grew. Further, the presence of these international, non-Malaysian restaurants, as well as foreign travel abroad by Malaysians, has increased awareness and knowledge of, and tastes for, international cuisine among local customers. To fulfil these demands, we can see the mushrooming of various internationally themed restaurants, including Arabian, Persian, Thai, Korean, Japanese and Indonesian. These internationally themed restaurants usually offer foods from 'their' different national locations, and 'authentic' ambiance and 'traditional' music. Furthermore, as Malaysia is a multi-racial country, there are some restaurants that combine an international, foreign theme with a local 'ethnic' theme or focus on Malay ethnicity. Restoran Seri Melayu, Songket Restaurant and Istana Bambu Restaurant are among the places synonymous with Malay cuisine and traditional décor. Dragon-i Signature, Old China China Café and Oversea Restaurant are among Chinese themed restaurants with heavy red colours, dragon decorations, and fengshui ambiance. Passage thru India, Bombay Palace as well as D'Tandoor are notable examples of an Indian theming. A few pictures in the next page give a glance of international theme restaurants existed in Klang Valley area.

Both these types of restaurants ('special' and 'internationally themed') use heavy decoration to stage their experiences for customers and to give them a new and extraordinary dining experience (see also Jang, Ha and Park, 2012). As an overview, Table 4.1 lists the theme restaurants in this study together with details of the restaurants' theming.



Figure 4.6 Dragon-i: Chinese's red theme ambiance with large, modern lantern and fengshui layout (Dragon-i, 2010)



Pictures clockwise:

Figure 4.7 Sahara Tent: Arabic theme décor and materials (Supermeng Malaya, 2015)

Figure 4.8 Sweetree: 'Hwahyeongje' or Korean traditional footwear as part of decoration

Figure 4.9 Food served in silverware and layered with banana leaves in Indian theme restaurant (Wong, n.d.)

Figure 4.10 Dragon-i: Lion dance performance during the Chinese theme restaurant's opening (Dragon-i, 2015)

				
Name	Asmara Fern	Ayem Burger	Bumbu Bali	Bumbu Desa
Theme	Special	Special	Ethnic	Ethnic
Subtheme	Garden	Cowboy	Bali	Indonesia
				
Name	Chemistry Café	Coliseum Café	Fisherman's Cove	Flora Kafe
Theme	Special	Special	Special	Special
Subtheme	Chemistry lab	Retro	Fisherman	Flower

				
Name	Garden Café	Horizon Garden	Istana Bambu	Upin Ipin
Theme	Special	Special	Special	Special
Subtheme	Garden	Garden	Bamboo	Cartoon
				
Name	Palate Palette	Yankies Hut	Passage thru India	Pondok Malindo
Theme	Special	Special	Ethnic	Ethnic
Subtheme	Colours	Village	India	Indonesia

				
Name	Songket Restaurant	Sweettree	Wong Solo	Paradise Inn
Theme	Special	Ethnic & Special	Ethnic	Ethnic
Subtheme	Songket	Korean & Tropical	Indonesia	Chinese

Table 4.1 Overview of theme restaurants

In this first section of the chapter, I analyse the research participants' accounts of the origins of these themed spaces. Each theme comes with its own origin story, an account of where the idea came from, and why it was chosen and developed. In the interview sessions, the owners and managers shared these stories. In reviewing them a key issue emerged, namely the combination of both knowledge of the market / consumers and personal experiences and passions in generating themes. In his study of Mexican restaurants in the US, Spain and the Netherlands, Matus Ruiz (2012) deployed Gabriel Tarde's ideas of an 'economy of passion' to emphasise the emotional and personal investments made by the restaurants' owners and staff. Restaurants, he concluded, are exemplary of a wider phenomenon: businesses are far from purely rational, and shaped by all kinds of personal investments. In what follows, I start with accounts of the origins of themed restaurants that foreground considerations of the market and consumer desires, but I then turn to where personal experiences and biographies, and assumptions about consumers and the market based upon these, come to the fore.

4.1.1 Knowing the market

Unsurprisingly, many respondents located the origins of their restaurant themes in an understanding of consumers. They talked about the need to see matters from the customer's point of view, to think of what theme customers would like, what ambiance would make them happy, what type of menu they prefer, what price they are willing to pay. Some undertook formal feasibility studies and market research; many more based their thinking on less formal appreciations of how customers saw the market.

For an international theme restaurant there was a particular issue of relating their

foreignness to a domestic market. Owners talked about the need to combine novel tastes with some elements of familiarity, adventure without provoking fear of the completely unknown. Introducing new tastes which use rare/unique ingredients for the local people, they opined, is not easy, especially at the beginning of the business. However, once it is accepted by potential customers, this difference can be a major factor in growth. Understanding the acceptance level of the local market is thus key. For instance, the manager of Bumbu Desa, an Indonesian theme restaurant, related the development of the restaurant to an assessment that Indonesian cuisine is accepted by most Malaysians and thus a strong positioning within the market:

Farah: So why did [the management] open this restaurant in Malaysia?

Manager: Oh, that is basically because Indonesian cuisine is not too different from Malaysian dishes...and because Malaysians too like the food in Indonesia such as Padang, Minang and Java.

(Bumbu Desa Manager, Interview with Author, January 28, 2014; translated by Author)¹

In the same way, the Pondok Malido owner agreed that the results from his market survey showed that Malaysian consumers are open to Indonesian food, as the cuisines from both countries are quite similar and often use similar ingredients, with many of the key differences being in food presentation. Indeed, similar dish names allow customers to feel confident in navigating the menu, whilst the differences are sufficient to maintain novelty:

When I did my survey, I could see that the Indonesian cuisine is accepted by Malaysians. All levels and groups, including the Chinese and Indian...
When I went to Indonesia, I carried out a study on the traditional cakes

¹ Farah: Jadi kenapa buka restoran Indonesia di Malaysia?

Manager: Oh itu basically daripada masakan Indonesia adalah bisa masuk dengan masakan melayu. Kerna orang melayu basically juga menyukai masakan yang ada di Indonesia, seperti Padang, Minang, dan Jawa.

[savoury desserts]. I tried them... they are really similar to Malaysian cakes [savoury desserts] but in terms of taste, there is a little difference. For me, maybe the layer cake there and here...differs in its look. It's been layered in various colours. As compared to here, we layer in pink and white colours. But over there [Indonesia], it's colourful. And there is a horizontal and vertical pattern [of the cake]. Then, their *onde-onde* is not the same as ours. Theirs [Indonesian] is thick, covered with sesame seeds but also has the palm sugar in the middle. However, certain people will call it *buah Melaka*. And in term of names, we have *martabak* [folded crepe filled with spices and meat] and there is also *martabak* over there. But here, we use flour [to make the skin] while they use egg layers. They fry the egg, put the filling and then wrap it. So, the foods are unique. But still have the same name even if the preparation [method] is different.

(Pondok Malindo Owner, Interview with Author, February 12, 2014; translated by Author)²

Indonesian food, these restaurants agreed, could thus be positioned in the Klang Valley market as attractively different whilst also being accessible and understandable. An Indonesian theme could be used to translate Indonesian foods in to the Malaysian market.



Figure 4.11 Pondok Malindo: Indonesian food is familiar to Malaysian cuisine

² Sebab saya tengok, makanan Indonesia di sini bila saya survey, dia boleh diterima oleh rakyat Malaysia. Semua lapisan dan golongan, termasuk orang Cina dan India. Tapi ada certain menu je la yang tidak. Tapi bila saya pergi ke Indonesia, saya buat satu kajian saya rasa kuih-kuih tradisional dia...memang mirip dan seakan-akan kuih tradisional Malaysia tapi dari segi rasa ada kelainan sedikit la. Pada saya...mungkin kuih lapis disana dengan kuih lapis disini..penampilannya agak berbeza. Dia layer tu ada pelbagai colour. Macam disini ada warna pink, putih..tapi di sana berwarna warni. Lepas tu corak dia ada yang melintang, ada menegak. Lepas tu onde-onde dia tak macam onde-onde kita. Kuih dia tebal lepas tu ada bijan, lepas tu ada gula merah dekat tengah la. Tapi kalau setengah orang panggil buah melaka. Kemudian kalau dari segi nama, macam kita martabak, dekat sana pun martabak. Tapi disini digunakan tepung, kalau di sana digunakan lapisan telur.dia goreng telur lepas tu dia letak la inti-inti kemudian bungkus. Jadi, unik la makanan-makanan dia. Tapi nama sama. Cuma cara penyediaan la berbeza.

Other owners also framed their concepts in terms of how they engaged potential consumers. The 'Chemistry Café + Lab' opened in 2014 in the Shah Alam area of Selangor, west of Kuala Lumpur. It is a 'special themed' café, based on a chemistry laboratory, with drinks in test tubes or lab flasks, sugar dressings for desserts in syringes, and so forth. The owners studied the location and its surroundings carefully, and identified a key potential market as the students from nearby colleges and universities. The lab concept was struck upon as having a link to the learning spaces of students, but then given a modern and funky touch/twist so that it would not appear serious as it does in school.

Owner: So since we're in an area with a density of students, a high percentage of students, we wanted something that can be linked to them. So that's why we came up with the lab concept. Where a student can relate to the concept and the concept can be alive. That means in uni [university] they have their labs where they are experimenting with their apparatus, with their chemicals... but over here, they experiment with the drinks, the foods. So something that is related to them. And that is why we came out with the lab concept. We wanted to have some relationship [to our potential customers]. Then our tagline for our cafe is 'the science of socializing'. Why does this statement say 'the science'? Because generally male and female, how are they are bonded? Through chemistry. So friends and family, and how they are bonded? Through chemistry and bonding. And through what? Through chilling out, through food, through good coffee, good ambiance. So all of it is science. So that's why we call it the science of socializing. And where does it happen? Here, in chemistry cafe. It relates everything.

Farah: So why do you add in an element of vintage, instead of focusing solely on lab based [themes]?

Owner: We want to make it more vibrant. So it's not dull. Because everyone will think that a lab is boring and dull, white, green, grey... serious. So we want to make it more fun. So that's how we manipulate the ambiance, decoration...to make it more fun.

(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 4.12 Chemistry Café: Mural of chemistry experiment set up connect the ambiance and the customers' background

As for the 'Upin Ipin' owner, he created a restaurant based on an established understanding of how the theme related to consumer culture, albeit in other forms of consumption. The restaurant was themed around a cartoon series called Upin Ipin that the owner had created. Upin Ipin is the story of Upin and Ipin, twin brother characters embracing their childhood. The stories of the cartoons are predominantly based on their everyday life and journeys to explore the world. This cartoon series is a hit in Malaysia and something of a phenomenon among kids – a local cartoon as popular as Mickey Mouse, the Ninja Turtles or Spiderman. Having successfully created the characters on television, the owner sought to extend the brand into his restaurants. His market plan was to create a physical place where children can feel that they are in Upin Ipin's world and the characters are alive. He decorated the restaurants with full size stickers of Upin Ipin and their friends on the wall, furnished them with a play area, repeatedly played the series on tv screens, offered Upin Ipin's favourite food on the menu as well as selling the characters' merchandise (e.g. books, stationery, bags, mugs, soft toys, T-shirts). Through this media-licensing-merchandise (the turning of a television animation into these physical materials and places), the owner tries to evoke a cultural form that contributes "to a culture of play, of returning the adolescent or the adult to a state of childhood, in which characters 'pop up' to

enliven the everyday world” (Lash and Lury, 2007, p. 105). He plans to open up to 30 branches across Malaysia (at the time of this research there were already 15). As a representative from the business told me:

So for Upin Ipin restaurant, it’s actually... what the boss wants is a restaurant with a [theme] dining experience. Like when customers walk in... the merchandise, the pictures of Upin Ipin...yeah, just like what you said, a theme, right? So actually we are focused on [decorating] the environment only. We don’t focus on certain types of food. None. The only specialty that we have is like in the series – fried chicken (Upin Ipin’s favourite). Other foods on the menu are to cater for parents who bring their kids to the restaurant. That is why we have already changed the menu four to five times after getting feedback from the parents. The menu offered is mostly for adults. And for kids we do have spaghetti, and simple foods like nuggets (...) so actually, the boss wants to bring the Upin Ipin’s experience in the restaurant for everyone to feel.

(Upin Ipin Manager, Interview with Author, April 24, 2014; translated by Author)³

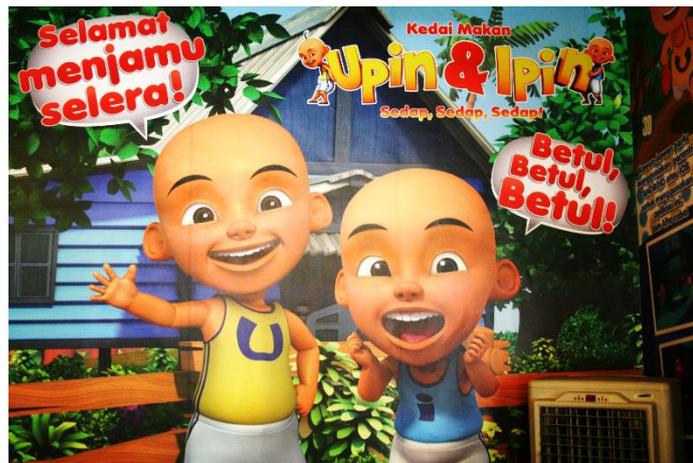


Figure 4.13 Upin Ipin: Two main characters of the cartoon series

³ So untuk yang kedai makan upin ipin ni, dia sebenarnya...yang bos nak, kedai makan ni adalah kedai makan experience. Macam bila masuk...dengan kita ada jual merchandise, lepas tu dengan gambar-gambar upin-ipin...kan, macam awak kata theme kan. So actually kita more to environment je. Food kita fokus bukan ada specialty in certain type of food. Tak ada. So yang kita ada macam dalam cerita upin-ipin tu kan, macam ayam goreng. So the main thing adalah ayam goreng tu la. Food yang ada ni adalah untuk cater ibu bapa yang bawa anak ke sini. Sebab tu kita dah tukar 4 5 kali kot tukar. So daripada feedback ibu bapa ni. Jadi food yang kita bawak ni semua adalah untuk ibu bapa. Yang untuk anak-anak cuma macam ada spaghetti, yang simple-simple, nugget...jadi untuk...sebenarnya bos nak bawa experience upin ipin tu, dalam buat kedai makan ni, untuk semua orang rasa.

In these various cases, then, what we see is the theme working as a 'bridge', linking the restaurant product to an identified potential market (consumers). The themes emerge from a knowledge of that market and consumers' tastes and desires, and are designed to ease the movement of those consumers into the restaurant. In the case of Upin Ipin, the market for the cartoon series is established and the adoption of this theme looks to lead those consumers into the hospitality sector. In the case of the Chemistry Café, an identifiable student market, present in the locality and attuned to the 'eatertainment' sector (Wood and Munoz, 2007), was targeted using a theme connected to their educational spaces, converting work space to leisure space. In the case of Indonesian restaurants like Pondok Malindo or Bambu Desa, the growing interest in foreign foods was catered for by an Indonesian theme that allowed difference to be approachable and have familiarity too.

My qualitative 'coding' (Strauss, 1987) of the interviews transcripts, however, also yielded a slightly different approach to deciding on a theme, less based on 'bridging' between product and identified consumers and more on creating a 'destination' from a personal sense of what consumers might appreciate. Here, then, personal experiences, enthusiasms and passions led to creative thematic experiments. I now turn to this role of 'personal passions' in theme emergence.

4.1.2 Personal Passions

In many cases, then, the restaurant theme emerged as much from the owner's perspective, from their interests, passions, experiences or lifestyle, as from any claims to know the consumer market. In these cases, the owner creates the environment based on his/her imagination and puts extra effort in to make sure that the ambiance is just like what he/she imagined it to be. For example, in an interview with the Ayem

Burger Restaurant's manager, which has a 'cowboy / American Western' theme, he narrates that it was the owner's interest in, indeed addiction to, cowboy stories since he was a kid that made him collect cowboy theme stuff and meant that he staged the restaurant with that theme's props when he started the business:

He [the owner] really likes cowboy since he was small. For him, [the] burger represents western and western is [equal to] cowboy. That is his mentality [personal thought]. So he really likes cowboy. He bought cowboy shoes, clothes... so he decorated [the restaurant] with cowboy theme... this is the restaurant, with cowboy concept, where you can see all of us wearing uniform, cowboy's hat, playing cowboy song, [and] showing the cowboy movies. To the extent that the staff are bored with the same cowboy movies [being played over and over].

(Ayem Burger Manager, Interview with Author, June 22, 2014; translated by Author)⁴



Figure 4.14 Cowboy Café: The owner's passion of cowboy made dream come true

⁴ Cowboy ni memang dia suka dan minat dari kecil. Bagi dia burger adalah western dan western tu adalah cowboy. Tu mentaliti dia. So dia memang minat cowboy. Dia beli kasut cowboy, baju..jadi dia hias macam cowboy la.... inilah dia kedai, konsep cowboy yang mana kalau awak datang kami semua pakai uniform, topi cowboy, lagu cowboy, pasang cd cerita cowboy. Sampai pekerja muak asyik pasang cerita cowboy yang sama je.

In addition, an individual's passion in a hobby can also be the genesis of a themed business. Many people with a deep interest in their spare-time activities convert it into a small scale business, which may well then grow. They generate money from their own interest and enthusiasm, and with a passion for that subject in their heart they are driven to make sure the business is up to a standard that satisfies them. For example, the owner of Fern Café admitted that the idea to open a garden themed café started from his and his wife's passion for plants and herbs:

The idea is from me and my wife. We both love herbs, plants... so, the history was that we wanted to open a nursery. So when there was a nursery, we wanted to have a small section that was a café. Just for the customers to hang out when they come over. But, out of nowhere, it [the café] has been... more than we planned. It's getting bigger. It turned into a big building.

(Fern Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 14, 2014; translated by Author)⁵

Theme ideas can also be triggered from family networks, personal attachments and personal biography. The Bumbu Bali's manager revealed that the decision to open a Balinese restaurant was made after her brother, who is also the owner, spent a few years living in Bali and married a Balinese woman. She claimed that *"...his wife is a Balinese, so that is why the restaurant applies a Balinese concept"* (Bumbu Bali Manager, Interview with Author, March 11, 2014; interview in English). Here, it was the owner's biography of travel and living abroad, as well as marriage, that developed their knowledge of Balinese culture and cuisine. It has been widely documented how travel can change the traveller, opening them up to new ways and tastes (Urry, 2011). Journeying out of everyday routines alters perspective, can make people appreciate others, learn new things, capture memorable moments. This personal biography of travel then becomes the inspiration for a Balinese restaurant that will let others

⁵ Idea tu datang dari saya dan isteri saya. Kami sama-sama minat dengan herba, pokok-pokok...jadi sejarahnya kami nak buat nursery sebenarnya. So bila ada nursery, kami nak ada satu kedai kopi kecik. Tempat untuk lepak-lepak. Sebab orang dtaang nursery mesti nak minum kan. So entah macam mana benda ni..out of plan. Jadi besar pula. Jadi building besar.

'travel' somewhere else, create their own memorable moments, without leaving Klang Valley.

Likewise, the owner of Passage thru India staged his restaurant based on his own journeying to and within India. Using his own talents in the arts, the owner sought to create a stage and ambiance that evoke a sense of rural India. The restaurant is themed as an experiential journey to the different Indian regions portrayed in the in the restaurant space.

Manager: (...) Inside, when you go in, the entire wall to wall and the wall hangings, the paintings, the tables, it's all been hand painted by the owner. He was the marketing director for Orlando, the t-shirt company in those days. When he was the marketing director for this company, he used to travel to India to purchase fabric. And those days when you were flying to India, domestic flying was not so common, so you had to take trains. And the trains will go through all the villages, all the rural areas. So that's his depictions of his experience when he used to travel to India. That is why it's a village concept. It's not a fine dining restaurant, it's not a Bengali restaurant. It is a casual, seated restaurant, depicting rural India, the villages in India, brought to Malaysia.

Farah: So that is how he got the idea to decorate the restaurant?

Manager: Yes, his perception of India is painted here. And food also. There is a noble, rich, elegant feel to the food. But the food also has a very rustic quality. So they sell very rustic dishes. Everything that he experienced as a traveller through India, he portrayed over here. So it's actually a very interesting story.

(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 4.15 Passage Thru India: The owner's travelog being 'painted' on the wall



Figure 4.16 Passage Thru India: Indian woman doll

Similarly, frequent travels to Indonesia made the owner of Pondok Malindo not only love and remember the local cuisine but also want to share the taste with others. His deep interest in Indonesian dishes made him open an Indonesian restaurant in Malaysia. The restaurant marketing emphasises the authenticity of its Indonesian food, cooked by an Indonesian chef, and with many ingredients flown in from Indonesia. The décor of the restaurant enhances this claim to authenticity with an emphasis on Indonesian arts and heritage.

I really like Indonesian food. When I travelled to Indonesia, I liked the rice based menu which is served with dishes like *ayam penyet*, *pecal lele*, *soto betawi*... because I like the Sundanese food from Indonesia. I have my favourite appetizer, soup, and then the rice with dishes, and ice blended with red beans; which is the special dessert from Indonesia (...) In conjunction [with my deep interest in Indonesian food], I have an Indonesian friend in Malaysia, named Pak Subiyakto. He lived in Malaysia for quite some time. He also owned a restaurant *ayam penyet*. So, whenever I felt like I wanted Indonesian food, he would cook the dishes for me. Looking at our close relationship, then it crossed my mind 'why don't we join together and promote this Indonesian cuisine, especially from west and east Java'. During my trips to Indonesia, I always visited the restaurants such as Sangkuriang, Garuda, Esteler, Restoran Nelayan... these are among the popular ones. And then it triggered my mind... one day, I might open a restaurant just like these, the same concept as these. So, here it is. This concept is as according to my preference, as well as the

chef's... and then some ideas from our interior designer.
(Pondok Malindo Owner, Interview with Author, February 12, 2014;
translated by Author)⁶

For the owner of Pondok Malindo, then, it was partly his own experiences as a customer, in Indonesia and at his friend's restaurant, that shaped his imaginations of the restaurant he wanted. Similarly, the owner of 'Palate Palette' was a regular customer in cafés and bars during her university days abroad, and felt that these experiences had shown her something missing from the Klang Valley market. Above all, she wanted a place with 'soul'. Viewing the dominant aesthetics in Kuala Lumpur as overly cold and, perhaps, lacking in individuality, she sought to create a space that would have a distinctive personality. She wanted to 'wow' the customers with something unique, both in the food (innovating new fusion foods) as well in the ambiance (colourful furnishes, mix and match furniture, artistic wall décor). She put herself 'in the customer's shoes', and used her own tastes and consumption experiences to imagine what customers were looking for. Her own experiences were forged abroad, in the UK and US, as well as in Malaysia, and the restaurant sought to bring something of the 'hip', trendy hangout café from those cities to the Klang Valley.

⁶ Saya ni memang suka makanan Indonesia .Masa saya pergi melancong di Indonesia, saya suka dengan makanan yang berasas kan nasi bersama lauk seperti ayam penyet, pecal lele, soto betawi....sebab saya suka makan-makanan Sunda daripada Indonesia. Maknanya saya ada appetizer yang saya suka, sup yang saya suka, lepas tu makanan-makanan nasi, lepas tu yang special ni abc dari Indonesia la. Ada kacang merah. So kebetulan dekat Malaysia ni saya ada kawan nama dia Pak Subiyakto ni. Dia memang dah lama stay dekat Malaysia ni. Dia jugak mempunyai restoran ayam penyet... So bila saya rasa macam nak makan makanan Indonesia tu, dia akan masak kan lah. Tapi dari segi hubungan akrab, saya pun terfikir 'kenapa kita tak buat usahasama untuk promote makanan-makanan Indonesia ni, terutama dari daerah Jawa Barat dan Jawa. Saya selalu pergi ke restoran di Indonesia seperti Sangkuriang, Garuda, Esteler, Restoran Nelayan..ha ini antara restoran yang popular la. Wong Solo..Cibiuk..saya terfikir, satu hari nanti mungkin saya akan buka restoran seperti ini, konsep dia sama.so jadi la macam ni. Konsep ni adalah mengikut citarasa saya, dan juga chef, lepas tu idea daripada kita punya interior designer.

In narrating the history of the restaurant, she explained on how the restaurant looked to stage an alternative, different sort of hospitality:

Erm... ok, so from my side... my previous occupation before palate palette, I was a graphic designer. But for a long time, I mean when the seed started you know, it was actually back in my university days. When I was a student... studying design in Goldsmiths [a London university], where I... always like... hangout at cafes in London, or New York... or wherever else that I went. And I always felt that KL [Kuala Lumpur] is really lacking in the kind of places that are a little bit more different, a little bit homier, a little bit more colourful. I mean we are talking about between seven to seven and a half years back when I started. I mean at that time I remembered friends would kind of take me out and it would be like "come let's go to this new place", and it would always be very cold and black and steel and new and very cool. And I was like "ok, so another one of 'those' bars" (laugh). So I asked "do you have anywhere else that is a bit more enticing, a bit more soul", you know, I kind of felt that it was a bit lacking, you know... (her story continues below)

This was where she personally realized that she need to come out with a theme that able to fill the market gap. She opted to go for a restaurant's/bar's decoration, offering a sense of soul which is differ from others within the same type of food and entertainment establishments. She and her partner, an American chef, decided to join forces and open a place which setting up the vibe of the surrounding location. She then continued:

...So if you just look at the name 'Palate Palette', the first palate is a taste palate, and the second palette is kind of the artist's colours. And it kind of represents the both of us, because he's the chef. So he takes the first palate and I take the second palette, which is the creative part [of the café]. So you know... it's kind of a tongue twister - palate palette. So I mean what we wanted to do was to introduce something that's a little bit different, you know, to kind of have like... even with, you know, all through in terms of like the ambience, and even down to the food where not everything's the same, like something is a little bit different or fusion you know, so not something too typical and kind of offers something that's a bit more exciting to people. So that's how we started at that time and of course at that time when we started ... I think it was kind of a bit new. I mean if you can just look at the furniture and all that, everything is different, the chairs are different, all colourful. People didn't even really understand it, because they're not used to it, you know, so they were like "What's going on?"

What's happening? What is this place?" you know, they could not even get it, that this is a restaurant and bar! So it took [a while] ...and even just look at the location, if you look at it, I mean at that time it was just me and the other bar, just the two of us and it was very very quiet. There was massive construction of this building, so it was a very very quiet street. But I've always like quieter streets you know, kind of like the ones that are not on the main street, I've always thought there was something special about that, because for something that you kind of have to look for... and since I was young I've always done that as well, always kind of gone to like trying to find secret hidden cafes that no one knew about
(Palate Palette Owner, Interview with Author, February 19, 2014; interview in English)

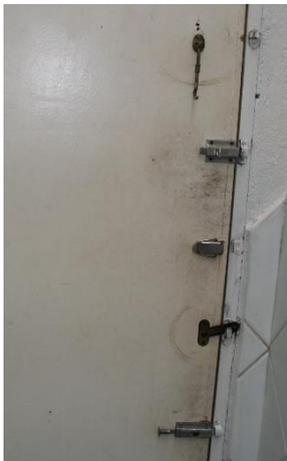


Figure 4.17 Palate Palette: Multiple types of locks on toilet door



Figure 4.18 Palate Palette: Colourful stairs giving 'life' to the formal type steps

Palate Palette closed at the end of 2014 after I had returned to the UK. Tellingly, its end was marked by a cover story in the #edgy supplement (subtitled, "young, smart, unstoppable") to The Edge Magazine (a business publication). Based on her own student days and tastes, in other metropolitan cities, Palate Palette had sought to offer a young, cosmopolitan, trendy aesthetic in the KL market.

In summary, the themes of the studied restaurants emerged from varied processes, but one can distinguish two slightly different emphases within the origin stories narrated to me. On the one hand, there were those who developed themes by focusing on target customers, using the theme as a form of marketing that could

'bridge' to their tastes and draw them into the restaurant. On the other hand, also apparent in my analysis of these narratives was an emphasis on personal biographies, experiences, and passions. Here we might describe the arrived at theming as more a 'destination' that its originators believed would appeal to others, often because it appealed to them. In many cases, this metaphor of the destination carried a more literal meaning too, as the imagined theme came from owners' biographies of travel and experiences as a customer elsewhere. This 'elsewhereness' then became central to their theme development. Notably, in most of the cases studied, these processes were not controlled by large-scale design and franchising operations, where a theme is centrally originated and then transplanted into multiple locations (perhaps the Upin Ipin restaurants get closest to this, given their presence as a 'brandscape' with multiple outlets across Malaysia). Rather, in Klang Valley theming tended to be more personal and often more passionate.

4.2 Being different

The themed restaurant owners and managers interviewed for this study emphasized that the difference and uniqueness in the ambiance created in their spaces was a principal factor which attracted customers to come. This second main section of the chapter turns to this issue of 'difference' directly. I outlined earlier how wider studies of marketing and branding emphasise processes of 'differentiation', i.e. of making products different. Now, I explore in more depth the 'different differences' (i.e. varied conceptions of difference) that I drew out in my qualitative data analysis of owners' and managers' accounts. Clearly, one key distinction was built in to my study sample. The 'special theme restaurant' type that I identified emphasises the unique character of their theme, which often makes them the only restaurant offering such a dining experience. In contrast, the 'international themed restaurant' type that I studied

frames difference within more generic terms too (so, for example, there are multiple Indonesian restaurants within the Klang Valley area, each claiming a difference from non-Indonesian restaurants, but each also potentially using food, décor and ambiance to make them somewhat different to the other Indonesian restaurants). Beyond that, however, my analysis drew out three main kinds of difference that theming was designed to help make: novelty; translocalization; and non-standardization.

The first, then, is novelty. In most independent themed restaurants, the theme itself is unique, and the owners' accounts often emphasise the value in the thematic concept 'surprising' customers. The ambiance created is usually desired to be beyond the customers' expectations. Operating on an independent basis makes sure that there is only one such restaurant in the city and draws in various groups of customers who are eager to try a new dining experience. The Chemistry Café provides a suitable example:

So that's how we came out with concept of lab, and how we bring out the uniqueness because we wanted to be the first theme concept in Malaysia so we are the first. The first theme cafe in Malaysia. None of it yet. (...) It's just full of energy, excitement. They are super eager. Eager to come here, eager to snap photos, eager to play with our apparatus (...) So that's how we bring up the concept of the lab, and how we brainstorm. We wanted to be unique, extraordinary, different than the rest of the cafes currently in Malaysia.

(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)

For the owners of this unique themed restaurant, bringing out the most from the theme is important, and establishes an emotional response in the market ('eagerness', 'excitement'). In this situation, they are not only focusing on creating the ambiance with the appropriate props and decoration but also setting the right mood towards the theme. Novelty was key, finding new ways to stage established aspects of the hospitality product. This included food and drink (I noted above the serving of foods in lab beakers and syringes) but also socialising. Chemistry Café uses genuine lab

apparatus in the restaurant, both to serve food and beverages but also as standing props to enhance the theme:

The most unique will be our apparatus. Because all our apparatus in service are all lab certified, lab qualified. Because we are using lab specialist apparatus. Everything, all these apparatus you can use in labs.
(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)

Drawing on the advice of the likes of Pine and Gilmore (1999) for thematic displays, the Chemistry Café displays the lab apparatus at the entrance door, mocking up a scene of a chemical experiment in a lab which customers encounter as soon as they walk in.



Figure 4.19 Chemistry Café: Lab apparatus as mockup display

The unique theme extends into the social dynamics of the space. The tagline for the Chemistry Café is 'the science of socializing', and they create a 'game' to make it more fun for their (predominantly young, student) to socialise by making them indicate their

relationship status while ordering at the till (their drinks then being colour coded for others to see or acknowledge). Figure 4.20 and Figure 4.21 below express how this 'game' works.

Yes, we actually have another concept here. There [at the till], we ask the customers what are their relationship status. Because we have the colour band. The code. Because we want to make it fun. That people come here, you know, checking out each other... male, female.. "oh, she's single", so if single is yellow. Ask me or I'm not sure [are other colours]. Because every band there is a code. Like green is complicated. So you know when a guy wants to check out on a girl. "Oh, she is in complicated relationship". Somehow like a mix-matching in chemistry cafe. Because the name itself is chemistry, so it suits the theme. So I think there is none yet in Malaysia [the same as this].

(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 4.20 Chemistry Café: The ordering system at the counter merges the tagline of 'the science of socializing'



Figure 4.21 Chemistry Café: The colour coded bands for drinks indicate the specified relationship status (Abdullah, 2014)

Another means of making a difference through theming might be described as ‘trans-localization’. Human geography has recently developed the idea of the ‘trans-local’ to describe social and cultural forms where ideas of local place are not destroyed by global processes but transplanted; and where local places increasingly become interfaces to and a part of other places (Brickell and Datta, 2011). For my purposes here, the idea usefully captures an emphasis in many interviewee accounts on difference coming from their restaurants’ connections to somewhere else. Themed restaurants could surprise not only through novelty per se but through being somewhat ‘out of place’. This would also be a way to understand the laboratory theme of Chemistry Café. In discussing Istana Bambu restaurant, for example, the manager emphasises the ‘village feel’ of the restaurant within the city centre. He told me how the restaurant’s use of real greenery / vegetation makes it different from other

hospitality spaces in malls and so forth that look to evoke a natural theme through artificial plants and trees.

It's the uniqueness. Because a lot [of customers] mentioned that it is hard to find a place like this. Especially with the paddy field (...). So, it really creates a feel like in a village.
(Istana Bambu Manager, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; translated by Author)⁷

Claims to authenticity are also based on this idea of translocalization. Particularly in the 'international theme restaurants', authenticity is often framed as an encounter with food and culture as it is elsewhere. The manager of Bumbu Desa emphasized that the main reason people kept coming to the restaurant was because of the 'authentic' food offered, which he defined in terms of its (trans)location of the Indonesian village:

Basically... it's the authentic [taste] of the village. So we are focusing on the food that people already know. If compared to the western food, ours are really village [original taste]. It's authentic from Indonesia. That's the power to attract customer to come.
(Bumbu Desa Manager, Interview with Author, January 28, 2014; translated by Author)⁸

Offering an international ethnic cuisine to the local market is often bound up with a wider translocalisation of place. The owner of Sweetree, a Korean themed restaurant in the Ampang district of Kuala Lumpur, claimed that he is not only selling the food but the culture of Korea. He was aware of the wider cultural trend in Malaysia for Korean culture, through travel, Korean drama and movies, and music. Consequently, In order to fulfil that requirement, he utilized props and a staging of that wider culture

⁷ hanya keunikan. Sebab ramai yang datang cakap susah nak dapat macam ni. Especially ada sawah padi (...).so memang feeling-feeling kampung kan

⁸ Basically...authentic dari bumbu desa. So makanan kita memang khusus makanan yang orang-orang dah kenal. Kalau di compare dengan western food, kita memang yang benar2 masih desa, masih asli. Ia authentic dari indonesia. Itu lah kekuatannya untuk menarik customer datang.

to deliver the Korean world locally. Moreover, he sees this process as a dialogue, a form of cultural exchange:

Because our major foods are Korean foods. So I want to.... I don't like one-way communication. I prefer two-way communication. One way communication means you like k-pop, you like k-drama, so I sell Korean food. And I take money. This is one-way communication. Ok, I don't like that. Two-way communication I learn your culture, you learn my culture. So share ideas. So this is two-way communication. My aim is to sell culture. Appearance, food, but inside, culture. So, our core is the culture, not food (...) Not Korean drama, not Korean song. Not k-pop. I want to sell Korean culture. Culture include the clothes, song, food, dress ... everything. So this is our core and concept.

(Sweetree Owner, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; interview in English)

During my visit to this restaurant, the owner showed me the third floor, under construction at that time. He explained his plan to develop it as a space for cultural exchange activities. As per today (April 2016), I can see (through the restaurant's website: <http://www.sweetree.net>) that this has indeed happened. The restaurant now has designated space for a 'Culture Centre', which offers cooking classes, language and arts classes for customers who keen to know more about Korea's arts and culture. In this way, the owner of Sweetree is not only promoting his restaurant, specifically, but also his country, more generally. He is providing a space of connection between Malaysia and Korea, as part of what makes his restaurant distinctive.



Figure 4.22 Sweetree: Cultural materials in Korean restaurant

A third aspect of difference that was present in the interview analysis centres on issues of (non-)standardization. Many of the best known themed environments are, ironically, notable for a standardization that codifies their difference. Think of the similar looks to various Hard Rock Café's or even Irish theme pubs in different places. Difference can, then, go hand in hand with sameness. This was apparent in my study where themes had begun to develop across multiple branches. For instance, the owner of a garden themed restaurant, Horizon Garden, with four branches emphasised how the standardization of decorative items or 'props' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) was important in giving the restaurants a consistent uniqueness:

We have to look the bamboo on our own, make it by ourselves, transport it from Kota Bharu [main branch in other state] to here [Klang Valley branch], just because we wanted the same image. If you visit other branches, it is the same. All with the bamboo, colours...everything is the same. The different is only the design of the building [which is out of the owner's control].

(Horizon Garden Owner, Interview with Author, June 12, 2014; translated by Author)⁹

Figure 4.23 below illustrates a plant holder made of bamboo, specially made by the owner to decorate the Horizon Garden restaurants.



Figure 4.23 Horizon Garden: Specially made props

⁹ Kita pun terpaksa cari buluh sendiri, kena buat sendiri, kena angkut dari kb ke sini, semata-mata kita nak imej yang sama. Kalau awak pergi mana-mana cawangan pun sama. Semua pokok buluh ada, warna..semua sama. Cuma rekabentuk bangunan tu je la lain-lain.

In contrast, other respondents framed difference as a resistance to standardization, a uniqueness that came from a more 'ad hoc' design aesthetic featuring used and imperfect materials. The already mentioned case of Palate Palette is a good example. Here, the owner used second-hand furniture to create a homely feeling in the restaurant, and she resisted a standardization of the looks or arrangement of tables and chairs. This was, perhaps, another way of staging authenticity, a look that was just like in the 'real world' where nothing is actually perfect (see also Figure 4.24).

(...) I was really want[ing] to offer something unique, I think, really, I just wanted a lil [little] bit of colour, I mean it's quite simple, you know. When talking about the ambience, it's really just to create a little bit of that homey vibe. I mean most of my furniture, actually, I could say almost all of it is second hand, you know. So they are all like reclaimed furniture, I mean look at this table. I mean I just bought old wood and made it into a table. But it was just a part of it, you know. Just recycling and nothing is the same. And look at all these furniture, they're all of different sizes.
(Palate Palette Owner, Interview with Author, February 19, 2014; interview in English)

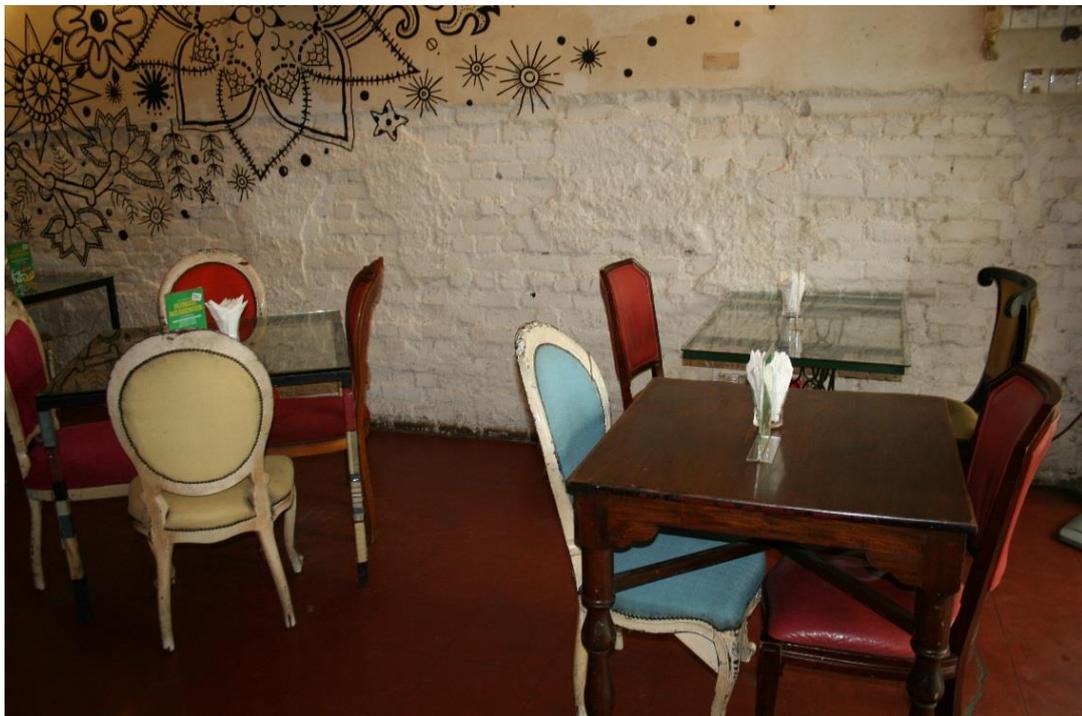


Figure 4.24 Palate Palette: Unstandardized materials

In summary, difference was a central marketing concern for the themed restaurants studied, but the character of that difference, and what was required to produce it, varied. Across the dataset, insight was offered on how difference could be framed in terms of novelty, in terms of a translocal reworking of place, or in terms both standardization and absence of 'standards'. Difference appeals for its ability both to make a hospitality product visible and to position it within the market, but the making and form of those differences is complex and not as uniform as might be assumed.

4.3 Targeting customers

A central concern in most practices of marketing is some understanding of potential consumers (often characterised as 'the market' for the product) (Lien, 1997). Classic 'managerial' marketing texts (e.g. Kotler and Keller, 2016) are characterised by their emphasis on a consumer orientation. Notwithstanding the critiques of more recent, critical marketing studies (Hackley, 2009), this orientation remained as a way that many of the respondents characterised their restaurants. Obviously, the substantive markets targeted varied substantially but some common threads could be identified in the data analysis and I draw these out here.

First, there was a recurrent emphasis on the sociable and memorable nature of the experience offered by themed hospitality spaces and the appropriateness of this for collective consumption by groups of consumers. Sometimes these groups might have a link to the theme offered, a passion shared with the restaurant. For instance, as its name implies, Ayem Burger Bikers Café was regularly visited by bikers who came in groups, having meals together while chatting and exchanging their shared interest.

Bikers groups are always coming [to the restaurant]. Just last Friday, there were 50 bikers came. The parking space was full. We serve them at the entrance alley, make it buffet style just for the group, so it won't interfere with the customers here [the main dining hall]. They have their meals at the alley. So it's quite private [for them].

(Ayem Burger Manager, Interview with Author, June 22, 2014; translated by Author)¹⁰

More often, themed restaurants were understood as appropriate venues for groups looking to celebrate particular occasions. These could be business meetings / entertaining business acquaintances or personal celebrations like birthdays and school reunions. The following interview extract from my conversation with the owner of Horizon Garden is an illustration:

If there is [customer] who come for meeting purposes, we will allocate a special section [for them]. It's like a private function. [Previously], there is a group from UKM [Malaysia National University] bring over a guest lecturer from Indonesia. Complete with karaoke [session]. We start providing karaoke session due to a high demand. [Customers want to] sing while dine. It is a trend now.

(Horizon Garden Owner, Interview with Author, June 12, 2014; translated by Author)¹¹

Perhaps the most common groups of people who visit themed restaurants are families. Most owners in the interviews saw families as key constituencies among their customers. They claimed that *"yes, family groups (...) Bangi [a district in Klang Valley] is full with families"* (Fern Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 14, 2014; translated by Author)¹²; *"so far, the majority is family"* (Garden Café Owner, Interview with Author, May 27, 2014; Translated by Author)¹³; *"our target market is families. It's*

¹⁰ Group bikers pun selalu juga datang. Hari jumaat baru ni ada 50 bikers datang. Penuh dekat situ parking. Kami buat dekat lorong masuk tu, buffet untuk dorang sahaja. So tak kacau customer sini. Dorang makan kat lorong tu la. So agak privacy sikit la

¹¹ Kita pun memang family restaurant. Kalau yang datang untuk meeting, kita akan beri satu section khas. Macam private function pun ada. Pihak ukm datang bawa pensyarah jemputan dari indonesia. Siap dengan karaoke. Sebab ramai yang request so kita baru la start dengan karaoke tu. Sambil makan sambil nak nyanyi. Dah jadi trend sekarang.

¹² Aah, group family (..) Bangi ni memang ramai family.

¹³ So far majoritynya family

not for teenagers, it's 100% families. And yes, families are the one who usually dine in" (Upin Ipin Manager, Interview with Author, April 24, 2014; translated by Author)¹⁴.

The emphasis on an ambiance beyond the food, and the potential for a theme to help the memorability of a special occasion, are suited to family groups:

It's family oriented restaurant, so yes, it's family who come (...) so we have a lot of husband, wife and kids. Small kids are running around. And we do have our loyal old customers. So they come with family and they have kids and grandkids.

(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)

Secondly, many respondents distinguished between 'foreigners' (i.e. visitors to Malaysia, especially tourists) and locals as target markets. For example, the Fisherman Cove restaurant, which is situated in Starhill Gallery in the heart of Kuala Lumpur surrounded by a list of major businesses and dense with local and international tourists, targets these visitors to the city with their seafood and fishing place theme, offering them something locals experience by travelling to the coast.

Most of our customers are foreigners. I can say 80% of them are foreigners. I think the locals are more likely to go a bit far, near the beach, [to] enjoy the seafood... for the foreigners, they want the seafood but if they want to go outside [Klang Valley area] it's very far [for them]. So that is why they come here.

(Fisherman's Cove Manager, Interview with Author, May 12, 2014; interview in English)

Of course, these targets and balances can change over time, with a number of respondents commenting on how their restaurant customer bases have changed:

The locals and foreigners [customers] are balanced. Because most of the crowd for lunch are locals. And dinner, it depends. Sometimes there are

¹⁴ Target market kita adalah family. memang bukan untuk teenagers, memang 100% family. Yang banyak masuk pun family.

locals who bring the delegates or friends from abroad. So it can be said, a balance. 50-50. When it first opening, most of them are foreigners [tourists] as they were brought by the travel agents and hotels [where they are staying]. Nowadays, since its opening 3 years ago, it become balanced. The locals and foreigners share almost the same percentage.

(Songket Restaurant Manager, Interview with Author, May 14, 2014; translated by Author)¹⁵

I am actually targeting at the locals. But when I do marketing through Facebook, there are also Indonesian students who come. They study here and come and dine here. So when they came, they said 'oh, it [the food] is really the same [as food in Indonesia]'. Then, when they met the [Indonesian] chef, talking in the same language, so they feel close to their home country. For those Indonesians who work or study here, they usually visit us during the weekend. They come in large groups.

(Pondok Malindo Owner, Interview with Author, February 12, 2014; translated by Author)¹⁶

A third key area of customer targeting is concerned with 'word of mouth' marketing, as magnified through social media. When 'public figures' go to a restaurant, it will be highlighted and increase awareness and, if they are well known, allow the restaurant's 'sign-value' (Goldman and Papson, 1998) to gain from the association. Owners or managers can take advantage of this situation, advertising about the important people or celebrities who dine at their restaurants. The power of attention and crowd that these people bring is the one that the owner can highlight. Also important, in a rather different way, are those with a social media presence in the city for restaurant reviews and food blogging (more generally, see Muton and Wang, 2011). Having realised the impact that information on the net can have, some owners or managers invited these 'keyboard warriors' to the restaurant, treated them, and in return asked them to write

¹⁵ (...) based on percentage, kebanyakannya boleh di katakan balance. Local dengan foreigners balance. Sebab kita punya crowd tengahari mostly local. Dinner depends, kadang-kadang ada local yang bawak delegates ke, kawan-kawan dari luar negara. So, kalau nak cakap, balance la. 50-50. Dulu masa first opening kebanyakannya foreigner. Sebab di bawa oleh travel agent dan juga hotel. Nowadays, sejak dalam 3 tahun buka ni, sekarang dah jadi balance. Local dan foreigner hampir sama dia punya peratus.

¹⁶ Target saya sebenarnya untuk local. Tapi ada juga bila saya buat marketing melalui facebook, ada juga student Indonesia yang datang. Student indon yang datang belajar kat sini, dia datang makan di sini. So bila datang, dia kata 'oh, memang sama la'. Lepas tu bila jumpa dengan chef, dah berborak satu bahasa, so dorang terasa dekat dengan kampung. Maknanya orang Indonesia yang bekerja di sini atau student Indonesia yang belajar di sini, dorang selalunya datang waktu weekend. Datang ramai-ramai.

an entry for them. The existing blog followers are the potential customers that is easily reachable through these blogs' entries. Chemistry Café benefitted from both these sorts of digital media presence:

But we even also had Saifuddin Abdullah. He came last Saturday for father's day. The politician. [but]...we haven't invited any celebrities yet. We were [also] in the blog. Just the recent blog, Eat Drink KL. Like today, we had a lot of food bloggers.
(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 4.25 Chemistry Café: A blog entry of the restaurant review (Eatdrinkkl, 2014a)

In summary, most of the restaurant managers and owners who participated in the research had some sense of targeting particular customers (though one should also note the less targeted rationales for some themes, discussed earlier). A consistent element of these discussions was the importance of themed restaurants being stages for sociality as well as memorable occasions (issues returned to in Chapter 7).

4.4 Reaching customers

In this final section, I turn more directly to the most obvious forms of marketing work, i.e. the advertising and communication activities, of the restaurants. I categorise these into two main types: self-marketing by the restaurant; and 'influencer' marketing, undertaken through intermediaries. A summary of these activities by participating themed restaurant is provided in the following Table 4.2 .

4.4.1 Self-marketing

4.4.1.1 Website

Most of the themed restaurants studied had their own website to provide information to customers, and, in some cases, to translate the restaurant environment into virtual / digital space. The owners know that it is important to develop a website for their restaurant as customers today are highly dependent on the internet for information. Table 4.3 shows the web addresses of some of the studied themed restaurants with sites.

Given the meaningful and often narrative nature of themed 'commodity-signs' (Gottdiener, 1997), it is unsurprising that these websites usually contain the general story about the history of the restaurant, or perhaps a statement on philosophy, as well as more explicitly factual information (such as menus, prices, contact information, address / location map, news items and so on). A picture gallery is also common, featuring not only food but also some evocation of the ambiance of the restaurant. In some cases, the website is interactive, with a 360 degree view of the restaurant or moving pictures using flash; Garden Café's (2015) website (<http://gardencafedeexceltouch.com/>) gives an example of the use of a 360 degree 'panorama' view to deliver an online experience of the restaurant space. Figure 4.27

to Figure 4.30 show some views. Thus for many of these restaurants, websites do not only provide information but also extend the space to stage the experience. The information gathered through online channels gives customers ‘purchase fantasies’ (Venkatesh, 1998).

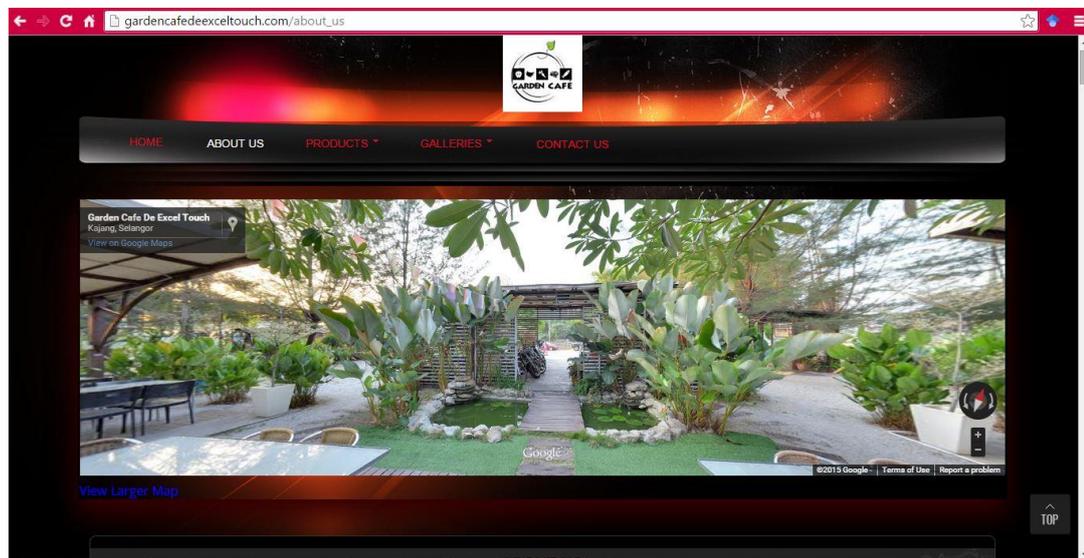


Figure 4.26 Garden Café: Restaurant’s website (Garden Café, 2015a)



Figure 4.27 Garden Café: 360 view – a (Garden Café, 2015b)

Figure 4.28 Garden Café: 360 view – b (Garden Café, 2015b)



Figure 4.29 Garden Café: 360 view – c (Garden Café, 2015b)

Figure 4.30 Garden Café: 360 view – d (Garden Café, 2015b)

Name of Restaurant	SELF MARKETING					INFLUENCER MARKETING					
	Website	Social Media	Set Promotions	In house		WOM	blog	TV Programmes	Magazines	Awards	Tourism Malaysia
				TV/Screen	Specialties						
Fern Café	√	√		√							
Ayem Burger		√		√		√			√		
Bumbu Bali	√	√						√			
Bumbu Desa	√	√									
Chemistry Café		√	√			√	√	√	√		
Coliseum Café	√	√						√			
Fisherman's Cove	√									√	
Flora Kafe		√	√			√	√	√			
Garden Café				√							
Horizon Garden		√	√								
Istana Bambu	√	√	√		√			√			√
Upin Ipin	√	√		√	√						
Palate Palette	√	√	√	√							
Paradise Inn	√	√	√								
Passage thru India	√	√	√		√	√			√	√	
Pondok Malindo	√	√	√			√		√			
Songket Restaurant	√	√			√			√		√	√
Sweetree	√	√									
Wong Solo	√	√	√								

Table 4.2 Overall marketing strategies by themed restaurant

Name of Restaurant	Website/blog
Fern Café	http://fernherbsgarden.blogspot.co.uk/
Bumbu Bali	http://balibistro.com/web/
Bumbu Desa	http://www.bumbudesam.my/
Coliseum Café	http://www.coliseum1921.com/
Fisherman's Cove	http://www.starhillgallery.com/dining_sub.asp?tenantID=20
Garden Café	http://gardencafedeexceltouch.com/
Istana Bambu	http://istanabambu.com.my/
Upin Ipin	http://www.kedaimakanupinipin.com/
Palate Palette	www.palatepalette.com - disabled now, closed on 1/6/14
Paradise Inn	http://www.paradisefnb.com.my/
Passage thru India	http://www.passagethruindia.com/
Pondok Malindo	http://restoranpondokmalindo.com.my
Songket Restaurant	http://www.songketrestaurant.com/
Sweetree	http://www.sweetree.net/
Wong Solo	www.wongsolo.com/

Table 4.3 Themed restaurant with websites address

4.4.1.2 Social media

Approaching customers through social media has been recognised as a new way of interacting and engaging in customer relationships (Greenberg, 2010). Through social media applications, the role of online users is transformed from passive consumers of information to active participants in creating and sharing information (Trainor, 2012). According to Kim and Ko (2012), social media technologies include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google and various peer-to-peer websites such as blogs, microblogs, wikis, podcasts, photo sharing, video sharing and social bookmarking.

Choudhury and Harrigan (2014) claim that individuals are increasingly depending on social media technologies to keep connected with their circle of friends, thus making these networks vital for businesses. The information and experience sharing among the customers via social media not only enables the identification of market trends but also provide an opportunity to reduce misunderstanding and prejudice towards products and brands (Kim and Ko, 2012). Nevertheless, as the customers expect active interaction within their networks, they also anticipate similar relationships with the business counterparts (Rainie et al., 2011). The communications with businesses enable and empower customers to take role in co-creating their experiences too (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Most owners recognised the importance of social media:

Yes, that [is] how we market our cafe. Through viral marketing, social media. For now, we are active on insta [Instagram]. But during our *doa selamat* [feast prayers] for opening, we just have a few followers. After the first day opening, the [number of] followers doubled! The next day [it] triples. Means our followers grew very fast. We just started like ten days operation, and just now I checked it's already 4,000. In 10 days. And we just active in Instagram, not yet Facebook, Twitter... we do not do any other marketing yet.

(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)

Okay, now we have a Facebook (account) named Pondok Malindo, and Instagram (account) named Pondok Malindo too. We update our activities here.

(Pondok Malindo Owner, Interview with Author, February 12, 2014; translated by Author)¹⁷

¹⁷ Ok, sekarang ni pun kami dah ada facebook. Nama Pondok Malindo. Instagram pun Pondok Malindo. Kita update apa-apa aktiviti di sini la. Ada plan juga untuk buat website tapi masih dalam proses la

The manager of Flora Kafe emphasised that he encouraged customers to take pictures at the restaurant and post them on their Facebook accounts, where he asked them to tag the restaurant's account and share with the public.

We [staff] keep taking pictures. Before the customers leave, we had a photo session. So where the spot normally? [Of course] At the entrance. When you snap pictures at the entrance, [you will] see our logo. When we share it back at the customers' accounts, people will ask "Where is this place?". And obviously they will see the flora kafe [signage]. From there the social media helps us a lot. Helps us in a way where we use camera as a tool, snap and share [on Facebook].... I would like each customer to take pictures and bring them back together [as memories]. And if they asked us to take their pictures, we will snap and give it to them. Then they will share and tag at the Facebook account. So from there, it will spread. It's marketing right. The database will expand from there.

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)¹⁸



Figure 4.31 Flora Kafe: The restaurant's Facebook account posting pictures of customers in the restaurant and at the entrance to promote the place and ambiance (Flora Kafe, 2016)

¹⁸ We all pulak keep on taking pictures so bila customer nak balik, kita ada sesi tangkap gambar. So dekat mana yang kita selalu ambil? Dekat entrance. so bila you snap photo dekat entrance, logo kami nampak. Bila kita snap sana, snap sini (2 entrances), kita share balik dekat customer, customer 'eh, kat mana ni?'. Obviously nampak flora cafe kan. Dari situ la orang kata social media ni banyak menolong kitorang. Menolong macam mana tau, kita gunakan camera sebagai dia punya tools, snap snap snap, share. kadang orang tanya tau kat mana (...) Tangkap gambar dan bawak balik. I nak setiap customer buat macam tu. Sebab tu kalau mintak kami tangkap gambar, kami akan tangkap gambar dan bagi dekat you. Nanti i akan share and tag dekat facebook. So dari situ akan spread la. Marketing kan. Dari situ la akan bertambah database

However, the owners or managers have to carefully use this tool to make sure that both parties are comfortable. A slight mistake runs the danger of negative comment. Flora Kafe's manager comments further regarding the handling of the Facebook account:

When I first offered this job, the boss asked me to handle Facebook [account]. But I said that if I am handling Facebook, I won't do it in English. I will do it in my own way. So I use Malay language and deliver in my own way. He said "I leave it to you". Because before this he created a Facebook, all in English. So the customers were quite reluctant to share and comment. Because... I didn't take English for granted, English is good. But when you create it in English, the people's mentality will judge this place as standard [high end]. Correct? It must be expensive. When I convert it into Malay language, a lot of people came in. Commenting a lot. There are those who comment in English, I respond, but in Malay. There is no problem.

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)¹⁹

As a summary, Table 4.4 lists the themed restaurants' account names for Facebook, Instagram and Twitter which are actively used as a marketing tool in these businesses. Normally, they use the name of the restaurant to ease the existing or potential customers to find them. They keep the account active and post regular updates on restaurant's activities, information and promotion.

¹⁹ Bila I dapat kerja ni, bos suruh I handle facebook. I cakap kalau I handle facebook, I won't do it in English. I buat I punya lenggok bahasa. Tapi tak ada la lenggok bahasa pasar, kita ada la adabnya. So I guna Bahasa Melayu tapi I olah mengikut cara I. Dia kata 'I leave it to you'. Sebab sebelum ni dia buat dia punya facebook, all in English. So customer susah nak masuk tau. Sebab..I tak lemahkan English, English is good. Tapi bila you create in English, mentality masyarakat kita ni English mesti tempat ni standard. Correct? Mesti mahal.sebab you buat in English. Bila I convert je dia into Bahasa Melayu, yang masuk berduyun-duyun. Komen laju...alhamdulillah semua cakap Melayu. Ada yang hantar in English, I respon la tapi I jawab Bahasa Melayu. Tak ada masalah

Name of Restaurant	Social Media Account		
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
Fern Café	Asmara Fern Garden & Café		
Ayem Burger	Cowboy Western - Ayeem Burger Bikers Café		
Bumbu Bali	Bumbubali Puchong Bandar Puteri		
Bumbu Desa	Bumbu Desa Malaysia		
Chemistry Café	Chemistry Café+Lab	chemistrycafe	@Chemistry_Cafe
Coliseum Café	Coliseum 1921	coliseum1921	
Flora Kafe	Flora Kafe AmpWalk	Florakafe	@florakafe
Horizon Garden	NEW HORIZON GARDEN RESTAURANT		
Istana Bambu	Istana Bambu Restaurant	istanabambu	@istanabambu
Upin Ipin	Kedai Makan Upin & Ipin		
Palate Palette	Palate Palette		@PalatePalette
Passage thru India	Passage Thru' India		
Pondok Malindo	Pondok Malindo	pondok_malindo	@PondokMalindo
Songket Restaurant	Songket Restaurant		
Sweetree	Sweetree Swtree		
Wong Solo	Restoran Wong Solo, Bandar Baru Bangi		

Table 4.4 Themed restaurants' social media accounts

4.4.1.3 Promotions and other in-house marketing

As with many other food and beverage businesses, themed restaurants also regularly offer promotions to attract customers. For example, the conversation with the manager of Passage thru India indicated that this restaurant occasionally provided promotional packages which were targeted at different groups of customers.

Farah: So do you occasionally have this, promotions?

Manager: Yes. Our promotion right now is the yoga with the brunch. Ladies come for yoga in the morning and 11:30 to 12 we will have the brunch in the restaurant, on Sundays. So that's one promotion. Then we have thali promotion. Thali means plate. So this thali promotion, there is two types, the northern and southern India. Each one has got about four varieties of the dishes and the rice, naan bread, or chapatti, dessert and a drink. So that's again regional. So its 20 ringgit thali. And includes everything from starter to main to dessert.

(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)

Figure 4.32 and Figure 4.33 show the promotion leaflets by Palate Palette Restaurant and Flora Kafe. These combine factual information with an impression of restaurant experience and theme.

Apart from the themed ambiance, themed restaurant also use other in-house features to attract customers. In Malaysia, the most common extra features are large screen TVs, Wi-Fi, dances and performances. Having one or more of these features increases the potential of the restaurant to be chosen as a place to dine in.

The big screen is one of the attraction elements here. Adding to that, it is football league season now, so there will be customers who come to watch the match.

(Fern Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 14, 2014; translated by Author)²⁰

²⁰ Screen besar tu salah satu tarikan jugak la. Tambahan sekarang musim bola, so nanti ada la yang datang tengok match.



Figure 4.32 Promotion leaflet by Palate Palette (Palate Palette, 2014)

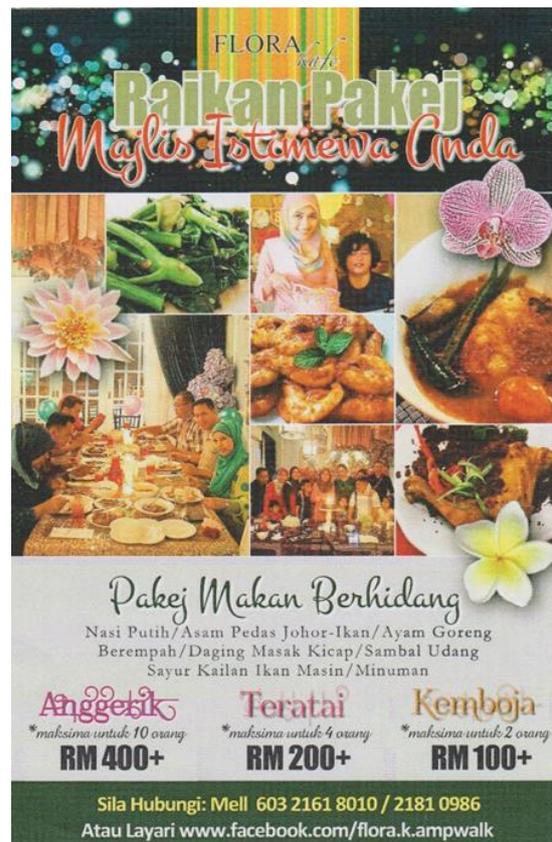


Figure 4.33 Promotion leaflet by Flora Kafe (Flora Kafe, 2014b)

Other important factors include official certification, especially of *Halal* status.

Farah: So why do you come with the concept of providing *halal* food for the customers? Because there are a lot of other Korean restaurants that do not apply for *halal* certificate.

Owner: Natural. Because it's Malaysia. When I came here, all I can see is Muslim. So Muslim means *halal*. This is the reason I provide *halal* food.

Farah: But, are you a Muslim?

Owner: No, no.

Farah: You are not Muslim but you provide *halal* food (!)

Owner: Major market is *halal*. [In] Malaysia, the market is *halal*. If I go outside now, I can see people wearing scarf. So it's natural in Malaysia for Muslim and *halal*. So I sell *halal* food. I can choose to sell to Chinese, European... [but] depends on the location. But in Malaysia, the *halal* market is bigger than non *halal* market.

(Sweetree Owner, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; interview in English)

4.4.2 Influencer marketing

Marketing can also work through intermediaries. Word of mouth (or WOM) recommendations are often a crucial form of advertising, and amplified through the operations of social media:

(...) so people will come and try [our food]. When they eat, and it match their taste buds, then they will come again. [They will] tell their friends, viral it in Facebook (...)

(Ayem Burger Manager, Interview with Author, June 22, 2014; translated by Author)²¹

²¹ (...) So orang akan datang cuba. Bila makan, kena pula dengan selera, then datang lagi. Cerita pada kawan-kawan yang lain, masuk facebook.

I will go table by table and ask them [the customers]. How is the food, how is the service. On daily basis. Because we wanted to get the feedbacks. That is the most important thing. So usually they knew from word of mouth, Instagram and twitter (...)

(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; translated by Author)²²

Another extension of WOM, blurred with past professional reviews, is the power of food blogs and bloggers (Muton and Wang, 2011). Flora Kafe for example, appreciate the reviews by the food bloggers and therefore occasionally invite them to dine:

One of the things that help us are the bloggers. I will give and take with them. What people call, the win-win situation. [It's] important. Because they are, important. I will tell the boss what is the reason I called in [invite] the bloggers. It's not that I wanted to treat them with free meals... but because when we invited them, they will do a review [blog entry], and the reviews will be permanent [on the web] (...) When people start google searching 'flora kafe', then [the blogged review] appears. I always check the Google search engine. When I typed 'best places', flora café will pop out. So when people search for flora café, they will read the reviews first. [If it is a] good review, then people will attracted to come (...)

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)²³

Older media matter too. A number of the studied restaurants had featured in television programmes or in print media. Jalan-jalan Cari Makan, Ho Chak! and Best in the World are among the featured TV programmes which look for popular, authentic and special menus combined with attractive and themed ambiances to feature. The choice of the dining places is based both on the production companies' research and

²² I akan pergi table ke table dan akan tanya dorang. Makanan macam mana, service macam mana. On daily basis. Sebab kita nak dapatkan feedbacks. Itu paling penting la. So biasanya dorang tahu dari word of mouth, instagram, twitter (...)

²³ Salah satu yang membantu kita juga adalah bloggers. I banyak give and take dengan dorang. Orang kata win win situation. Penting. Sebab dorang ni kan, penting. I kan akan bagitau bos dulu why the reason i nak panggil blogger. Bukan i nak bagi dorang makan free..sebab bila kita panggil, then dorang buat review, review dia kekal kat dalam (...) orang akan bukak google search, 'flora cafe', flora cafe appear. I sentiasa check dekat google tau. Tempat yang best. Pop keluar flora cafe. So bila orang bukak nak cari flora cafe, review dulu, baca dulu. Good review, orang akan attracted to come.

recommendations from customers (often on social media), as the Bumbu Bali Manager stated:

We also had Jalan-Jalan Cari Makan come here before. It's Muslim customers who suggest them to come. Thanks to the customer. We don't know who the customer is, but we know she is a Muslim.
(Bumbu Bali Manager, Interview with Author, March 11, 2014; interview in English)

Coliseum Café had been featured on Ho Chak!, an 8TV channel programme (Chinese programmes) and Songket Restaurant was chosen as one of the dining places in the Jalan-jalan Cari Makan show (a Malay programme). (The following pictures are still frames from both TV programmes' videos; please refer to Video 4.1 and Video 4.2 in the DVD attached to this thesis to play the full videos).



Video 4.1 Coliseum Café featured in Ho Chak TV Programme (Coliseum Café, 2014)



Video 4.2 Songket Restaurant featured in Jalan-jalan Cari Makan TV Programme (Songket Restaurant, 2012)

In terms of magazines and newspapers, Figure 4.34 illustrates the Fisherman's Cove restaurant being featured in EAT magazine issue 8 and Figure 4.35 shows the magazine's cover for the issue. Generally, such press and TV coverage is obviously welcome, but it can cause problems if it suddenly changes patterns of demand, with the featured restaurant suddenly bombarded by interest that it cannot meet.



Figure 4.34 Fisherman's Cove feature in a magazine (EAT, 2014a)

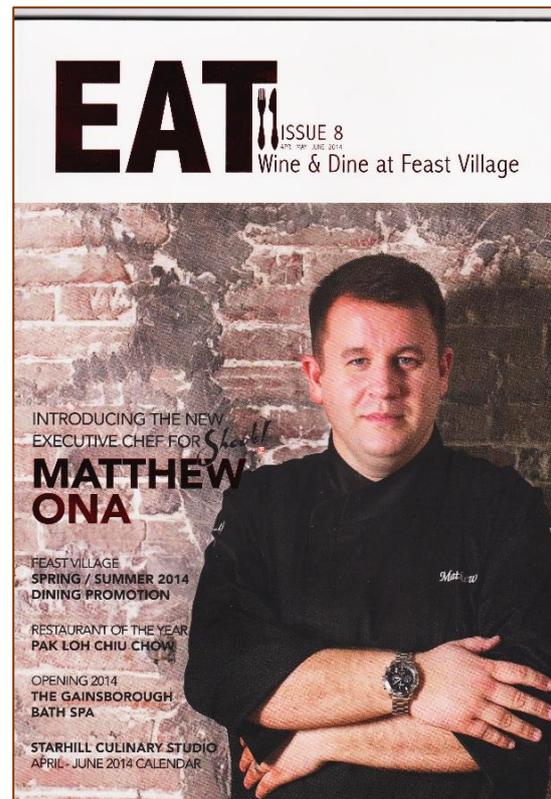


Figure 4.35 EAT issue 8 magazine cover (EAT, 2014b)

The Ayam Burger manager reflected on this:

At one time, Jalan-jalan Cari Makan came but the boss was reluctant [to appear on the show]. It's because of the restaurant's capacity. Previously, this restaurant once appeared in a newspaper article. When it appeared, the customers came. Too many, till there was not enough seating available. [It was] Frustrating. The kitchen can't serve them all. So pity the customers. I asked the boss "what if Jalan-jalan Cari Makan come again?". He said "it's ok". Because the kitchen seems a bit stronger than before. (Ayem Burger Manager, Interview with Author, June 22, 2014; translated by Author)²⁴

²⁴ Sampai satu ketika, jalan-jalan cari makan datang. Tapi bos tolak. Sebab kapasiti kedai. Dulu pernah kedai ni keluar dalam artikel di surat khabar. Bila keluar artikel, customer datang. Ramai sampai tak cukup meja. Hampa, dapur tak boleh coop..jadi dia kesiankan customer. saya ada tanya bos kalau

Awards and other forms of recognition are another form of intermediated advertising. Figure 4.36 below shows the awards received by Songket Restaurant and various recognitions obtain by Passage thru India in Figure 4.37.



Figure 4.36 Songket Restaurant: Awards received by the restaurant



Figure 4.37 Passage Thru India: Various recognitions received by restaurant

sekarang ni ada lagi jalan-jalan cari makan datang macam mana. Bos cakap ok lah. Sebab dia tengok dapur pun macam dah strong skit.

Official bodies, in particular the Ministry of Tourism, are also important. Tourism Malaysia produces a list of programmes, events and plans targeted at local and international tourists. They identify places of interest, suggesting good accommodation, promoting various mode of transportation and recommending dining places. Tourism Malaysia will then liaise with the travel agencies to assist the travellers with tour planning. However, another way to connect all these services is through the Hop On Hop Off service. As widely available in numerous countries, here a tourist can buy a bus ticket which will tour a designated area and stop at selected points, with the tourist able to 'hop off' to discover the place and 'hop on' again later using the same ticket. Dependent on location, many restaurants look to have a link with this service, as they will receive a steady number of customers, on a daily basis. Istana Bambu currently has a contract with Tourism Malaysia to be a part of the selected destination for a Hop On Hop Off service.

(...) So, now we had a contract with Hop On Hop Off. So every night they will bring over the tourist here. Every single day, if there are tourists, then they will bring them here. So far it has been a year contract with them. Yes, the rapid hop on with double-decker bus. The roofless one. It will start at 5pm. The night package will travel to Batu Caves, come here to dine and then travel to Bukit Langat. That's the night [package]. They mostly bring the foreigners. The tourists really love places like this. They appreciate it. So, they are not too many but every day we will have around 6 to 20 people. The latest we have a group of tourists from Jakarta, Indonesia. It's last Friday. They really like it. Yes, because they also do have places like this in their home country. So they were amazed with this place, that there is such a restaurant in the middle of the city, coming with the paddy field. So they were happy. Usually, they have places like this at top of the hill [in their country]. Suburban. So they were surprised (...)

(Istana Bambu Manager, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; translated by Author)²⁵

²⁵ (...) sekarang ni kita ada stau contract dengan rapid hop on tu. So setiap malam memang dia akan bawak tourist masuk la ke sini. Setiap hari kalau ada tourist memang dia akan bawa masuk. Before ni dorang hantar ke train station tapi saya dapat tahu dorang ada complaint dari segi makanan la dekat sana so dia pergi kat kita. Tapi so far dah dekat setahun jugak la dengan kita. Haa, rapid hop on yang 2 tingkat tu kan. Yang roofless tu. Dia akan start pukul 5. So bila malam dia ada pakej yang pergi batu caves and then dia datang makan sini lepas tu dia akan naik ke bukit langat. Yang malam. Yang tu memang dia bawak orang luar la. Tourist memang dia suka tempat-tempat macam ni. Dorang

In addition, each Malaysian state also has its own tourism board. In Selangor, there is Tourism Malaysia Selangor and Tourism Selangor Sdn Bhd. Both provide information to tourists, including on places to eat out. In an interview with a representative from Tourism Selangor Sdn Bhd, she stated that have a regular meeting with the Local Authorities to update on any new or planned events, places of interest and even the list of restaurants in the area. Each town presents their database and Tourism Selangor will then compile this information and produce a printed booklet, updated annually, without any charge to businesses.

4.5 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has considered themed restaurants' marketing practices. In part this has involved analysing the marketing and advertising work done by the restaurants; in equal measure it has involved recognising the development of a restaurant theme as a form of marketing in and of itself. With both these emphases, my argument has been that we should understand hospitality spaces such as themed restaurants as produced through marketing. Marketing, I suggested, is a process of both connecting production and consumption and of differentiation. The evolution and work of themed hospitality spaces can be seen to be focused on both these ambitions. I now turn in Chapter 5 to a more direct focus on themed restaurants as not just marketing spaces but designed and maintained material spaces, focusing in particular on the material forms that comprise their 'dinescapes' (Ryu and Jang, 2007).

appreciate. Dorang tak ramai tapi setiap hari tu ada la at least 6 hingga 20 orang. Yang terbaru minggu lepas dorang bawak orang dari jakarta, hari jumaat. Dorang memang suka la. Ye la, tempat dorang memang ada macam ni kan. So dorang pelik dekat sini, dalam bandaraya besar ni ada restoran macam ni, ada sawah padi lagi. So dorang macam seronok la. Selalu kat tempat dorang restoran macam ni dekat atas bukit. Terpencil, jauh.. So dorang macam terkejut la...

5

The material making of themed restaurants: Designing the DINESCAPE

In the previous chapter's analysis, the emergence of theme restaurants in the Klang Valley area was framed in relation to commercial processes of marketing. The development of these restaurants, with their emphasis on using a theme to ensure memorable experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), was understood as an attempt to position and differentiate their hospitality product by 'entangling' (Pike, 2009) it within wider webs of meaning and signification. This interpretation chimes with wider adoptions of broadly semiotic approaches that understand themed environments as "socially constructed, built environments that are designed to serve as containers for co-modified human interaction ... material forms that are products of a cultural process aimed at investing constructed spaces with symbolic meaning and at conveying that meaning to inhabitants and users through symbolic motifs" (Gottdiener, 1997, pp. 4-5) However, so far the restaurants' status as "material forms", to use Gottdiener's phrasing, has been somewhat sidelined. This needs to be corrected, for as Beardsworth and Bryman (1999, p.36) note, "one of the characteristics of a themed restaurant is the narrative is made visible and tangible in the physical structure of the restaurant's interior including artefacts, décor, logos, menu terminology and merchandise". The next two chapters seek to redress the balance and to foreground these material forms.

Here, in Chapter 5, analysis centres on the studied restaurants as representational material spaces, representing their themes and experiences through their design and material decoration. Developing Pine and Gilmore's (1999) attention to the role of props within the theatrics of the experience economy, the discussion centres both on the processes and elements in the material design of restaurant spaces. Then, in Chapter 6, the argument is broadened to include other aspects of restaurant materiality, associated with their ambiances and atmospheres (Thibaut, 2002; Anderson, 2009), such as their 'soundscapes', lighting and seating. Here, deploying a lens that is more 'affective' than 'representational' (Matus Ruiz, 2012), analysis centres on the spatial design of restaurants such that they orchestrate particular kinds of embodied, sensory experiences.

The two chapters' emphasis on the material making and design of the studied restaurants draws on wider bodies of thought, the chief elements of which I introduced in Chapter 2. You may recall, for example, the notion of 'experiencescape', associated with the anthropologist Tom O'Dell (2005, 2010). O'Dell argued that the layout, design and material organization of places plays a crucial role within the experience economy, both framing the symbolic meaning of the experiences they advertise and helping to produce the feelings and mental states that constitute those experiences. Taking inspiration from long and still vibrant traditions of economic anthropology that resist oppositions between the material and the mental, the meaningful and the immaterial (see, for example, Gudeman, 1986; Miller, 2005), O'Dell suggested that the seemingly ephemeral experience economy currency was in fact underpinned by material forms and spaces. The spa is the example to which he has applied this approach most fully, as he considers the roles of natural landscapes, buildings, pools, saunas, hot stones, fluffy towels and so on in producing states of relaxation and renewal for consumers (O'Dell, 2010). Likewise, Svabo et al. (2013) also emphasise the importance of spatial design within the experience economy, defining experiential commerce as "a process where people undergo the influence of things, environments, situations and events, and a wide range of materials play active roles as mediators of experience" (2013, p. 316).

More specifically, many scholars have discussed the importance of the physical restaurant setting to the eating out experience (eg: Baker et al., 1992; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1999; Turley and Milliman, 2000; Brady and Cronin, 2001; Raajpoot, 2002; Nancy and Christina, 2011). Pillsbury's historical geography of the American restaurant (1990) notes the growing importance of ambiance and décor. Liu and Jang (2009) agree with this idea as they argue for the importance of dining atmospherics to the customer experience. Rahman (2010) likewise argues that restaurant aesthetics are crucial in attracting and retaining custom. Set within a wider ambition to codify and measure the product aspects of the service and experience economy – such as the well-known SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988) – and to draw out the

role played by the physical environment within service delivery processes or encounters – e.g. the SERVICESCAPE model (Bitner, 1992) – hospitality management researchers have developed various frameworks for recognising restaurant environments as part of the dining out product, and for dissecting their constituent elements. The TANGSERV model (Raajpoot, 2002), for instance, “develop[s] a scale... for measuring tangible quality in food service industry... captur[ing] ambient factors such as music and temperature; design factors such as location and seating arrangement; and product/service factors such as food presentation and food variety” (p.109).

For this study, of particular import was the DINESCAPE model, introduced by Ryu (2005) and developed in later co-authored papers (e.g. Ryu and Jang, 2007; Ryu and Han, 2011). According to Ryu and Jang, DINESCAPE refers to the “man-made physical and human surroundings, not the natural environment, in the dining area of an upscale restaurant” (Ryu and Jang, 2008, p.5). They focus on six dimensions: social factors, service product, layout, facility aesthetics, ambiance, and lighting. Each of these can thus be seen as part of staging a themed hospitality experience. *Social Factors* refer to the characteristics of the staff in the restaurant, including their embodiment, uniforms and interactions with the customers. The *Service Product* represents the products or materials served to the customers. This includes not only the food and drink but also the materials presenting it: for example, the use of banana leaves as a plate in an Indian themed restaurant. *Layout* refers to the arrangement of objects within an environment which impacts on how they relate and how they make customers feel. Barker and Pearce (1990), for example, emphasized that customers may feel uncomfortable if seating positions are too close to another customer. *Facility Aesthetics* refers to the impact of architectural and interior design on the qualities of the physical environment (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1994). The argument here is that aesthetic style involves both a representational aspect and a physical sensing of qualities (more generally, see (Postrel, 2003). Colour is often crucial here, being not only one of the first things that customers notice and evaluate when entering a space

but also affecting people emotionally (Eiseman, 1998). The furniture and seating can be related to the state of bodily comfort of customers. *Ambiance* refers to the less tangible and, perhaps, more 'background' characteristics of the restaurant space, including temperature, noise, music and scent (Baker, 1987). Crucial here are the nonvisual senses, and their often subconscious effects (Fullen, 2003). Interestingly, Ryu and Jang (2007) highlight one aspect of ambiance, *lighting*, as particularly important, and as one of their six factors in its own right. Both Baraban and Durocher (2001) and Ryu and Han (2011) agree that lighting is the single most important element in a restaurant design, as if got 'wrong' it can obviate the effectiveness of all other elements (more generally, for an account of luminosity and the 'agency of light', tellingly published in the 'Journal of *Material Culture*', see Bille and Sørensen, 2007).

Across Chapters 5 and 6 the various dimensions of the DINESCAPE model will be addressed, and they were central within the qualitative data coding practice, but the account is not simply linearly structured in relation to them. Rather, as noted above, here in Chapter 5 I focus on the more representational aspects of the restaurant setting, whilst in Chapter 6 attending to the more 'atmospheric' and 'affective'. Specifically, Chapter 5's narrative is developed through three main sections, analysing: first, the processes through which the restaurant environment is designed and made (thus paralleling and enhancing the analysis of theme development presented in Chapter 4's account of marketing); second, the use of environmental materials within the theming of the 'special themed restaurants' within the study sample; and third, the use of environmental materials within the 'international themed restaurants', where their representational role carries rather more 'weight', given how the restaurants' theming relates them to actually existing cultures and places.

5.1 The process of theme restaurant design

Existing literature offers various forms of guidance for successful restaurant design. Baraban and Durocher (2001) signal the design process complexity, and the multiple elements addressed within it, in their mapping of an ideal restaurant design team (see Figure 5.1). Fullen (2003) emphasizes that every surface is a design opportunity in creating a themed environment. He further notes, echoing Pine and Gilmore (1999), that every single physical and emotional element that the customers encounter must add to the illusion if a theme is to become the foundation of the restaurant's brand and 'brandscape' (Klingmann, 2007).

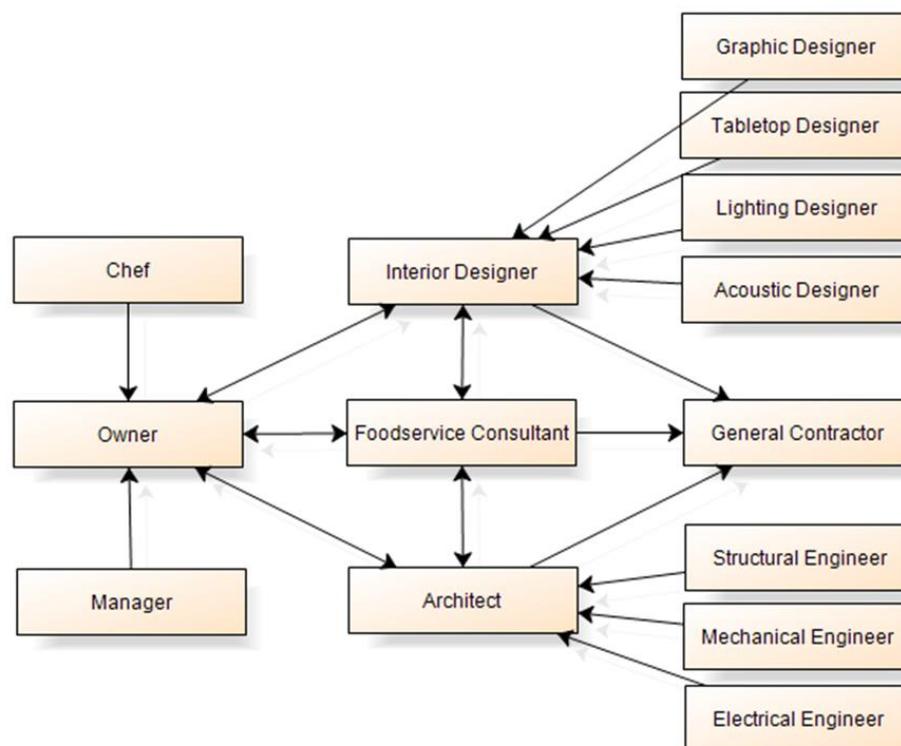


Figure 5.1 A sample design team for a major restaurant project (Baraban and Durocher, 2001, p. 32)

In the Klang Valley context, it was rare that quite such a large and complex team was involved in restaurant design, with many functions being covered by fewer individuals, reflecting the less large scale, less corporate nature of the restaurant scene. Instead,

then, of focusing on the ideal team and all the roles implicated in restaurant design, a better overview is given by schematising the process. Such a schema is presented in Figure 5.2. In this section, the process is illustrated by taking one case study in more depth, the Pondok Malindo restaurant. My intention in narrating this case is to develop the argument that restaurant theming, as a form of ‘imagineering’, is an intensely material process, with the kinds of marketing ideas discussed in Chapter 4 made manifest through detailed spatial design work. Pondok Malindo was launched in 2013 by DSD Groups, with a focus on providing an ‘Indonesian’ restaurant that was ‘authentic’ (and later, as we shall see, with an emphasis on also being ‘modern’). The name ‘Malindo’ suggested some combination of the Malaysian and Indonesian.

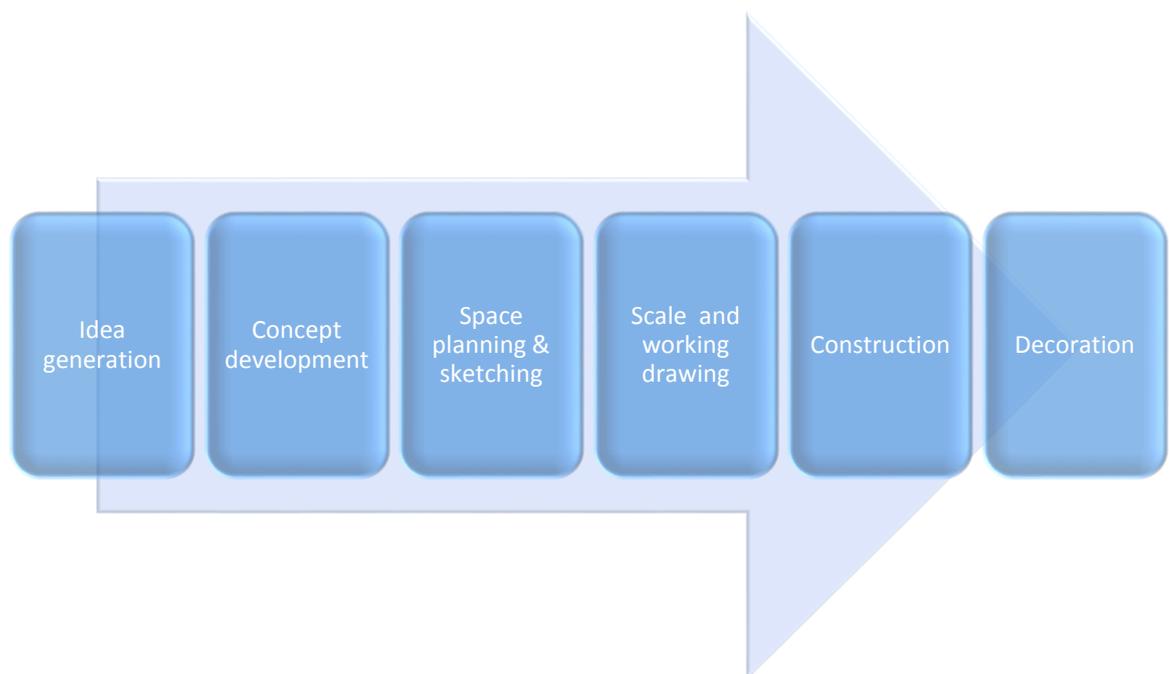


Figure 5.2 The phases of making and decorating a theme restaurant

The first step in the process of restaurant design is idea generation. This stage was discussed in Chapter 4, and Pondok Malindo was discussed there as an example of a case where the initial ideas was as much driven by the personal experiences and passions of the owner as by market research claiming to know potential consumers. To recap, frequent visits to Indonesia had captured the owner’s interest in the food

and culture of the place and having an Indonesian friend who is also a chef had led to a joint venture focused on offering 'traditional' and 'authentic' cuisine to customers.



The second stage in the process was a translation of the restaurant idea to an interior designer for concept development. Usually, once the owners were firm with their theming ideas, they started to imagine how the restaurants would look, drawing ideas for the restaurant layout, the seating arrangements, possible theme 'props', the decoration and so on. In the case of Pondok Malindo, the owners undertook this process by commissioning an interior designer (hereafter labelled as Pondok Malindo ID). The process of communicating initial ideas into a design concept is rarely easy:

So most of the clients that come and meet us, they have the idea but face a problem to translate the idea into the 3D [drawing], to the physical [I mean]. Unless, [it will be easier] they have a background in art. (Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)²⁶

The Pondok Malindo ID was therefore conscious of needing to work at understanding what the owners wanted for the restaurant:

Normally, as consultants, we will fulfil the clients' briefs. Because they are the one who will operate [the business]. We have to suit the clients' needs. Because they have... they have set their market. And then they know what they are able and unable to do. So we have to work within their capacity. So, [number] one is their expertise. Secondly is their budget and third is their market. So these are the three things that we have to digest. From here, we will look for the direction, which is in line with the concept that they want.

²⁶ So most of the client yang dtg jumpa kita, dia ada idea tapi dia nak translate the idea to the 3d, to the fizikal tu dia ada problem sikit lah. Unless kalau dia tu memang ada background on the art ke kan

So in the case of Pondok Malindo, the chef noted that they wanted to offer Indonesian cuisine. From there [that information], I can see the flavour that they wanted to apply in the restaurant. But I emphasized that we don't want to make it too traditional [as] it will look like a typical Indonesian restaurant. We don't want people to [already] expect what is inside the restaurant. So we turn away from what others [restaurant operators] did. So I proposed that we have a glimpse of the [Indonesia's] culture or architecture. And then we simplify it and inject some modern elements to it, [play around with] the colours and the materials. Because if we just follow [the traditional elements] then it will be too traditional, like the carved furniture...which I think will affect their budget at the end of the day. So we go with their budget and I proposed the concept based on that [actually].

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)²⁷

So here, the Pondok Malindo ID works to the clients' brief, but has significant latitude to shape how various factors at play – including the theme idea, understandings of the market and competition, and budget – interact and relate to the eventual design concept. In this case, the owner's initial emphasis on a 'traditional', 'authentic' Indonesian restaurant is adjusted in the process. A desire for an aesthetic distinctiveness – ensuring that customers cannot simply predict what the restaurant will look like – as well budget issues – namely, the expense of 'authentic' Indonesian carved wood furnishings – leads to design innovation, with a new emphasis placed on

²⁷ Aaa normally kita as consultant kita akan full fill clients punya brief sebenarnya kan. Sebab dia yang operate. Macam kita design banglow ke ape benda ke kita have to suit to the client punya needs. Sebab dorang dah ada, dorang dah set dorang punya market. And then they have to set depa punya depa tau apa yang dorang boleh buat. Apa yang dorang x boleh buat kan. So kita kene work within dorang punya capacity lah. Satu, depa punya expertise, yang kedua dorang punya budget kan. Ketiga, dorang punya market. So those benda 3 tu kita nak kena digest. Dari situ baru kita tengok which direction yang kita patut pegi. Which is inline dengan concept yang dorang nak la.

So macam pondok malindo ni pak subi dia kata dia nak buat ada dia nak jual product indonesian punya cuisine kan. So drpd situ i nampak lah the citarasa yang dorang nak dlm dorang punya restoran tu. Tapi i ckp kat dia kita xnak go to traditional sgt. Nampak too typical indonesian punya restaurant kan. Kita xnak nampak sgt org boleh aspect apa yg ada dlm tu. So kita kata kita, lari sikit dari apa yang u nak which is org lain dah buat dah. So i kata kat dia kita ambik a glimpse of a dia punya culture ke dia punya architecture ke kan. And then kita simplyfy benda tu and then kita inject some modern punya element, colouring dia material dia. Sebab kalau betul2 nak ikut u akan jadi very traditional kerusi pun kayu bunga2 tu kan. Which is i think budget dorang pun lari jugak esok ni. So we go as their budget yg dorang ada tu, thats why kita come out dengan that konsep sebenarnya.

a more simplified and 'modern' aesthetic within which to feature to 'traditional' elements. This is a creative, imaginative design process:

Okay, normally my approach is... I will listen to the clients' wants. Because I will try to tailor make to their needs. So from there, I will imagine the things that I can offer them. Meaning that, we anticipate their expectations. They know food is food. Let's say that Indonesian cuisine is food [that they want to offer] but whether the food can go along with the ambiance is a question. So from there, I will imagine what will happen in that space. So, it's like 'dreaming'. So I dream this one, I dream about this particular corner, [I dream] about the drinks section.... [and] about the flow from the kitchen to the table. And then, how they want to operate [the business]. So from all of these [client information and creative imagination], then I will start with the space planning.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)²⁸



After a concept had been developed, **the third stage is the space planning, often through the production of sketches.** The designers will roughly sketch the layout, flow and ambiance of the restaurant, based on the concept development to that point. In his explanation, the Pondok Malindo ID pointed out several important elements during this process. He considered the design from various angles and reviewed the effect of each idea. He highlighted the ambiance, the customers' impressions of the

²⁸ Okay, selalunya macam my approach is...i akan dengar apa yg client nak sebenarnya. Sebab kita akan try to tailormade to dia punya needs. So from there, kita bayangkan apa resepi yg i boleh bagi kepada dorang. Maksud dia macam ni, apa yg kita boleh agak customer punya expectation. Depa tau food is food kan. Memang katakan makanan indonesia tu food tapi that food tu boleh go along dgn dorang punya ambiance x. So drpd situ i akan imagine la apa yg akan berlaku dlm that space. So macam kita mimpi sikit la kan. So kita dream this one, kita dream this corner macam mana, tempat yg org buat air macam mana. Macam mana dia punya flow of the food daripada kitchen pergi ke table kan. And then, macam mana dorng nak operate. So drpd benda2 ni semua baru i start buat the space planning.

restaurant's looks, the comfort of both customers and staff, as well as impacts on profit generation from the design and layout.

What I meant by space planning is the layout. The floor plan. For some operators, they would like to highlight their... cooking. They wanted to make what we call... [an] open kitchen. So they wanted to show [the cooking process] to the customers but at the same time they have to control the smell and smoke from entering [the dining area]. So they have to put a glass, so the customers can see the chef is cooking. But some restaurants wanted to highlight their drinks section. So the drinks section will be a part of the decoration. So we have to consider these things. Like in Pondok Malindo, they didn't display their food preparation area... because the kitchen for eastern food production is not as tidy as the western. It is messy, because of a lot of ingredients, so we don't want the customers to see this as it will downgrade their expectations [towards the restaurant's image]. But the owners can see that the drinks counter can be a selling element. So with the restriction and guidelines given, I placed them [the elements].

[However], when I create the space plan, the main important thing is the operation. Because we don't want the operation's flow to disturb the customers who are having their meals, as sometimes they want their own space. They do not want people [staff] to pass by their table while they are eating to serve other tables... that kind of thing. You personally won't like it if people walk pass behind you, right? Sometimes we feel that others overhear our conversation. So these are the kind of things that we have to take into consideration. And then, the smell. Especially if it is an air-conditioned restaurant. So ladies didn't like it if their hair or scarf gets smelly. The guys just didn't mind. So these things we have to take control of technically which involves the ventilation systems, the air pressure. So this space has to be low pressure and that space has to be high pressure so that the smell didn't travel to the dining area. So that's all technical.

And then back to the space planning, I will identify the prime area for the seating. Prime area doesn't mean the front area. It can be a private space. It's not necessarily that sitting at the entrance door is a prime [position], right. So that 'pocket' [the prime area] has to be created because you have to offer to various categories of people who dine in. Like the kids, they didn't like small spaces. Because they want to run here and there. But to run in the restaurant is a bit of a problem. But at least there is some comfortable space for them to move around. And then when we create the space planning, and we have go through the spaces for the seating areas, then we can spot the negative area and turn it into a positive one. Like in the case of Pondok Malindo, it's a shop lot and there are stairs to the upstairs, right. So we use the space below the stairs as the storage and a part of the drinks counter. Because if I allocate seating there, customers

will not like it. Even if I went to a restaurant I would not sit underneath the stairs. So I turn the negative space into positive space, which is good for the operation. And it also aligns with the toilet. I also create a transition space for the toilet. There is a wash area before entering the toilet (...) so that transition space is created to cover the toilet from being too visible because nobody likes to sit near a toilet. So these things have to be considered when creating a space plan. We want to maximize, we want to turn the negative to positive space, and we want to create the prime space. (Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)²⁹

²⁹ Space planning ni maknanya the layoutlah. A floor plan. Contohnya macam setengah operator, dorang nak highlightkan dia punya... dorang masak. dorang nak jadikan macam apa tu... open kitchen. So dia nak tunjuk kat orang tp at the same time dia nak control bau asap. Tak nak keluar kan. So we have to put a glass, so customer boleh nampak the how their grill benda tu kan. Tapi setengah restoran dia nak highlight dia punya drinks kan. So tempat drinks tu as the part of the decoration. So daripada particulars tu yang kita ambil berat.

Macam Pondok Malindo tu, food punya preparation dorang tak tunjuk....sebab eastern punya kitchen ni tak kemas macam western. Messy sebab byk ingredient, kan. So kita tak nak customer nampak serabut,kan. So dia akan downgrade dia punya tu. Tapi dorang nampak dia punya drinks punya... apa tu counter tu...that one boleh jadi selling punya element. So with that restriction and guideline yang dorang bagi, then I place la.

Bila I buat space planning, yang penting skali the operation. Because kita tak nak operation punya flow ganggu customer yg nak makan tu. Sebab customer kadang-kadang dia nak their own space. Dia tak nak bila tengah makan orang nak serve kat sana lalu tepi meja dia kan...that kind of thing kan. Macam you pun tak suka org lalu belakang kan. Kadang-kadang kita rasa orang curi dengar kita bercakap kan. So benda-benda tu we take into consideration la. And then...bau makanan. Especially kalau restoran tu dia aircond kan, so orang perempuan tak suka rambut dia berbau, tudung dia berbau, lelaki tak kisah kan. Melekat bau. So dorang taknak. So benda-benda tu kita nak control la which is come to very technical la you punya apa tu ventilation system, pressure...pressure kena kuat, so space ni kena pressure rendah space ni kena pressure tinggi so that the bau tak pegi tempat makan, kan. So benda-benda tu nak kena technical lah. Technical.

And then balik pada space planning td, I akan tgk kat mana yang prime area untuk customer duduk, kan. Maksud prime area tak semesti ni depan. Prime area can be private punya. Tak semestinya duduk depan pintu tu is a prime kan. So that pocket have to create la because you nak kena offer to the various category of people yang nak pegi. Macam budak-budak, dia tak suka tempat sempit, kan. Sebab dia nak berlari kan. Tapi nak berlari dalam restoran tu masalah la sikit. Tapi at least ada some comfortable space la untuk dorang nak move around.

And then bila kita buat space planning tu, bila kita dah tengok the customer punya location dia punya seats tu and then kita cari pulak which area yang negative kita nak turn to the positive. Macam you tengok Pondok tu, dia shop lot tu dia ada tangga kan. So we use bawah tangga tu as a storage and a part of the tempat buat air. Sebab kalau I letak customer di situ dia tak nak kan. Kalau I pergi restoran pun I tak nak duduk bawah tangga. So that negative space tu kita turn to the positive space, which is good for the operation lah. And then dia pun inline dgn toilet tu kan.

Figure 5.3 shows the layout of Pondok Malindo restaurant based on the space planning undertaken by the interior designer. As apparent from the interview with the designer, the seating layout and area design was especially important here. In particular, the designer worked to achieve a variation/diversification in seating arrangements in order to cater for different kinds of diner. An emphasis on families, including children, involved planning for more room to move around. The designer also created outdoor seating spaces to attract customers to come for lighter meals and for a more 'relaxing' environment with fresh air (see Figure 5.4).

And then we wanted to cater to various categories of people. If you can see, there is a corridor in front of Pondok Malindo's entrance. We have extended and raised up the floor so that we can put some seating in the corridor. So, that seating will cater to those who wanted to have a more relaxing space, or just wanted to be outside while smoking and having light meals. So there are options for the customers. If not, once they enter and didn't find a smoking area, then they will go to other restaurants which offer the space. So I said to the owners, we should have some kinds of spaces to cater for these type of customers. A diversification [in seating arrangement]. And they agreed.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)³⁰

Toilet tu pun kita dah buat transition space. Before you masuk toilet you ada some wash area kan which is quite I mean not 100% yang I suka pasal contractor dah buat silap tapi tak boleh buat apa kan. I tengok-tengok dah siap pastu owner kata tak apa lah. So that transition space tu yang kita buat tak nak bagi nampak toilet sgt pasal toilet ni org tak suka duduk sebelah toilet kan. So benda2 tu yang kita consider masa buat space planning. Kita nak maximize, kita nak turn negative space to the positive space, kita nak create prime space kan.

³⁰ And then kita nak cater various category of people lah kan. Kalau you tgk depan Pondok Malindo tu dia punya pintu depan dia ada koridor kan. Koridor tu kita extend sikit dia punya floor tu infact kita kita raise floor yang kat luar tu so kita boleh letak some seatingkan. So seat kat situ untuk mungkin malam org tak nak duduk dlm aircond dia ingat nak hisap rokok, teh tarik kat luar tu minum makan jemput-jemput that kind of thingkan, so more to relaks sikit la. So ada option la pada orang. Ni masuk-masuk tak boleh isap rokok keluar pergi kedai mamak. So I kata kat nuzul dgn pak subi tu kita kena ada some cross section of space untuk cater for this people. Pelbagaian. So dia pun agree la.



Figure 5.3 Pondok Malindo: The overall seating layout in dining area



Figure 5.4 Pondok Malindo: The outdoor seating area offering a more relaxing dining experience

The outdoor seating area is another example of looking to use spatial design to convert a negative space into a positive space, similar to work done on the understairs area (see Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.5 Pondok Malindo: The negative space underneath the stairs turned into a storage area



Figure 5.6 Pondok Malindo: The drinks preparation area underneath the stairs decorated to make use the negative space



Once the layout of the restaurant has been sketched in a spatial design process, **the next process is to turn them into formal scale drawings / plans.** There are two types of drawings at play here: scale drawings and working drawings. The scale drawing comes first, as the designer uses the sketches as a guideline to create a formal and detailed floorplan. There is often some revisiting of initial designs are non-scale sketches at this point, as the use of exact measurements for each item on the floor tests out the feasibility of design ideas. For example, in the case of Pondok Malindo the arrangement of kitchen furniture had to be reworked:

Once the flow seems right in the sketches, then I translate it to the scale drawing. And then we go through again on how many stoves the chef needs because at that time we already know the size of the stove. I told him that a kitchen can't be too big nor too small. If it is too small then it will be cramped and the cook might get backache. So we have to reach the comfortable level for the workers. So from there we insert the scale of tables for food production such as the dishwashing area, utensils and circulation space. Because you can't allow just a two-foot-wide aisle between opposite [back-to-back] countertops for cooking. The pans are hot and later on your abdomen will be hot too. So these kind of things, when we put them into the scale drawing, then we revisit the sketches to see whether it matches. Sometimes, when we turn the sketches into the scale drawing it doesn't fit because... ideas are just free flow right?
 (Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)³¹

³¹ Bila kita dah nampak flow tu dah okay masa sketch tu then baru I translate benda tu to the scale drawing. And then baru kita tengok balik berapa stove yang chef nak pakai kan sebab masa tu kita dah tau size stove tu. I kata kat dia kitchen tak boleh teralu besar atau terlalu kecil. Terlalu kecil nanti cramp, you punya cook sakit belakang kan. So kita kena bagi some comfortable punya level pada dia punya workers. So daripada situ baru kita masukkan scale-scale meja untuk dia nak buat proses macam scale tempat dia nak basuh pinggan, scale dia punya utensils and then plus dengan scale circulation space. Sebab you tak boleh buat counter masak di depan dengan counter belakang you ada 2 kaki je. Periuik panas kat sini so punya perut nanti esok panas. So benda-benda scale tu baru kita letak dlm scale drawing. So kita refer balik kita punya sketch tadi okay tak okay flow tadi with the scale. Kadang-kadang bila kita buat sketch tu, bila kita masukkan scale tak menjadi sebab idea mungkin... idea ni just free flow kan.

The layout of diner seating also had to be tested for practicality and the best combinations of comfort and privacy (for diners) and commercial efficiency (through the number of 'covers' possible at any one time):

But when it comes to scale, then we will know if the table is not enough, whether the table [size] doesn't fit... that kind of thing. Then we can go through again on how many seats we wanted and whether this number can fit in the [dining] space. If not mistaken, I think it is around 70 seats [in Pondok Malindo]. So from the [number of] seats, they will calculate the ROI [Return on Investment]. They will think of how many customers can fit in at one time, how many menus they will provide and how much is the profit and when can they get the return. Let's say they invested MYR 300,000 and the ROI is 12 months; that's too long. A restaurant is supposed to break even in at least 5 to 6 months. And then from there you just control your operation. So these are the things that we have to take care of so that the client can make money.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)³²

The formal design drawings are also important in ensuring fulfilment of the requirements placed on a restaurant by the local authorities when they apply for a business licence. Different organizations require different documentation. Some of them need more detailed information and a close look at the drawings as the basis for expert endorsement, e.g. by an architect. Upin Ipin, which at the time of the research had opened almost 15 outlets based on its children's cartoon theme, had to undergo various applications and requirements by different organizations. Often the work of the interior designer includes navigating these:

Yes, we have to call out an ID [interior designer] to design our concept and layout. Because we need all these things [drawing and design] for the licence purposes. Ok. Specifically, like you want to apply [to open a branch]

³² Tapi bila we come to scale then kita tahu meja tak cukup ke meja tak boleh muat ke... that kind of thing kan. So bila dah buat tu baru kita go balik berapa kerusi yang kita nak dan sama ada kita boleh achieve tak boleh achieve. Bila I buat benda tu I ingat dia dlm 70 seats tak salah I. So from the seating tu depa calculate balik depa punya ROI brapa. Kan. Sebab dorang fikir brapa full org boleh masuk so berapa meja boleh isi, brapa menu yang dorang boleh hantar and then brapa profit dorang boleh dapat kan. And then return dia bila. Let say dorang dah put about RM300K and ROI sampai 12 bulan kan. Lama sangat. So restoran dalam 6-5 bulan tu dah boleh dapat breakeven. From there tu you just control you punya operation saja. So benda-benda tu kita nak kena take care so that the client can make money la.

at KLCC [Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre] for example. KLCC requires A1 plan. They have their own specification. And then they wanted the schematic drawing for the electricals. They wanted to know how many lights that you installed, how much power consumption. We would not want to pay people just for that [drawing]. So we hire one [person/company] and paid a lump sum [for all the required works] (...) and then for the signboard. Les Copaque [parent company] will design the signboard and we just choose which one [to install]. [However], it must be specified with the width, length and thickness. This information will be sent to DBKL [Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur or Kuala Lumpur City Hall, the local authority charged with the administration of Kuala Lumpur city] and council authorities for license applications. If they didn't ask for A1 [plan] so then we give them A3 [plan]. But there are a lot of changes today. Most of them require the A1. When people use A1, it needs the endorsement from the architect. So that makes it expensive. Like in Putrajaya [another branch location], they [the local authorities] require an architect's endorsement [on the drawing], the A1. Only then will they give the license (...) Sometimes the shopping complexes like Mydin, Giant USJ, they require the 3-D Drawing, the front view and side view drawing. The requirements vary. So we do need to hire the ID.

(Upin Ipin Manager, Interview with Author, April 24, 2014; translated by Author)³³

Once the owner and interior designer have agreed on the scale drawing, the working drawing will then take place. This drawing has more details available such as the dimensions, type of materials, colours and extra notes such as the specifications which will help the contractor to find the exact (or the closest) items within the budget set earlier on. These notes too will guide the contractor in the construction phase on how to build, put down or install items at the right place and position. In other words, the clarity of the working drawing will assist others to construct or manufacture the

³³ Ya, kita terpaksa panggil ID untuk designkan kita punya konsep dan layout. Sebab benda-benda ni kita perlukan untuk tujuan license. Ok. Spec, sebab contoh you masuk dekat KLCC katakan. KLCC nak A1 punya plan. Dia dah ada spec dia. Lepas tu dia nak schematic drawing untuk electrical. Dia nak tahu berapa banyak lampu you pakai, berapa banyak power consumption. Takkan kita nak gajikan orang-orang untuk tu je. Jadi kita ambil yang tu kita bayar lump sum kan (..) Lepas tu untuk signboard plak, kita dah ada satu designboard tu, yang dorang dari Les' Copaque designkan, kita pilih je. Signboard pulak dia nak ukuran tebal, panjang, lebar signboard tu. Ha itu semua kita akan hantar pada DBKL (Kuala Lumpur City Hall), ke majlis-majlis perbandaran, untuk license. Kalau diorang tak mintak untuk A1 pun kita pakai A3 je. Tapi sekarang banyak perubahan, dorang nak pakai A1. Bila orang pakai A1, dia nak endorsement architect. Itu yang mahal. Macam Putrajaya. Dia nak endorsement architect, nak A1. Baru boleh dapat lessen (...) Kadang-kadang shopping complex macam Mydin, Giant USJ, dorang mintak 3-D drawing, front view, side view. Requirement lan-lain. So memang kita kena hire ID.

item/plan as a built form. In addition, at this stage the interior designers therefore also have to 'think ahead', and consider ways to save costs in the later building and construction phases:

We will produce the working drawing once we are done with scale drawing. So it means the specifications... what type of tiles, what size will it be, what furnishings it needs, such as polished tiles or any other specific materials. It is important for the contractor to pick up this information as the specifications will translated into the cost and whether we can meet the client's budget or not. If we bust the budget then we have to revise the specifications. We won't revise the layout but we play around with the materials, so for example instead of buying one square feet at MYR 10 then we buy it at MYR 6. So we amend it.

Then, from there we review the architectural part like the renovation works. [For example] the drainage works...If you know, when we convert a common shop house to a restaurant, there will be piping and drainage here and there. So these will incur cost to the client. We try to minimize these things. The kitchen for instance, we have to raise up the floor a little bit so that we do not have to hack the existing floor which will be a cost to the client. It is much cheaper to raise up the floor instead of hacking and redoing them all over again. There will be a lot of work.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)³⁴

The specifications of materials also important to ensure that they meet the rules and regulations set by the council and other authorities. Rules from the Ministry of Health are often particularly important in restaurant design:

³⁴ Dah habis scale drawing tu barulah kita buat the working drawing. So maknanya specification...tiles jenis apa, besar mana, apa finishes dia macam polish tiles ke atau lain-lain specific materials. Sebab benda ni contractor akan pickup because that specification last skali dia akan translate to the cost samada kita boleh meet to the client punya budget. Kalau kita dah burst the budget kita kena revise balik dia punya spec. Kita takkan revise dia punya layout cuma kita main dengan materials contohnya instead of beli 1 kaki persegi rm10 kita beli 1 kaki persegi rm6 punya material. So tu adjust balik. Then from there kita tengok balik on architechtrual part macam the renovation works ke. Nak buat longkang... kalau you tau, bila dorang buat normal shop house nak tukar jadi restoran dia kena ada piping sana piping sini, longkang sana longkang sini kan. So benda-benda tu is a cost to the client. Kita try to minimize benda-benda tu kan. So macam kitchen we have to raise up dia punya floor sikit so that kita tak perlu nak hack the existing floor which is cost to the client. It is much more cheaper you topup the floor instead of you hack and then you redo balik. Banyak kerjakan.

The health authority requires restaurants to install the grease trap in the kitchen. So, as an operator, the owner should abide by the law. But, you need the grease trap anyway. If not, it is hard to control the area soon. It will clog here and there because fat will build up in the pipe lines. So, we will advise the clients “Okay, you have to have all these things. It will ease your job later on”. (...) Sometimes they wanted the floor tiles that do not accumulate stains. The one with a smooth [surface]. It’s called vinyl tiles. Like this one [pointing to the flat table surface], it looks flat. No line at all. Usually, the commonly used tiles have the line in between the joining tiles. If [they] use that one, it will trap the stains, oil and grease and the bacteria will start to grow. So because of that [law], it is good for your business [to follow the rules]. Actually, once the government [or authority] come out with the rules, they are not trying to hassle the operators, but to make it easy for them in the long run. Secondly, it’s for the consumer safety, right? We do not want to have food poisoning.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)³⁵



The fifth stage in the restaurant design process is the construction phase. This is the most time consuming phase because of its complexity. Once the contractor has been appointed and received the working drawing(s), they will give an approximate time scale to finish the work based on the construction needed, the materials to be sourced, the number of workers required and the budget from the client. The restaurant designer usually monitors the construction work so that the contractor’s workers follow exactly what is stated in the working drawing(s). In addition, visits from the clients during the construction process may result in changes to the working

³⁵ Jabatan Kesihatan nak kitchen di restaurant ada grease trap. So as an operator, owner kena ikut law. But you need a grease trap anyway. Kalau tidak you punya area tu nanti susah nak control. Ada clogging sana clogging sini because fat dah build up dalam pip tu. So kita advice client “Ok, you kena ada benda-benda ni. Senang kerja you nanti”. (...) sometimes dorang nak floor tiles tu yang tak lekat kesan kotoran. Kalau you pergi hospital dia nampak macam floor yg licin tu kan. Dia panggil vinal tiles kan. Macam ni la, nampak flat. Dia tak ada langsung line. Kalau tiles biasa tu ada line in between kan. Kalau yang tu nanti dia akan trap kotoran, minyak, grease and then bacteria akan start membiak. So because of that, which is good also for their punya bisnes kan. Actually government ni, bila dorang buat law tu, bukan nak menyusahkan the operator, tapi untuk menyenangkan in long run. Yang keduanya untuk keselamatan consumer kan. Kita tak nak ada food poisoning kan.

drawing and the original plan. According to the interior designer of Pondok Malindo, this is a normal situation because the clients can now see the physical layout of the restaurant, in a way that they could not really imagine from the drawings. For him, the interior designer's presence is important at this stage so that they can advise and assist the clients as they encounter the emergent physical space.

Once we are done with all [the drawings], then we call in the contractor and start the construction [works]. We will supervise [the work] during the construction [phase]. Sometimes, the contractor acknowledged the drawings at first but then it doesn't turn out as it is [meant to be]. And sometimes the contractor did as per specifications but once the client looked at it, they wanted to add things here and there. So there are modifications, because the ideas occasionally came when you see the physical [layout]. Especially the clients, they can't really imagine if we show them the drawings until the work is 80 percent complete, then they said 'oh, I think we need to change this'. It will be like that. That's normal. So we will try to work it out again. Because once changes are being made, it will affect the design. When it affects the design then it affects the layout as well. So we have to tell them that if they change this, it will affect other things [design/layout]. It's not just simple to make changes. Because the client thought it is okay to change the position of the window, door [for example]...they didn't know that if the position of the door is changed to here [a new position], the whole floor will change. So we need to advise the client. Sometimes I remind the client "at the end of the day, you wanted to make money, right? I know you like it [the changes] that way but it will delay your operation and it will cost you money". So we are in the position to advise them.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)³⁶

³⁶ So habis tu baru kita panggil contractor dan start buat construction. Masa construction tu kita cuma supervise la. Kadang-kadang contractor kita bagi drawing dia kata ya ya ya kan. Tapi tak jadi jugak. Tapi kadang contractor dah buat ikut spec tapi bila client tengok kata nak tambah ni tambah tu. Still ada some modification. Sebab sometimes idea ni datang after u dah fizikalkan. Especially client, bila kita tunjuk drawing plan kadang-kadnag dia tak boleh nak imagine macam mana until 80% dah nak completekan 'ooo macam ni i think kita nak kena tukar la. Dia akan jadi macam tu. Yang tu biasa. So kita try to work out balik lah. Sebab bila dia ubah satu benda dia effect the design kan. Bila effect the design, dia effect the layout. So kita nak kena bgtau kat dia kalau you tukar ni dia akan effect yg lain. Bukan just tukar macam tu saja. Sebab client ingat tukar tingkap tukar pintu kat sini ok... Dia tak tahu kalau tukar pintu kat sini, the whole floor dah jadi lain kan. So kena advise client la. Kadang-kadang I remind client, "by the end of the day nak buat duit tak buat duit kan? Memang I tau you suka macam tu. Tp benda tu delay you punya operation and it cost you money". So we are in position to advise them.



Soon after the construction phase, **the final process will be the decorating of the space**. This is quite often overseen by the interior designers, and is focused on ensuring theme coherence and the desired ambiance. An interview with an interior designer company, KC Design and Consultants, explored some of the details about this process, framing it above all as aesthetic work:

Once the contractor is done with the wet work, dry work, carpentry and everything, then the decorator will come in. In Malaysia, the decorators and interior designers are sometimes the same person. So the decorators will do the final touch up. They know where to hang the paintings, the clock, pictures, arrange the decorations..., put the table lamps, and all that. When all the designing in the restaurant is completed, then the soul will emerge [in the ambiance]. So those who come and understand the arts will appreciate the work. Sometimes, people who do not understand the arts also can judge whether the place is beautiful and it will make them comfortable to be in the environment.

(KC Design Consultants, Interview with Author, July 15, 2014; translated by Author)³⁷

The case of Pondok Malindo provides, then, a basis to set out the various processes involved in restaurant spatial design. However, not all the studied theme restaurants' owners sought professional interior design expertise to oversee it, many relying more on their own oversight and direct creative labour. This tended to produce some simplifications in the process; for example, owners often eschewed the "formal"

³⁷ After contractor buat segala benda berkenaan dengan wet work, dry work, carpentry and everything, then decorator akan masuk. Decorater tu jugaklah interior designer kalau di Malaysia ni. So decorator akan buat final touch up. Decorator akan...okay letak painting, letak jam, letak picture ni, letak memorables style sikit lepas tu dia akan letak table lamp semua. Lepas tu barulah hasil design kita untuk restaurant complete, baru dia ada jiwa kat situ. Bila orang datang ikut dorang lah siapa nak appreciate akan appreciate, sapa yang faham art akan faham art. Selalunya individu tu sendiri, walaupun dia bukanlah orang yang berseni tapi kalau dia tengok tempat tu cantik of course lah dia kata cantik dan benda tu akan selasakan dia dalam tu.

drawing work done by interior designers (such as the scale drawing and working drawing), referring instead to their own “imaginative” drawings in guiding them. The Horizon Garden owner, for example, did most of the design tasks on his own, including even the sourcing of materials:

We did the concept, design and decoration on our own. We did not hire an external or interior designer. None. We did it all by ourselves. [For example] looking for the bamboo [for props]... we got it from the villages [rural area]. We look for it [bamboo] and then ask people [carpenter to produce it [as we planned].

(Horizon Garden Owner, Interview with Author, June 12, 2014; translated by Author)³⁸

The owner of Sweetree, partly due to budget constraints, was also determined to design and decorate the restaurant all by himself. He hired fourteen workers to help him in this process, but all had basic or no knowledge about decorating or building. So, he kept on studying and researching about the techniques and processes of restaurant design, and the team worked together, learning from mistakes as they went:

Farah: You are very creative. All of these [decorations] ... you did on your own, right?

Owner: It's me and my staff. They see what I'm doing and they want to do it too. I don't ask but they are willing to help. The Indonesian workers are enjoying working with me. They [are] not stressed. It's not all about money, they have fun doing their work. This one is also recycling (pointing to the large vase outside the restaurant). I got this from Bangi Kopitiam restaurant. It chipped a bit and they threw it. So I took it and put cement [to mend it]. And now I use it in my restaurant.

Farah: So, how about the painting? Who painted them?

Owner: Normal person can. I also do. My staff also do.

³⁸ Dari segi konsep, design dan decoration memang kita buat sendiri. Kita tak hire orang luar atau interior designer. Tak de. Semua kita buat sendiri. Cari buluh ke... Macam buluh ni kita ambik dari kampung-kampung. Tapi cuma kita cari lepas tu kita upah orang buat la.

Farah: Oh, really? Do you have any background of design and art?

Owner: No, nothing. Just... when I trigger the idea, I asked from the professional. Asked their opinion and try on my own. I also gather information from the internet. Sometimes, I fail but I will look for the solution. It will not be perfect.

(Sweetree Owner, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; interview in English)

The process was very similar for the owner of Passage thru India. To recap, the theme of the restaurant is based on his own visits to and travels within India, whilst working as a designer for a T-shirt company. In setting up the restaurant, he used these personal experiences and his design training both to plan out the overall thematic design and environment (with different areas of the restaurant matching the menu and representing different Indian regional cuisines) and to paint the walls, decorate and stage the ambiance.

Farah: So do you mean that when designing this restaurant... [the owner] did not hire any interior designer team?

Manager: No interior designer team. Nowadays, they [the management team] get the consultants from the interior designer company [only] to consult for the basic structure, changes of the building, and all that, but with regards of layout, the paintings, the design, styling, that's all from his idea. Everything from scratch.

Farah: Does he have any basis or background of arts?

Manager: Yes. He is a painter.
(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)

Other owners also used other forms of expertise within the development of their restaurants. For example, the owner of Garden Café took advantage of his knowledge and experience as a landscape contractor to design his own *alfresco* garden theme restaurant. Owning a landscape company, he was used to sketching and drawing and producing the 3D designs, albeit not in the restaurant context:

Actually, we are doing [offering] landscaping [service]. We do the design and build, we do the maintenance work, we do the design... because we are the [landscape] consultant and contractor.

(Garden Café Owner, Interview with Author, May 27, 2014; Translated by Author)³⁹

Others drew on external expertise, but through networks of friends and acquaintances rather than formal design consultancies. As discussed in Chapter 4, Palate Palette sought a colourful themed ambiance that would present a quirky, alternative, authentic, ad hoc ambiance. The owner did consult a professional designer, but also commissioned artists she knew to produce works, guided by her overall brief:

Farah: So, did you design the restaurant yourselves? Or is there any other designer involved?

Owner: I would say that...maybe. No, I worked with the designer but I think maybe the best word to use would be that I helped to create the space so kind of with a bigger vision... so, like I have the vision on how to use the space, you know, like what elements should be here. So, if you can see like... for example all the arts on the wall, like upstairs, all the arts on our walls, none of them are painted by me. They're all artists, or friends. But because I know their style so it was like "you paint here, you...I think you just do something here, colourful."

Farah: So you're like the mastermind?

Owner: Well, maybe. Just creating the space. And the energy of it. And I guess buying the furniture and all that to make it work.

(Palate Palette Owner, Interview with Author, February 19, 2014; interview in English)

³⁹ Kita sebenarnya memang buat landscape. Kita buat design and build...kita buat maintenance, kita buat design...sebab dulu kita memang consultant dan juga contractor

Figure 5.7, Figure 5.8 and Figure 5.9 illustrate the artworks by the artists in Palate Palette's dining area, each unique yet matched to the theme.



Figure 5.7 Palate Palette: Artwork 1



Figure 5.8 Palate Palette: Artwork 2

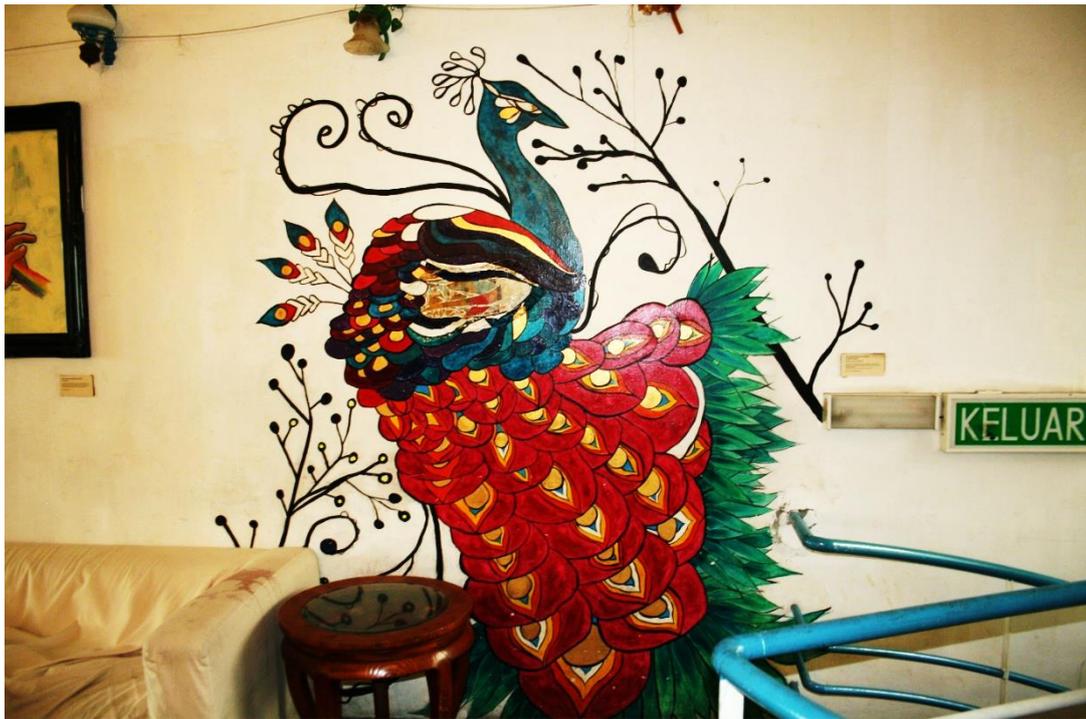


Figure 5.9 Palate Palette: Artwork 3

In summary, then, I have been arguing that a theme restaurant is not just a question of theme development and marketing, but also a deeply material process. Ideas are not just expressed materially; their material development re-works them in various ways. The material processes at play address issues of spatial design, infrastructure and decoration, and work through a range of material forms themselves (from initial sketches, to formal plans, to the built space of the restaurant).

5.2 Material culture and the DINESCAPE

The interdisciplinary field of material culture studies has, over the last two decades, re-engaged the social sciences with the importance of material 'stuff' (Miller, 2010). For Daniel Miller, material culture has often been overlooked by the social sciences,

treated as a mere backdrop to the more important realities of social interaction (Miller, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 2, in their account of the experience economy, Pine and Gilmore (1999) mobilise a theatrical metaphor: ‘work is theatre and every business a stage’. A common development of this way of thinking has been to emphasise the performative nature of labour and service encounters in the hospitality industry (Crang, 1994). Here, then, it is the performances of front line staff and customers that are the centre of attention. In contrast, drawing on the broader insights of material culture studies, I argue that we also need to explore the materiality of the stage itself as an important ‘actor’ in consumer experiences. We need, then, to foreground what might be something of a ‘background’ in our experiences of hospitality spaces: their material design and infrastructure. Themed restaurants are helpful in this regard precisely because they are exceptional in the explicit attention they draw to their material decoration. Theme restaurants are unusually obvious cases of a wider issue, namely the role of material design elements in fashioning restaurant aesthetics, and the importance of these aesthetics to customer experiences. As the owner of the Pondok Malindo restaurant discussed above put it:

...when we look at the first impression...the first impression to the customers is of course the aesthetic. The social will come later, because we want to attract the customers first, right. That is the one that we want to deliver. The wow factor... So in order to draw them to our place, we have to make sure that we have the aesthetic value. When people buy that aesthetic image, then they will walk in. When they enter, only then does the ambiance come to the stage. They take the seat, then the social starts to play a role. They will feel... ‘oh, this place is so cosy’. So they feel comfortable, it’s not noisy... and then they start evaluate other things like the lightings, layout... so it will be continuous. It’s like peeling the rose’s petals. It comes layer by layer. And lastly, when they feel the ambiance, they will taste the food...

(Pondok Malindo Designer, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)

In this section the analysis homes in on restaurant aesthetics through attention to some key ‘DINESCAPE’ elements (Ryu and Jang, 2007), and in particular those that extend Pine and Gilmore’s (1999) own emphasis on the role of ‘props’ in staging

experiential products. The discussion begins with a focus on some of the 'special themed restaurants' from the study sample, emphasising the importance they place on the materialisation of their themes, and thus the material labour involved in the management of these hospitality spaces.

5.2.1 Special theme restaurant materials

One of the widely noted characteristics of theme restaurants is that "the narrative is made visible and tangible in the physical structure of the restaurant's interior including artefacts, décor, logos, menu terminology and merchandise" (Beardsworth and Bryman 1999, p.36). This was borne out in the Klang Valley cases studied. An obvious example is Upin Ipin restaurant, which you may recall has multiple branches in Malaysia based on popular cartoon characters and targets children and families as its prime market. Large 'sticker' pictures on the wall help to generate a feeling that the animated media characters are materially present in the environment (see Figure 5.10 and Figure 5.11). The designing of these stickers was undertaken by the parent animation company, Les' Copaque Production Sdn. Bhd., drew on narratives from the cartoon series, and then matched design to wall size and to allow different designs within different branches.



Figure 5.10 Upin Ipin: The wall-size cartoon characters' stickers in the restaurant



Figure 5.11 Upin Ipin: The cartoon characters fill each wall in the restaurant

Other props also contribute to translating the animated cartoon media product into a restaurant environment to the customers. These include the ice cream maker, books, other Upin Ipin merchandise, and TV screens playing promotional extracts from the cartoon series (originally, whole programmes were played, but children were annoyed by episodes being seen 'out of order', so it was found that a more effective 'translation' of the programmes into the themed environment were specially produced promotional 'adverts' for the series) (see Figure 5.12 to Figure 5.15).



Figure 5.12 Upin Ipin: Own brand ice cream maker to attract the kids



Figure 5.13 Upin Ipin: Various types of books with the characters are presented

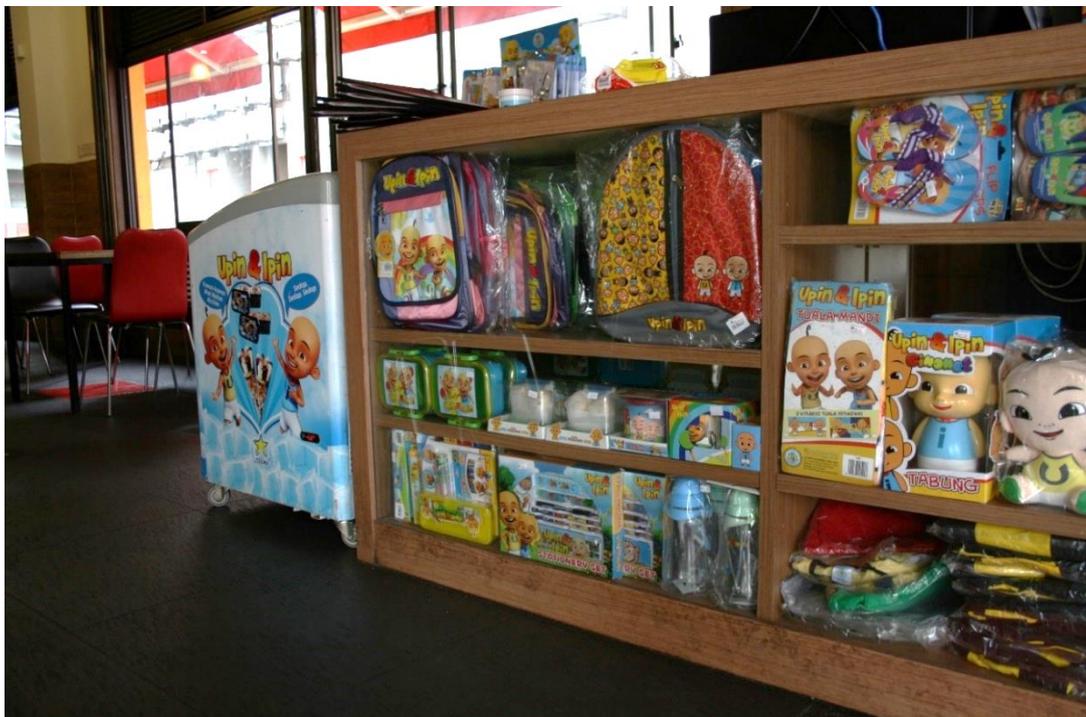


Figure 5.14 Upin Ipin: Varieties of merchandise are sold at the restaurant, offering a way to 'take away' the experience and to increase sales



Figure 5.15 Upin Ipin: Television screen showing the Upin Ipin promo and short series accompany the diners throughout their visit

In other cases, the translation of brand identity to ‘brandscape’ was a simpler decorative process, involving ensuring that key brand elements – especially colour usage – were reinforced in the built environment of the restaurant. In Horizon Garden, for example, the colour combinations chosen in the restaurant reflect the restaurant logo, as well as having been chosen for the ambiance they help to create (an issue I turn to more directly in Chapter 6). Thus, colour choices present a brand image as well as being used to help produce a comfortable and peaceful dining environment:

Farah: How about the colour combination [in the restaurant]? Are they based on your favourite colours?

Owner: These colours represent Horizon’s image. Meaning that they are the corporate colours. There are chilli red, cream, chocolate and green. We chose the harmonious combination of colour tones, not the one that overly contrasts.

(Horizon Garden Owner, Interview with Author, June 12, 2014; translated by Author)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Farah: Kalau macam colour combination ni macam mana? Memang colour favourite encik kah?



Figure 5.16 Horizon Garden: The logo of the restaurant and its colour combinations



Figure 5.17 Horizon Garden: The restaurant painted with the corporate colour of the company

Owner: Colour ni melambangkan imej horizon. Kiranya corporate colour la. Ada warna red chilli, cream, chocolate dan hijau. Kita pun tengok juga la tone colour combination yang harmoni, bukan yang terlalu kontra.

In the case of the Wong Solo restaurants, the founder of the restaurant was very particular in ensuring the outlets were all painted in the same green tone so that customers will recognise them as associated with the Wong Solo brand.

Farah: So why did you choose the green colour?

Owner: Even I don't know why he [the founder] chose green. Maybe it's his favourite colour. But all of the outlets are green in colour. He is very particular about the wall colour [being the same].

(Wong Solo Owner, Interview with Author, February 10, 2014; translated by Author)⁴¹



Figure 5.18 Wong Solo: The green colour of Wong solo is standard across other outlets, giving this restaurant a unique identity

In other cases, too, themed restaurant decoration was a central material concern. Flora Kafe, in the Ampang district of Kuala Lumpur, was launched by a parent company

⁴¹ Farah: So ni kenapa hijau temanya?

Owner: Saya pun tak tahu kenapa dia pilih hijau. Favorite colour ke ape. Tapi semua kedai dia hijau. Dia sangat particular tentang warna dinding ni la.

focused on bespoke wedding and event designing, and as the name suggests places particular emphasis on floral decoration (see Figure 5.19 and Figure 5.20). Using both artificial flowers, living plants and cut natural flowers, the decoration was overhauled periodically (at least every 6 months), and also changed to mark particular seasons and festivals such as Ramadhan, Eid, Chinese New Year and Christmas, among others (see Figure 5.21 to Figure 5.23):

We highlighted the different concept according to seasons. It's seasonal concept. For example, when Eid approaches, we come out with the Eid festival mood's concept. We create the village like concept, then we decorate [the restaurant] and make it look like a village scenery... with the curtains looking like a village's ones, a roof of palm fronds, gigantic elephant ear plants. Then we play around with the lamps. So, the concept is diverse. When it comes to Christmas, we come out with a Christmas tree, white Christmas and everything related to the concept. Then during the Chinese New Year, we come out with the red colour theme, lantern, big framed pictures... and then it's not even a seasonal concept only, but we try to change the concept from time to time. Most probably, the gap is around 6 months because we do not want the customers to be bored. People will be tired with the same ambiance. They will feel like "I've been here for three or four times and I feel bored. [There is] no difference". And then [when this happen], I disappeared [from social media]. And when we started to upload [the new ambiance's pictures and news] in social media, Facebook, telling people that we come out with this concept, the customers started to come back. From there we preserve our relationship with the customers. We tried to pull back the existing customers. We refreshed [the mood and relationship with them].

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)⁴²

⁴² Kitorang ketengahkan konsep berbeza-beza mengikut season. Seasonal concept. For example bila datang raya, kami come out dengan konsep macam mood hari raya. Kita buat la konsep ala kampung, lepas tu decoration dia pulak kita buat memang nampak macam permandangan kampung...dengan langsir yang kat kampung buat, bumbung atap nipah, daun keladi gajah yang besar-besar tu. And then kita mainkan dengan lampu-lampu. so konsep dia berbeza-beza. Bila datang christmas pulak, kita come out dengan christmas tree, white christmas, lepas tu dengan macam-macam yang kena dengan concept la. Then bila datang chinese new year plak, kita come out dengan red colour theme, lantern, frame gambar yang besar-besar...and then not even seasonal concept sahaja tapi kita cuba ubah concept ni dari masa ke semasa. Most probably gap tu 6 bulan la. Sebab kita tak nak bagi orang jemu. Orang akan cepat jemu kalau sama je sentiasa. Kadang-kadang mereka rasa 'I dah datang 3 4 kali tapi rasa eh, dah bosan la. Tak ada beza'. And then the next..I disappear. And then bila kita upload dekat social media, facebook, kita comeout with this concept, and then mula datang balik customer kita. Dari situ kami jaga relation dengan customer. Kami cuba tarik customer yang dah lama tak datang. Refresh balik.



Figure 5.19 Flora Kafe: Attractive restaurant entrance with floral decoration



Figure 5.20 Flora Kafe: Heavy flower decoration in the dining area



Figure 5.21 Flora Kafe: The ambiance inside the restaurant during the wonderland concept (Flora Kafe, 2013b)

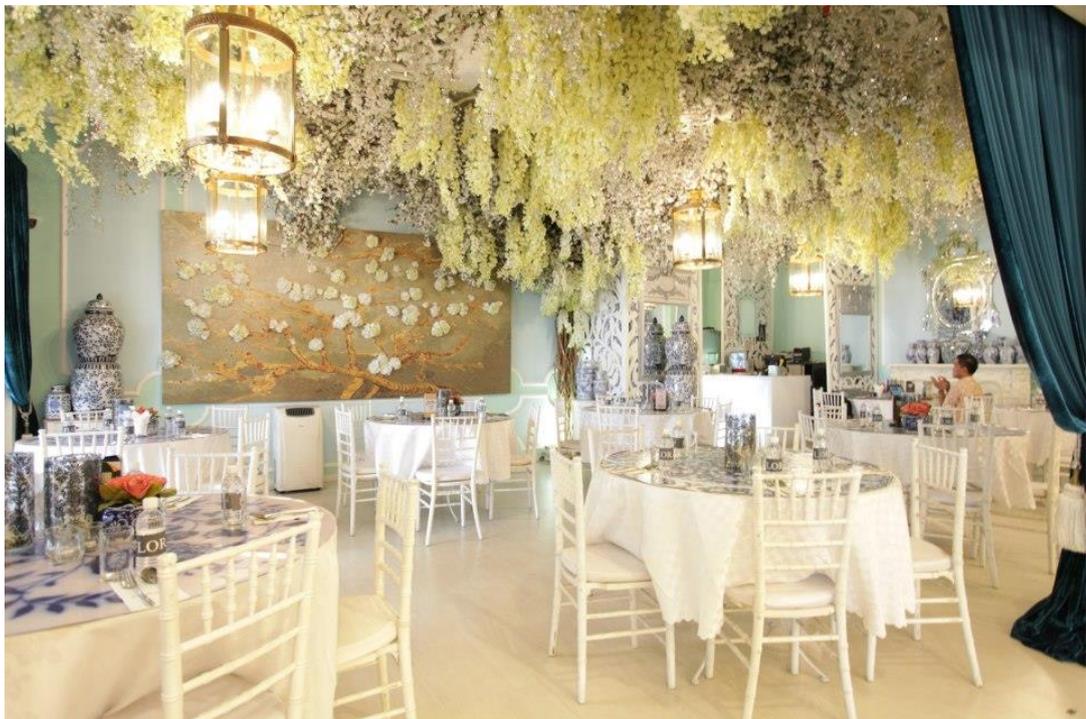


Figure 5.22 Flora Kafe: Variation to white concept in floral theming (Flora Kafe, 2013a)



Figure 5.23 Flora Kafe: A more urban and chic concept (Flora Kafe, 2011a)

The table setting and decoration was part of this material staging, and also allowed a direct sales benefit, with customers being charged for 'extra beautification', a material enhancement especially offered to those coming to the restaurant for special dining occasions:

I charged extra MYR 50. What did you get? From the plain table without decoration, I decorate with flower bouquet, candle... so with the ambiance, it will automatically emerge the mood. When you go for a date, have conversation, you can get this entire mood together with the ambiance. (..) We wanted you to get the most from us. So the price is affordable and value for money.

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)⁴³



Figure 5.24 Customers can upgrade their dining experience by requesting for special table setting (Flora Kafe, 2014a)

In both Upin Ipin and Flora Kafe, other businesses – cartoon animation and event design respectively – were extended into the restaurant sector through a material decoration strategy. In the case of Ayam Burger, the staging of a cowboy theme

⁴³ I charge RM50 extra. Apa you dapat? Daripada table tu kosong bulat-bulat, tak ada apa yang menarik, so i decorate kan dengan gubahan bunga, dengan lilin. So dengan susana dalam ni...automatically mood tu dah ada. Bila you pergi dating, pergi borak, you dapat mood ni semua sekali dengan susana. (...) Kami nak bagi you nikmati apa yang kami ada. So harga tu memang affordable and value for money.

required the owner to embrace a more personal passion, and in particular to deploy his personal collection of 'cowboy' materials for the restaurant decoration. As he had been a cowboy and 'American western' enthusiast since childhood, he had a lot of collected objects that could be used as props and decorations. He was also eager to continue adding to this collection, as he sought out materials matched to the restaurant theme.

Farah: Where did you get the hats and other cowboy concept materials in this café?

Manager: They are his [the owner's] personal collections. He bought them one at a time. He bought at *pasar karat* [like carboot sale]... just like all those pictures [pointing to pictures on the wall]. He went to the market which was selling second hand items. The *pasar karat*, morning market... he will buy anything with a cowboy concept. He collected them. Later on, you can see there are his collections of boots inside the café. Sometimes he went to the bundle shop and bought the cowboy boots in bulk. People today did not wear boots anymore. So he bought them. For the decoration, as props.

(Ayem Burger Manager, Interview with Author, June 22, 2014; translated by Author)⁴⁴

In fact, the cowboy theme also bled into a motorbike / biker theme, through a joint association with American landscapes of 'freedom' and mobility. Thus the Ayem Burger Bikers Café had various cowboy materials on display, pictures of classic motorbikes, and also the classic Western bar swivel door, the playing of cowboy movies on tv screens in the outdoor seating area, the playing of country music in the indoor dining area, cowboy clothes to dress up in and to be photographed wearing

⁴⁴ Farah: Mana dapat topi dan barang-barang berkonsepkan cowboy kat dalam café ni?

Manager: Dia punya collections. Dia beli sikit-sikit. Dia beli di pasar karat...macam gambar-gambar tu. Pergi pasa-pasar yang second hand ni. Pasar karat, pasar pagi...dia nampak je apa-apa konsep cowboy dia beli. Dia collect. Nanti boleh tengok sebelah dalam cafe, dia ada collect boots. Kadang dia pergi kedai bundle, dia beli borong cowboy boots tu. Orang sekarang dah tak pakai boots tu. So, dia beli. Untuk hiasan, props.

(thus providing a memento of the themed experience), and the wearing of cowboy hats by the staff (see Figure 5.25 to Figure 5.30)



Figure 5.25 Ayem Burger: One of the iconic theme props – cow skull



Figure 5.26 Ayem Burger: The welcome signage with horseshoes and old bikes pictures on to



Figure 5.27 Ayem Burger: Wooden and rustic cowboy signage with cowboy theme pictures



Figure 5.28 Ayem Burger: Photography corner where customers are free to wear vests, cowboy pants, boots, hats and accessories for memories



Figure 5.29 Ayem Burger: Guns are among the cowboy theme materials displayed on the wall



Figure 5.30 Ayem Burger: Swivel door purposely built to enhance the theme ambiance

In Chemistry Café too, the themed ‘props’ move beyond just the decoration of the space and become part of how food and service is presented to consumers. The staff wore lab coats to enhance the lab theme; and drinks were served in various sorts of laboratory equipment / glassware (conical flasks, jars, test tubes, beakers and syringes), a common talking point amongst customers (see Figure 5.31 to Figure 5.33):

How do we serve our drinks? By using conical flasks, flat-bottomed flasks, syringes and test tubes. We use syringes to serve sugar syrup. Customers can inject the sugar syrup in their drinks. Just like they did when using the sugar in sachets. (...) In addition, we have the iodine bottle for our water. The brownish colour one... We also have the measurement jug for the ice. We serve menu items like iced cappuccino, iced mocha in a measurement jug. The blended one we serve in the conical flask.
(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 5.31 Chemistry Café: Staff wearing lab coats and looked like chemist in a lab



Figure 5.32 Chemistry Café: Ice blended drinks served in conical flask, to enhance the lab theme and lab dining experience for the diners in the restaurant



Figure 5.33 Chemistry Café: The white and brown sugar syrup served in syringe for customers to ‘inject’ into their drinks

In many of the studied restaurants, the material design and management undertaken went well beyond the decoration of the space and the presentation of staff and food. It involved the making of the whole environment. Istana Bambu, for example, used bamboo in 80 percent of its structure to create a village-like and peaceful ambiance (see Figure 5.34 to Figure 5.36). The building work included a large structure for the main dining area, and also individual dining huts to accommodate various types and number of customers and offer a more private dining environment. As well as bamboo, the use of palm leaves for the roof is able to give the effect of village scenery, as well as ensuring a cooling effect during hot and sunny days. The management team also planted rice plants around the restaurant in imitation paddy fields, relocated to the urban setting.



Figure 5.34 Istana Bambu: The entrance and walkaway to the main dining area which was built from bamboo



Figure 5.35 Istana Bambu: Individual hut dining area offering a more privacy setting to the customers



Figure 5.36 Istana Bambu: Paddy field made the village scenery livelier when combined with the bamboo structures of the restaurant

Istana Bambu has a large plot and a standalone building. Fisherman's Cove, in contrast, is located in a shopping mall (in the basement level of the exclusive Starhill Gallery in the Bukit Bintang area of Kuala Lumpur). Nonetheless, it too materialises its theme -- a fisherman's village and seafood theme -- in the construction of the whole dining environment (see Figure 5.37 through Figure 5.42). Bamboo is again heavily deployed within the structure; bamboo and wood are the materials used for tables and chairs; and there is a huge fishing net and large tanks of live seafood. In fact, the manager claimed that *"when you stand and look from outside [of this restaurant], it looks like a ship (a traditional South East Asian 'junk')"*. (Fisherman's Cove Manager, Interview with Author, May 12, 2014; interview in English).



Figure 5.37 Fisherman's Cove: The restaurant's signage made of bamboo



Figure 5.38 Fisherman's Cove: Individual partitions for more private dining in the upper level dining area



Figure 5.39 Fisherman's Cove: Downstairs dining area catering to bigger groups of diners, with heavy use of netting



Figure 5.40 Fisherman's Cove: Bamboo and wood as the main theme materials being used in the structure of the restaurant, along with traditional hat decoration

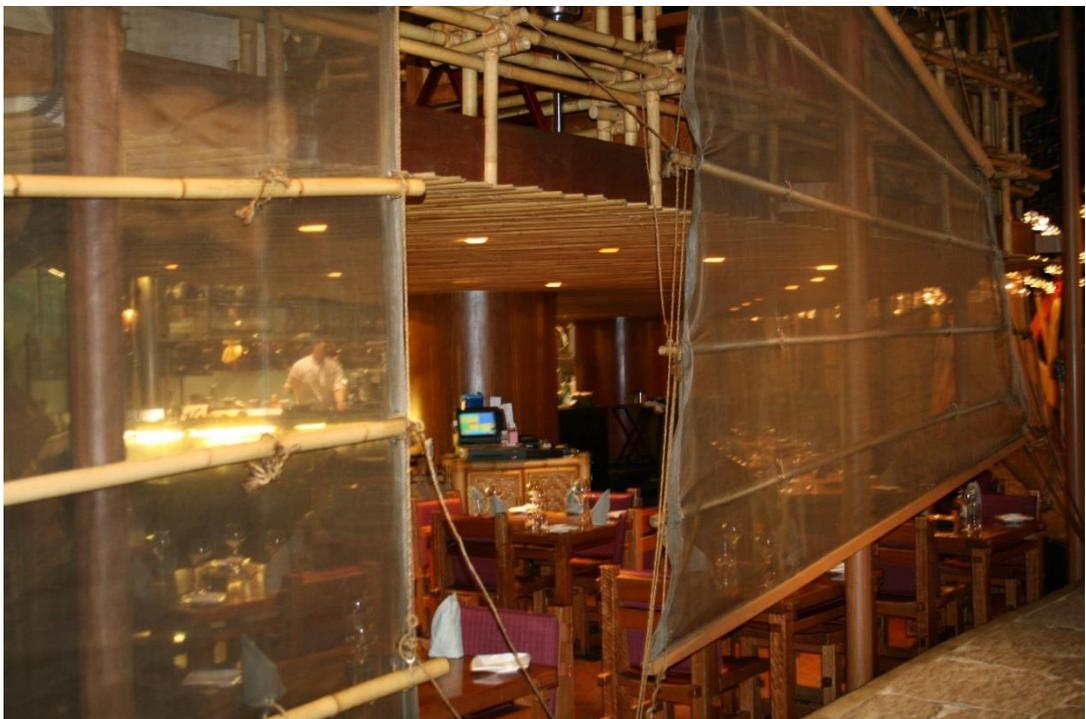


Figure 5.41 Fisherman's Cove: The large nets give privacy for the diners from the passers-by, give a look of the ship, and contribute to the fisherman theme ambiance



Figure 5.42 Fisherman's Cove: Tanks filled with various fresh seafood for the customers to choose

This level of material design and investment necessitates on-going maintenance. In a focus group session carried out during the fieldwork, one of the participants, who is also a restaurant manager, pointed out that running a theme restaurant requires high maintenance. She claimed that:

From my view as a restaurant operator, if someone wants to embark on special theme restaurant, it requires a high cost of maintenance. If it is a common restaurant, there is only waiter, cashier, and bartender for example. But, they [theme restaurant] need a maintenance staff. A keeper to take care of the decoration. For example the Hard Rock Café, they have the merchandise like the shirts, memorials and all. So they have to take care of that thing to sustain the ambience. It is the same with the garden theme restaurant. I can imagine how it looks like. There must be a person who takes care of the landscape, the plants, fertilizer
(PR 38, Focus Group session, July 1, 2014, translated by Author)⁴⁵

The use of the term 'keeper' here is notable. In part this signals the 'curatorial' work involved in building up a material collection to decorate these spaces; in part the ongoing maintenance work required to maintain their look and the impression they produce. This is a significant issue when deploying inanimate materials; signs of wear and decay convey powerful, and usually unwanted, meanings to customers. It is perhaps even more of an issue, however, when restaurant dinescapes are made in part through living materials. Often, restaurants produce a 'natural' theming through enrolling living plants within their material networks, requiring forms of maintaining practice much like other forms of nature commerce and consumption such as garden centres (see Hitchings, 2007). The Garden Café and Asmara Fern are good examples of this (see Figure 5.43 to Figure 5.49). Plants and trees are the main design materials in these restaurants, needing daily maintenance and extra care to retain their freshness, beauty and life. In both cases, a deep interest in plants and landscaping was

⁴⁵ Kalau saya dari restaurant operator punya view, kalau nak buat special themed restaurant tu, memang high maintenance kosnya. Kalau restoran biasa, dia hanya ada waiter, cashier, bartender macam tu contohnya. Tapi diorang kena ada maintenance staff. Keeper yang jaga decoration tu. Contoh Hard Rock Cafe tu ada dia punya macam baju-baju, memorial dia tu semua. Ha tu kena jaga sebab nak sustainkan ambience tu. Sama juga kalau garden theme restaurant tu. Saya boleh imagine dah macam mana. Kena ada orang yang jaga landskap, pokok, baja

part of the motivation for these owners to open garden themed restaurants, and also equipped them with the skills required for upkeep of the surroundings. Both recognised plant care, sourcing and management as central tasks for restaurant management, and key to the staging of the desired customer experience. 'Nature' is a material culture that requires significant labour.



Figure 5.43 Asmara Fern: Night view of the restaurant surrounding



Figure 5.44 Asmara Fern: Green entrance and roofed seating area awaits the customers



Figure 5.45 Asmara fern: Outdoor seating area surround by nature for customers who wanted to enjoy the soft breeze of air



Figure 5.46 Garden Café: Entrance gateway with colourful plants welcoming the customers to the restaurant



Figure 5.47 Garden Cafe: Option of roofed dining area for customers



Figure 5.48 Garden Café: Alfresco seating area surrounds with the water element and plants offer fresh air and calming ambiance



Figure 5.49 Garden Café: Customers are free to have a walk and enjoy the landscape surrounding the restaurant. There are a few seating areas and wooden swings for customers to relax in 'nature'

5.2.2 International theme restaurant materials

Through looking at examples of ‘special theme restaurants’ I have been arguing, then, that the staging of a hospitality product involves design work on the very materials of that stage. It is essential for a theme restaurant to present the consumer with appropriate materials to portray its theming. The material work undertaken ranges from decoration to construction, from curating collections of objects to ongoing care of these material arrays (both inanimate and animate). ‘Facility aesthetics’ (Ryu and Jang, 2007) are a crucial part of the production of place in the hospitality sector. The same processes can be found in the ‘international theme restaurants’ studied. They too focus on restaurant décor, table decoration and tableware, seating and furnishings, construction materials, staff uniforms, and items that can act as memorabilia. These issues will recur in the discussion below. However, in discussing them here I also want to introduce an additional focus: the ‘representational’ role of material culture. So far, my analysis has been predominantly ‘practical’. It has concentrated on the ‘doings’ associated with the material culture of restaurants (more generally, for practice focused approaches to design see Shove et al., 2007). Now I want to foreground the role that material culture plays within wider cultural and geographical understandings and discourses, extending representational analyses of culinary culture beyond food per se (Cook and Crang, 1996). Those founding and managing internationally themed restaurants were conscious of the representational weight they bore, speaking frequently about the relationships between restaurant design and wider understandings of the nations and cultures in relation to which they were themed.

For instance, Bumbu Desa is one of the restaurants which represents Indonesia in the Klang Valley area. Materially, the emphasis is on decorating the restaurant with Indonesian arts, culture and heritage. Specifically, the *wayang golek* (rod puppet) was chosen to be the ‘ambassador’ or icon for the restaurant chain. The rod puppet was, and still is, a popular theatrical form in Indonesia, often portraying narratives of epic

history (Cohen, 2014). These puppets not only act as props to stage a different ambiance but also are recognised by customers as representing Indonesian culture.

So we use the ornament from Indonesia. It's the rod puppet. This is to show that this is an Indonesian restaurant bringing the Indonesian culture. The rod puppet is a story. These puppets (pointing to the puppets on wall) are the characters in the stories like *Ramayana* and *Pendawa Lima*. So all of these ornaments are based on the theatre in Indonesia. They are original and there are stories behind each character.

(Bumbu Desa Manager, Interview with Author, January 28, 2014; translated by Author)⁴⁶

In using these puppets (see Figure 5.50 to Figure 5.53), Bumbu Desa frames Indonesian culture around ideas of heritage and artistic quality, attributes which are then associated with the restaurant itself. There is a wider emphasis on Indonesian arts and crafts in the restaurant décor (see Figure 5.54) that the puppets form the iconic part of. This particular picture show how the restaurant create a hand wash area but presented it in and artistic way. The use of wooden basin matches with large mirror of filigree gold frame and for hygiene and cosmetic purpose, this area is being divided with pillars, covered with traditional *batik* design prints, maintaining the overall Indonesian look. Furthermore, as a form of 'folk culture', the theatrical puppets also connect the restaurant into ideas of authenticity and a lack of artifice (whilst being theatrical objects re-deployed within the commercial theatre of the experience economy!). This is reinforced by other aspects of the material array, in particular the use of simple artefacts (see, for example, the tableware used in the preparation of *gado-gado* in Figure 5.55) and the visual imagery of Indonesian village life and people (see Figure 5.56). The music used in the restaurant reinforces this, as the manager explained:

⁴⁶ So kita juga guna ornament dari Indonesia. Seperti itu wayang golek. Ini untuk menunjukkan bahawa ini adalah restoran Indonesia dengan membawa budaya Indonesia. Wayang golek ini adalah satu cerita. Ini semua (pointing to the ornaments) adalah tokoh-tokoh menurut cerita Ramayana dan Pendawa Lima. Jadi semua ornament ini adalah wayang yang ada di Indonesia. Ia adalah asli dan ada cerita disebaliknya.

The name of the restaurant itself is *Bumbu Desa* (flavour of village). The village. So we chose the medium range music, not modern, remix or rap. We just use the music played by the villagers. Like the music using the *gending* and *tembang-tembang*. In Indonesia too, there are many types of music which match with Bumbu Desa like Sunda authentic, *gending* and Javanese music. If in Indonesia, there is *karawitan*. *Karawitan* is a music where a group of people playing instruments create authentic musical songs, from traditional music instruments, not a modern one. It's like gamelan. They are the instruments made of bamboo or woods. Not modern musical instruments.

(Bumbu Desa Manager, Interview with Author, January 28, 2014; translated by Author)⁴⁷



Figure 5.50 Bumbu Desa: Rod puppet figurines



Figure 5.51 Bumbu Desa: Rod puppet with various characters based on epic stories

⁴⁷ Sebab kitakan kembali dari tema bumbu desa dan nama restoran tu sendiri bumbu desa. Desa. So kita akan mengambil muzik yang sederhana, bukan dari moden atau remix atau rap. Kita just guna yang muzik yang selalu dimainkan oleh orang-orang desa. Macam nanti ada gending la. Lepas tu ada tembang-tembang. Di Indonesia juga ada banyak sekali jenis muzik jadi kita ambil yang cocok sekali dengan bumbu desa iatu sunda authentic, gending dan lagu-lagu jawa. Kalau di Indonesia ada satu karawitan. Karawitan itu adalah suatu muzik yang dimainkan oleh banyak orang dan akan menciptakan lagu-lagu yang authentic, daripada alat muzik tradisional dan bukan moden. Ianya seperti gamelan. Atau alat muzik dari bamboo atau dari kayu. Bukan dari alat muzik moden



Figure 5.52 Bumbu Desa: Rod puppet used to assist in food display and decoration



Figure 5.53 Bumbu Desa: The rod puppets displayed on the wall close to the seating area, so customers will have a closer view of the original figurines



Figure 5.54 Bumbu Desa: Wash area, decorated using the craft framed mirror, wooden materials and batik pillars, as a space to deliver the arts and culture of Indonesia



Figure 5.55 Bumbu Desa: The original tools used in food preparation of gado-gado



Figure 5.56 Bumbu Desa: Pictures of local people in daily life to enhance the village-like ambiance

Staff uniforms were sourced in Indonesia and completed with headwear of bandana/songkok (this was also true for another Indonesian restaurant, Pondok Malindo) (see Figure 5.57 and Figure 5.58). Overall, Bumbu Desa uses materials to represent Indonesian culture to Klang Valley consumers simultaneously as both a rich heritage and as a simpler, more authentic form of everyday life. The overall ambience can also be engaged through the Video 5.1 on the attached CD.



Figure 5.57 Bumbu Desa: Specially designed uniform incorporate the Indonesia theme



Figure 5.58 Pondok Malindo: Staff wearing batik uniform originally from Indonesia



Video 5.1 Bumbu Desa: The video clip of the Indonesian village theme ambiance

In Passage Thru India, as discussed above, the interior decoration and paintings were all done by the owner, inspired by his personal biography and travel within India. Decoratively, he not only painted the walls to portray parts of India through which he had journeyed but he also invested in and collected materials that represented the regions and culture of India.

A lot of the stuff inside [the restaurant] was coming from India. He [the owner] travelled down to India, he travelled to Delhi, he travelled to Bombay, he travelled to Chennai (...) A lot of statues over here that you are seeing, they are all from India. These two at the entrance (pointing to statues of men at the entrance), the three ladies with the pot on the head... all those are from India. That's not cheap now. These things are not cheap because of the cost of shipping, the cost of import duty, local purchase over there... it doesn't come off cheap. But it's quality product that lasts a long time and it fits the theme. Certain things are cheap. For example the pot overhead; this one I bought at MYR 30 a pot. But it fits the theme well. I will consider buying things even if it is cheap. And I will buy if it's expensive as long as it fits the decor and the theme, and the aura of the restaurant. That's the idea.

(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)

The following pictures (refer to Figure 5.59 to Figure 5.64) show some of the decorative materials displayed around the restaurant. In its emphases on travel and material collection, the village scene and artefacts and female figures, the overall aesthetic echoes longer colonial histories of the representation of India within consumer cultures abroad (Mathur, 2007). That a twenty-first century Indian restaurant in Malaysia parallels so clearly the department store displays of nineteenth century London (Mathur, 2007) perhaps suggests something of the endurance of colonial ways of seeing India within wider postcolonial global cultures of travel and consumption.



Pictures clockwise:

Figure 5.59 Passage Thru India: Three women with pot on head

Figure 5.60 Passage Thru India: Bullock cart's wheel

Figure 5.61 Passage Thru India: Horse with accessories

Figure 5.62 Passage Thru India: A man wearing an army uniform holding a spear



Figure 5.63 Passage Thru India: Wall paintings, colours and decorations inspired by the owner's journey to India



Figure 5.64 Passage Thru India: Various props and paintings showing the art and culture of India

Pondok Malindo, as discussed above, sought to stage a representation of ‘authentic’ Indonesia with a modern twist. The design solution for this was to feature material artefacts that would signal Indonesian culture and heritage but in a framing reminiscent of a gallery. In so doing, the aim was to stand out from other Indonesian themed restaurants (though note how both Pondok Malindo and Bumbu Desa end up featuring Indonesian puppetry, though in this case shadow puppets):

In fact, I restricted them from hanging the long batik prints because that is too common [in other Indonesia restaurants]. So they hang some paintings. Its *wayang kulit* [shadow puppet] if I’m not mistaken. So I think that will do. It’s something related to their culture.

(Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)⁴⁸



Figure 5.65 Pondok Malindo: The paintings of wayang kulit [shadow puppet] characters hung on the wall to illustrate the Indonesian culture

The gallery aesthetic was further developed through a space in the restaurant to place artefacts such as books, magazines, papers, as well as traditional food and beverage containers (see Figure 5.66). The owners made several trips to Indonesia to buy these objects. Customers are free to read them or have a closer look at the materials. In this

⁴⁸ Infact macam kain-kain batik panjang tu I tak bagi letak sebab yang tu dah common sangat. So depa letak some painting. Wayang kulit kalua tak silap. So I rasa yang tu bolehla. Something relate to dorang punya culture kan.

way, the owners hope that they can share the knowledge and experience of Indonesia with the customers.



Figure 5.66 Pondok Malindo: The educational-sharing space created in international theme restaurant to present the source of knowledge, arts and culture of the country.

Similarly, the owner of Sweetree allocated a corner of the restaurant as a cultural exchange space, where he displayed Korean materials, books and magazines, as well traditional costume for customers to wear and then take pictures (thus creating an opportunity for commemorating a visit) (see Figure 5.67 to Figure 5.69). The owner believed in the principle of two-way cross-cultural communication with consumers, in which he not only receives payment from customers for their dining experience but also gives back knowledge of his home country and culture.



Figure 5.67 Sweettree: The Korean arts props



Figure 5.68 Sweettree: Reading corner with book shelf full of Korean books and magazines



Figure 5.69 Sweetree: Cultural-exchange corner where customers are free to try on the traditional Korean costume and take a closer look at the Korean materials on the shelves

5.3 Conclusion

In summary, extending the theatrical metaphors that underpinned Pine and Gilmore's initial statements of the experience economy (1998, 1999), this chapter has argued for the importance of the material staging of restaurant experiences. In so doing, it contributes to more recent work on so-called 'experience-scapes' (O'Dell, 2005) as well as studies that emphasise the role of spatial design within the experience economy (Svabo et al., 2013). The first half of the chapter focused on the design process implicated in the production of restaurant spaces. Despite their 'themed' status, it was apparent that these restaurants were not simply fantasy imaginations but also material constructions. Accounts of themed environments coined the idea of 'imagineering' to describe their design (Chaney, 1997); the analysis here looks to unpick the imagineering process and its relating of symbolic expression with the material production of place. The second half of the chapter drew on existing ideas within the hospitality management literature, particularly the notion of a restaurant 'DINESCAPE' (Ryu, 2005; Ryu and Jang, 2007), to begin drawing out some of the material elements that constitute a themed place. Discussing 'special themed restaurants', the chapter emphasised how the imagineering process moves beyond only decoration to the very fabric of these places, and the extent of the material management required to produce them successfully. The idea of restaurateurs as 'keepers' was raised by one of the research participants, suggesting something of the work done to create the material collections deployed in these commercial spaces and the requirement for their ongoing management and maintenance. Finally, discussing 'internationally themed restaurants', the interpretation moved on to the processes of cultural representation implicated in restaurant design.

However, the discussion so far has deliberately sidelined some key aspects of restaurant 'dinescapes' and how they shape consumer experiences. In particular, the focus so far has been on the extension of themes beyond marketing discourse into the material cultures of 'facility aesthetics' (Ryu and Jang, 2007). Much less attention has

been given to the rather different 'material geographies' emphasised in recent post-phenomenological accounts of an 'affective materialism' (Anderson and Wylie, 2009) that emphasise questions of atmosphere (Anderson, 2009) and ambiance (Thibaud, 2002). It is to those issues that Chapter 6 now turns more directly.

6

Affective dinescapes: Ambiance, atmosphere and the theme restaurant

This thesis approaches the theme restaurants of Klang Valley as exemplars of a wider phenomenon: the production of places to stage commercial experiences. In Chapter 4, the analysis focused on that production of place as a form of marketing. In Chapter 5, the interpretation emphasised the processes of material design, management and maintenance involved in the production of restaurants as 'stages', arguing that the material elements of a restaurant 'DINESCAPE' (Ryu and Jang, 2007) need to be analysed and understood rather than simply cast as the 'backdrop' to the social performance of dining out. This chapter develops that consideration of restaurant materiality through attention to what I term the restaurants' 'affective dinescapes' (echoing Matus Ruiz's attention to 'affective foodscapes'; Matus Ruiz, 2012).

Let me explain that term. Recent interest in the materiality of place in Human Geography has seen the emergence of what Anderson and Wylie (2009, p.318) term an 'affective materialism'. Extending longer-standing geographical engagements with material culture studies (Crang, 2014), affective materialism draws on various philosophical and theoretical inspirations, including the post-phenomenological writings of Alfonso Lingis (1998), to argue for a broadening of how we understand material geographies. These are not limited, Anderson and Wylie (2009) suggest, to the sorts of material objects, artefacts and signs that I foregrounded in Chapter 5. They are not only solid; our material geographies include the air we breathe and move through, the light, dark and colour we see, the sound waves that our ear drums hear, the temperatures we feel, and so on. For Anderson and Wylie (2009), dealing with this wider sense of materiality means attending to the geographies of 'affect'.

The term 'affect' is a complex one, deployed in various ways as part of a wider 'affective turn' across the social sciences and social theory (Clough and Halley, 2007). However, Anderson (2014) identifies two meanings of the term that are pertinent in this context. First, "the term affect is used to describe a body's capacities to affect and be affected that may be expressed in emotions or feelings" (Anderson, 2014, p.763). As Thrift (2004, p. 62 & 64) puts it, here affect is defined as "the property of the active

outcome of an encounter, takes the form of an increase or decrease in the ability of the body and mind alike to act”, “a sense of push in the world”. Second, though, “affect is [also] used to refer to explicitly collective experiences that are shared between individuals. One example expressed here would be the idea that a space has a characteristic atmosphere” (Anderson, 2014, p. 764). Here, then, the emphasis is on how particular places are experienced in terms of their ‘affective atmospheres’ (Anderson, 2009) and ‘ambiances’ (Thibaud, 2002). These atmospheres or ambiances relate to both the non-human materiality of a place and how the relations between human bodies within that place unfold.

This thesis is not concerned with advancing the abstract theorisation of affect and the affective. However, the research findings suggested that affective materialism’s emphasis on sensory, embodied experience, and on places being produced and encountered in terms of their ‘atmospheres’ and ‘ambiances’, is of significant value in developing critical hospitality management research on experience staging. Others, notably Lugosi (2008), have identified the affective nature of hospitality consumption. This chapter seeks to extend such work through attention to the production of affects. Owners / managers emphasised the importance of these factors in restaurant design and operation. In this chapter, therefore, the analysis focuses on the affective qualities of the restaurant dinescape and the making of restaurant ambiance as a key aspect of staging memorable, themed, dining experiences.

This argument is developed across three main sections. First, I briefly situate my interest in ‘affective dinescapes’ in wider recent research on architectural geographies and the design or engineering of affect in the built environment. The discussion will highlight the ways in which systematic engineering of affect has been applied to various geographical settings, including other commercial consumption spaces such as retail malls. I then turn to the empirical analysis. In the second section of the chapter, I focus on questions of spatial design and the orchestration of bodies within the restaurant space. I will focus on the design of entrances, dining areas and seating

in particular. In the third section of the chapter, the ambient, sensual aspects of restaurant materiality come to the fore. Putting aside the sensuality of the food itself, my interest is in the sensory experience of the 'dinescape', through material design processes such as restaurant lighting / luminosity, music and soundscapes, thermal control, and aroma management. Finally, in conclusion, I summarise my argument and highlight how difficult the 'affective dinescapes' is to control fully. Overall, then, the findings analysed in this chapter suggest that critical hospitality management research can usefully scrutinise the affective dimensions of the 'dinescape' and, by extension, that work on the experience economy can usefully investigate the affective qualities of 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell, 2005).

6.1 Engineering affects and ambiance

6.1.1 Affective engineering, architectural geographies and retail environments

For many years, geographers only implicitly noted that the fundamental of architecture form-making is the power of built spaces to affect the people who inhabit them, tending instead to highlight the meaningful, symbolic qualities of the built environment (Hopkins, 1990; Duncan and Duncan, 2004). More recent work in the field of 'architectural geographies' has rectified this neglect, however, framing architecture and building design as projects precisely concerned with giving or offering particular affects to place (Kraftl and Adey, 2008). Architecture and spatial design can be seen, then, as processes concerned with what Thrift (2004) called the 'engineering of affect'.

Drawing on their individual research projects on school and airport design and architecture respectively, Kraftl and Adey (2008) highlight three main aspects to this affective engineering. The first of these is a strong concern with “the bodily connection with architecture” (Kraftl and Adey, 2008, p. 214). Kraftl and Adey define this connection very much in affective terms, when they describe it as “the push that the particular relationship between a body and a building could bring about” (2008, pp. 216–17). Generally, their claim here is that buildings orchestrate the possible human movements within them by “supplying the perceptive body with a set of possible actions or movements to perform” (2008, p.227). Adey (2008), for example, argues that airport architects use “obstacles such as walls, glass, and metal barriers [to] produce a maze-like effect that restricts the passengers’ virtualised sets of ethological response, beckoning forth an outcome” (2008, p. 444). Whether in relation to the needs for way-finding, security, mobility or exposure to commercial retail spaces, airports are designed to ‘send’ and circulate their inhabitants in particular ways. Secondly, Kraftl and Adey use the idea of ‘affect’ to refer to the sensory ‘feel’ of a building, its “affective, tactile, sensual effects” (2008, p.214). Thus, Adey discusses how airport designers design the sensual qualities of their buildings, for example in relation to how they can allow their travelling inhabitants to relax and feel at home (Adey, 2006); and Kraftl (in Kraftl and Adey, 2008) discusses how an alternative Steiner school nursery is designed using materials, shapes and spaces that will ‘gesture welcome’ to both children and parents.

These concerns for the orchestration of inhabitants’ bodies and the sensory nature of building design lead on to a third focus, the ‘affective atmospheres’ of buildings. Anderson’s (2006) work suggests that affects emerge from relations between bodies and things; they do not reside in an object or a body, but surface from somewhere in-between. These relations and ‘in-betweens’ exist in place. Thus Conradson and Latham talk of ‘affective fields’ that reflect “the coming together of people, buildings, technologies and various forms of non-human life in particular geographical settings” (2007, p. 238). Anderson’s (2009) idea of an ‘affective atmosphere’ has been

particularly influential. He describes this as “a class of experience that occurs before and alongside the formation of subjectivity, across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions” (p.78). Perhaps, these ideas of affective atmosphere and affective fields are in line with what McCormack describes as being “something distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies whilst also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal” (2008, p. 413). In the same school of thought, Bohme also refers to atmospheres as what “seem to fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze” (1993, p. 114). These atmospheres are not just sensory, they affect consciousness too; Dewsbury et al. (2002) claim that affects are not only about body-object relations but also about how these relations inspire ‘worlds’.

These are abstract ideas, but more specifically, they suggest that one can approach the experience economy through an affective lens, comprised of three interrelated emphases: the orchestration of bodies; the sensual relationships between customers and materialities; and the atmospheres that are generated within experiential consumption spaces. Helpfully, an application of such an approach is beginning to emerge in research on other retail environments, in particular shopping malls. Writers on malls have long recognised how they are spatially designed in ways that seek to ‘direct’ shoppers’ physical movements and emotional states; thus Goss, for example, narrated design strategies that not only direct mall inhabitants’ bodies in certain ways but are intent on cultivating certain physical and social dispositions conducive to shopping (Goss, 1993). More recently, Miller’s study of Abasto Shopping, a mall in central Buenos Aires, adopts an explicit emphasis on affective engineering, as he observes that:

The wooden benches on the basement floor, for instance, offered an opportunity to witness the engineering of affect in hopes of directing movement into stores. The hard-edged benches, without back rests, are situated between two walls of retail locations. Thus, they position the human

eye in easy consonance with the displayed commodity while stiffening the body of the sitter after a few minutes, attempting to create push–pull affects. The constant flow of bodies on and around the benches was very rapid, making it difficult to observe specific outcomes. Some people went in, others did not, and others vanished before I could see where they went (Miller, 2014, p. 20).

This engineering is not only about physical movements. Miller (2014, p. 52) analyses, for example, how some people opted to visit the Abasto Mall for its “therapeutic offering and escape from the dense streets”, how the food court and lighting were designed to enhance such feelings, and how over-crowding could upset the designers’ and managers’ intentions and frustrate shoppers. Like O’Dell’s account of the spa (2010), Miller (2014) emphasises how the mall is an experiencescape, affecting its customers. Likewise, albeit with a more critical relationship to ideas of affect, Rose et al. (2010) frame their analysis of a shopping centre in central Milton Keynes, UK, in terms of its users’ feelings: of, in and about the place.

6.1.2 Affective ambiance

Also of value here is existing thought on place and ‘ambiance’, associated with a body of French spatial thought (Thibaud, 2002) and recently engaged with by Anglophone geographers (Adey et al., 2013; Allen, 2006). According to Thibaud (2002), ‘ambiance’, which originates from the Latin word *ambire*, carries a meaning of ‘to surround’ or ‘go around’. He further argues that this word can be defined as “a space-time qualified from a sensory point of view” (Thibaud, 2002, p. 1). Ambiance, then, relates to the sensing and feeling of a place. Thibaud (2002) gives various examples of such placed ambiance: ‘stimulating’ ambiances, in places which are designed to generate feelings such as tension and excitement, and where it is impossible not to react, such as the fairgrounds, major sporting event or night clubs; and ‘calming’ ambiances, in places

which are designed to promote contemplation and thought, such as museums, churches and hospitals. The ambiance of a place, then, both has a physical materiality and relates to an emotional disposition. It also Thibaud (2011) involves the interplay of a built environment and the social practices it stages. It is not only the architectural or spatial design of a place that creates its ambiance but also its everyday social routines (Thibaud cites examples such as people walking on the streets, talking to each other in places of social conviviality, or mowing their lawns in the suburbs). In other words, people do not only experience an ambiance produced for them; they co-produce it.

Ambiance may be experienced without being seen (Milliman, 1986). In fact, Thibaud (2002) believes that ambiance can further be differentiated into various mediums, and proposes grouping it into luminous, sonic, olfactory and thermal ambiances. In a subsequent paper, he focuses in particular on sonic ambiance (Thibaud, 2011). Sound, he suggests, immerses one in the environment, placing people as part of the world (Ong, 1981; cited in Thibaud, 2011). Here, his account chimes with a wider body of work in Geography that has sought to broaden the discipline's long-standing concerns with landscapes, which often imply visual appreciation and a distanced observer, into an understanding of 'soundscapes', in which one is environmentally immersed (see, for example, Smith, 1994; Saldanha, 2009). In many spaces, these soundscapes are actively designed, forming what Connell and Gibson call an "aural architecture" (2003, p.192). For example, background music is played in many consumption spaces as part of a desire for their affective engineering (see, for the example of mall space, Sterne, 2003). Thibaud (2011, p. 2) notes how musical composition has responded to this use:

Consider Eric Satie's *Musique d'ameublement* (furniture music) that was composed in order to create a background atmosphere for specific activities such as dinner. We can also think of Brian Eno's *Ambient music* that aims to create diverse moods appropriate to various times and situations. The set of pieces entitled *Music for Airports* may be some of the most famous.

This is music that is designed to be barely heard, or in other words, to be experienced without being noticed, heard without being listened to (Thibaud, 2011). At times, its source may not even be identifiable (Sumrell and Varnelis, 2005); it is simply part of the atmospheric ambiance that surrounds people in that place. Of course, sonic ambiance is also shaped by the unfolding of social life itself. Bohme (1998) gives the example of 'street noise', such as people honking their car horns, radio music heard through open windows, or names and prices of goods being shouted by street vendors. Such sounds become central to the ambiance of the street, celebrated by some, reworked by others as they try to create other kinds of space (such as a mall, where the absence of such sounds becomes a defining feature).

In summary, then, ambiance refers to the immersive, sensual qualities of place. In a range of spatial design contexts – from retail environments to spaces of mobility, such as train stations (Adey et al., 2013) – ambiance has been shown to be an ethereal yet material entity that is central to experience and feeling. Much of the existing literature on ambiance and consumption space focuses on capital-intensive, large-scale developments such as malls (Miller, 2014; Rose et al., 2010; Sterne, 2003) or airports and train stations (Adey, 2008; Adey et al., 2013). This research argues that the focus can usefully be extended to smaller-scale spaces of hospitality such as restaurants, offering those concerned with hospitality management insight on the sometimes elusive atmospheric qualities that both restaurateurs and customers recognise as so central to the experience of dining out.

6.2 Orchestrating bodies

As outlined above, an important aspect of 'affective engineering' is the orchestration of bodies in place. This begins with the arrival of the customer at a restaurant, so it is

appropriate perhaps to illustrate this idea initially with reference to the spatial design of entrances. I will then turn to the dining area, and more specifically the issue of furnishing and seating, to further illustrate the 'affective dinescapes' found within my case study restaurants.

Restaurant designers recognise that the customer's perception begins at the entry area of the restaurant, arguing that it is important that the arrival experience flows smoothly and creates an appropriate aesthetic impact (Baraban and Durocher, 2001). Best practice is that the area should both look 'inviting' and assist the movement of customers in an orderly flow from entry to the dining area. An exemplar from the field materials would be Istana Bambu (the English translation for which is 'Bamboo Palace'), a "paddy-field concept" restaurant "serving live seafood and Nusantara cuisine" (see <http://www.istanabambu.com.my>). The footage in Video 6.1 records how the affective engineering of Istana Bambu's structure shapes the movement of customers and their experience of arrival. Analysing the footage showed how the entrance to the restaurant is a gigantic bamboo structure, like a palace's entrance. Its scale ensures that people will feel welcomed through being recognised as important and special. Entering through the large entrance, the customers then walk on a roofed bridge, also made of bamboo, to the dining hall. The customers pass by the paddy field on the right, with a small pond just underneath the walkway. The bamboo walkway thus channels the movement of customers, ensuring that the transition from outside to inside both has a ceremonial quality and a sense of occasion and those customers are exposed to the atmospheric elements of the restaurant theme.

Generally, the entrances of the studied restaurants were particularly interesting for their obviously dual function: both semiotic and affective. Like other signage in designed spaces (see Adey, 2008, for the case of airports), the entrances were *both* texts to be read – giving potential customers information, more or less explicit, about the restaurant, its theme, the promised experience – and material forms to be affected by – grabbing attention, drawing people in, setting an emotional tone. The

use of iconic signs or symbols at the entrances captures the passer-by's eyes and seeks to trigger decisions to walk in and dine. As Pondok Malindo's Interior Designer (ID) puts it:

Design is very subjective. Sometimes we keep thinking why they [restaurants] put the camel (figure) over there [at restaurant's entrance], right? But, it may be because they want to promote it [the theme], what we called as the introduction to the food. Meaning that the customers will register this information [in their head]. "Oh, this might be Arabian or Middle East food". So, it's a symbol. An image. They will put the icon there. (Pondok Malindo ID, Interview with Author, July 11, 2014; translated by Author)⁴⁹



Video 6.1 Istana Bambu: Big, dramatic and thematic entrance

⁴⁹ Tapi tu lah, dia sebab tu kata design ni is very subjective. Kita dok rasa kenapa dia letak kepala unta kat situ kan. Tp yang tu mungkin pada dia because dia nak promote dia panggil apa introduction to dia punya makanan tu. Maknanya org dah register. Oo ni mesti makanan arab ataupun middle east punya makanan. Dia symbol. Image. Dia ada icon dia kan letak kat situ.

The theme materials placed outside the restaurant attract customers, often providing minimal information but intriguing them to come in and discover what is inside. As Figure 6.1 show, Pondok Malindo's entrance welcomes customers (and passers-by) with a huge umbrella, which for Malaysians also gives an idea about the restaurant's Indonesian theme. The board displaying the special menu of the day also helps to suggest something of the menu offered to customers, as does the 'banner' displaying special offers.



Figure 6.1 Pondok Malindo: Theme materials at the entrance

In the context of the wider streetscape, the presence of theme materials at the restaurant entrance, or elsewhere on the exterior, can play a number of roles. Take, for example, the exterior decoration of Bumbu Bali with three-tier umbrellas (see Figure 6.2). In part, this simply increases visibility; regardless of any meaning, it differentiates this building from others in the street, and offers a sign-post that can be used to find the restaurant. It also, of course, does convey meaning too: these are iconic materials that symbolise the Balinese theme. In combination, the visual power of the umbrellas, drawing attention to this place, and their meaning, act as a marketing tool, attracting potential customers to come in and aiding the way-finding of those already keen to dine there.



Figure 6.2 Bumbu Bali: Symbolic and affective theming materials outside the restaurant



Figure 6.3 Flora Kafe: Entrance with heavy flower decoration

Similarly, the entrance of Flora Kafe (refer to Figure 6.3) is heavily decorated with flowers hanging from the ceiling. This not only welcomes customers, it represents the restaurant theme and makes the customer wonder what experience awaits them inside. As the manager expressed it to me, the flowers are ‘eye-catching’. This decoration was a recent innovation, associated with trying to better use the outdoor seating / dining at the entrance (see Figure 6.4):

Before this, there was no floral decorative entrance like this. To me, it’s kind of a waste when you put the table there but people don’t occupy it. If you want people to sit, what should you do? You make a decorative gate or entrance. When you did it, people will like “Wow, it’s so nice. I feel like I wanted to enter this restaurant”. Sometimes the seating inside the restaurant is full and left the seating at the entrance. You persuade the customers by “You can’t sit inside but you have the special seat at the entrance. You will get the full ambiance of flora”. Right? What we said sometimes can convince the customers.

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Gerbang bunga-bunga ni sebelum ni tak ada. To me, it’s like kind of waste kalau you letak table, orang tak duduk. Kalau you nak orang duduk, apa you perlu buat? You buat macam gerbang, decorate cantic-cantik. Bila you buatkan gerbang orang akan macam, “ Wow, cantiknya tempat ni. Rasa macam nak masuk”. Ha, kadang-kadang dekat dalam dah full, tinggal yang dekat entrance je. You pujuklah



Figure 6.4 Flora Kafe: Maximizing the space for seating by decorating the entrance and make it special.

Obviously, the dining area of a restaurant is another crucial space for affective management. Generally, the dining area occupies the largest amount of square footage in a restaurant, and is the key revenue producing area. It is the place where customers “react to the environment and form opinions which will lead them to return or to avoid the restaurant in future” (Baraban and Durocher, 2001, p. 104). Baraban and Durocher’s design guidelines for a successful restaurant (2001) highlight architectural treatments, such as raised or lowered floor and ceiling levels, to help define the dining area; and the need for the spatial plan of the dining area to take into account the ‘traffic flow’ of the waiting staff and the amount of space needed between tables. The question of the density of seating elements is recognised as especially important in a number of other restaurant design studies. According to research done by Yildirim and Akalin-Baskaya (2007), results show that customers perceive moderate density of seating better than high density, with the latter often producing feelings of

customer “You tak dapat masuk dalam tapi you duduk kat seat yang special. Kan nampak bunga banyak”. Betul? Kata-kata ni pun dah boleh convince kan people.

'over-crowding' and the loss of private space. Others note too how overcrowding the dining area with furniture, seating, people, or simply the wrong arrangement of these elements, makes customers feel that space is limited, that they have lost personal space (Stokols, 1972), and can even lead to them leaving (Eroglu and Machleit, 1990).

In order to avoid these dangers, the management of Chemistry Café carefully planned the seating arrangement (see Video 6.2). They wanted to make sure that customers were comfortable with their personal space, whilst also enjoying the sociality of eating out. This planning was for the benefit of the staff too; the precise floor-plan directed customers' movements and positioning, ensuring a smooth service delivery, reducing waiting time, and easing cleaning processes and procedures. The owner of the café explains:

(...) and facing the barista, that's [seating] for reservation. So in our cafe, we have seating that is more relaxed, this one is cosier, and this one is more romantic. So that is how we set the table. We segmented [the seating]. So over there, there is a romantic corner for two. This is the table for two, table for four, eat and go, chit chatting for a long time, over there is for the big groups (pointing to various types of seating in the restaurant). Same with outside seating. We have it for the smokers. Yet to be implemented, because we haven't got the permit. But in our layout, we have the outside seating.... we will have the awning and 6 more tables outside.

(Chemistry Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; interview in English)

Various aspects of the restaurant theming and experience also have to be carefully orchestrated. Reflecting its authentic Malay theme, Songket Restaurant offers a 'remarkable' dining experience where customers can enjoy a 45 minute Malaysian traditional dance performance, on a daily basis, during dinner. The restaurant management took a deliberate decision that this dance performance should not be on a separate stage:

The performance will be at the outdoor dining area. We wanted the customers to clearly see it because if we use the stage, there will be a gap between the customers and the dancers. It's like they are separated. So we do not want it to be like that. We prefer the dancers to dance right in front of them, and not on stage. So they can enjoy watching the performance and sometimes join the dance too.

(Songket Restaurant Manager, Interview with Author, May 14, 2014; translated by Author)⁵¹

Staging the performance in the outdoors dining area creates a different affective relationship between the dancers and the diners, one of proximity rather than distanced spectatorship, ideally going so far as to encourage participation, and diners becoming part of the show. The previous Video 4.2 on the TV Programme featuring Songket Restaurant covered the event of dance and performance of this restaurant (start from the minute of 5:12 onwards). The scene clearly showed how the performers orchestrated through the floor of dining areas and at the same time entertaining and engaging the customers to mark their memorable experience.



Video 6.2 Chemistry Café: Design and seating arrangement in the restaurant

⁵¹ Tarian di kawasan makan di luar. Kita nak customer nampak dengan jelas sebab apabila guna stage, jarak antara customer dengan penari agak jauh. So kami tak nak macam tu. Kami nak penari tu menari depan dia, dan bukannya menari dekat atas stage. Jadi mereka dapat enjoy tengok persembahan tu dan kadang-kadang join menari sekali

In the Upin Ipin restaurant, you may recall that children were the target market. This involved designing the space in ways that facilitated childish bodies and movements. The layout both set kids free to move and at the same time restricted them to certain areas (so parents could feel that their children's roaming were safe and thus enjoying the space themselves). The small play area provided at the corner of the dining area was one element of this. Important too were other affective elements, such as brightened lights and the large and vibrantly coloured cartoon characters on the wall. The manager commented that:

We have to ask the kids, right? If we ask them "do you like to come to this restaurant?" they will answer "yes, definitely!". There are kids who are crying to not leave the restaurant. They want this, they want that [referring to the varieties of merchandise]. And they like to run here and there. That is why in certain outlets we do prepare a corner with mat where the kids can sit and they can write freely on the wall. We even give them the chalk to write. So, their parents can have their meals.
(Upin Ipin Manager, Interview with Author, April 24, 2014; translated by Author)⁵²

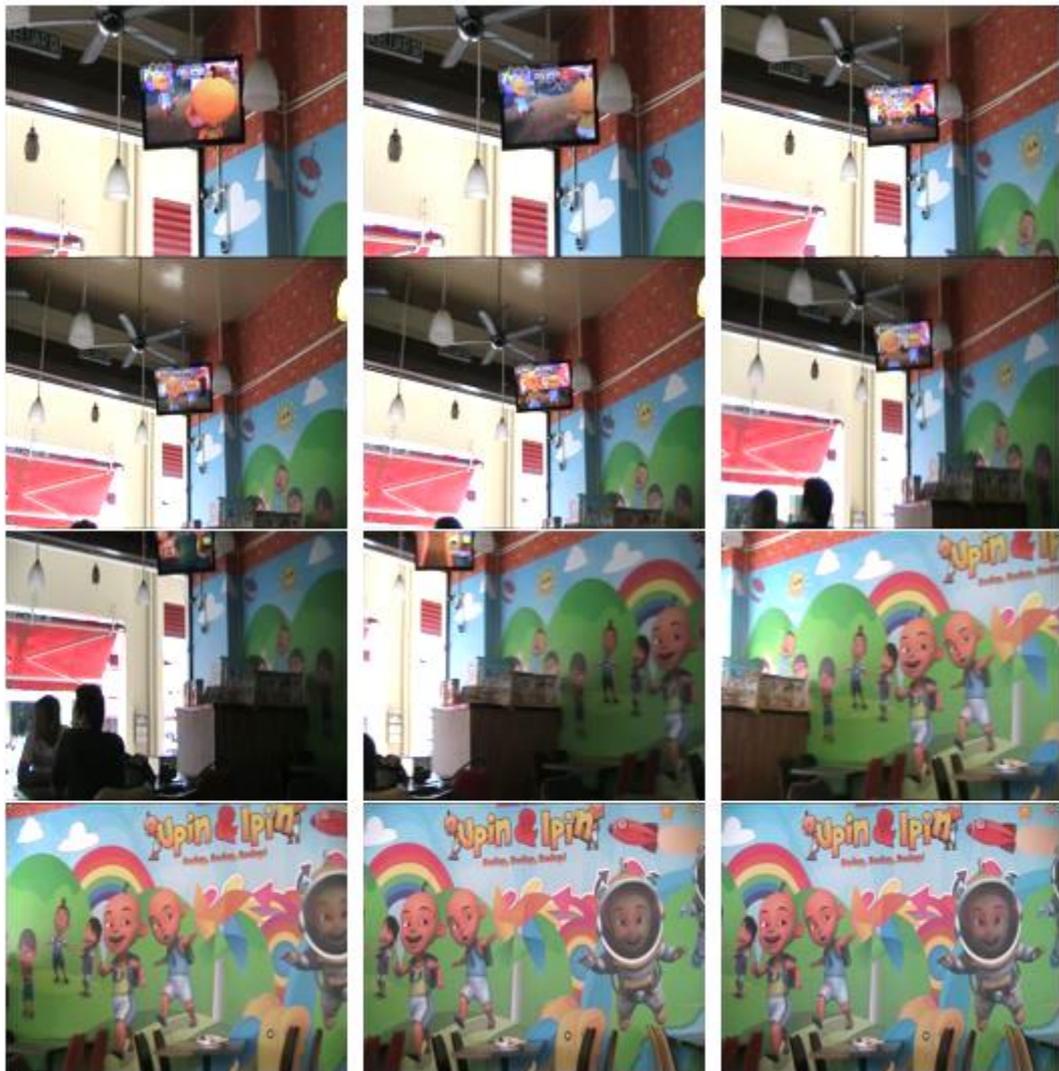
The following Figure 6.5 shows the small playground corner with the blackboard for writing, set to enhance the 'cartoony' ambiance and to facilitate the embodied playful practice that will make the kids feel happy during their visit to the restaurant.



Figure 6.5 Upin Ipin: Mini playground provided to ensure the kids were happy during their visit to the restaurant

⁵² Kalau nak tanya kena tanya budak-budak. Betul tak? Kalu kita tanya 'adik suka tak pergi kedai makan?' 'suka'. Haa..ada yang menangis tak nak balik. Nak yang ni yang tu (refer tu the merchandise). Lepas tu tengah makan budak tu berlari la..itu yang kadang-kadang dekat separuh outlet kita buat satu dinding yang budak-budak boleh duduk, ada tikar kan, lepas tu dinding tu dorang boleh conteng sesuka hati. Kita bagi kapur untuk dorang conteng. So mak bapak boleh makan.

The Video 6.3 below evokes something of the ambiance in Upin Ipin restaurant. Clearly, it is not always easy to control the ambiance here. Joyous laughter from playing children can soon become headache inducing screaming; playful fun can flip into cross squabbles over who gets to use the slide in the play area; but overall, Upin Ipin is designed to ensure that its child focused theme translates into a child focused, playful and fun ambiance.



Video 6.3 Upin Ipin: The ambiance to attract the kids

Within the dining area, furnishings – above all seating and tables – are also an important means for orchestrating customers’ bodies. Of course, at the same time, this furnishing is part of the material decoration of themed restaurants discussed in Chapter 5. Chairs and tables often materialise the restaurant theme, in ways that can be ‘read’ or interpreted by customers as well as more intuitively felt by them. Take, for example, the case of Coliseum Cafe, whose branding strap lines state: ‘Coliseum™: since 1921. The good old taste. 95 years of heritage colonial Hainanese cuisine’ (see <http://www.coliseum1921.com>). Here, the use of original furniture is important in the staging a colonial heritage ambiance. The Coliseum has kept the same layout, and then carefully managed the ageing processes of its materials -- the dark wood furniture, the old bar counter, the mosaic floor and the half-wood panelled walls -- so that customers can feel like they are visiting another time. This entails the affective management of two rather different affective qualities: on the one hand that nothing has changed, so that walking through the door is like taking a time machine back to the 1920s; and on the other hand, that this place has aged, that it has duration, that it is now heritage. The materials of the Coliseum are crucial in achieving these two aspects of a heritage theme: to be in another time now.

Manager: Everything is the same. It’s original furniture and in original plan [layout]. Nothing is changed. We only repair them back in its original colour so everything you see, like the floor, the chairs, the tables, are all the same.

Farah: Ok, and this is the very old flooring, right (referring to the floor in the restaurant)?

Manager: Yes, this is the mosaic floor. And do you know what these yellow lines placed here are (pointing to the yellow lines on the floor in between the dining area and bar area)?

Farah: No, I don’t. I wonder why.

Manager: During the early 20's, women were not allowed to enter the bar. So this is the barrier for them. Women are only in the dining area and drinks will be served there. This is what we call the men's bar.

Farah: Oh, really?!

Manager: So that's why the yellow lines were placed here. And these are all solid tables (pointing to the tables in the dining area). These 100 years old tables, as solid as you can get. Every single table here is original and the same.

(Coliseum Café Manager, Interview with Author, May 14, 2014; interview in English)

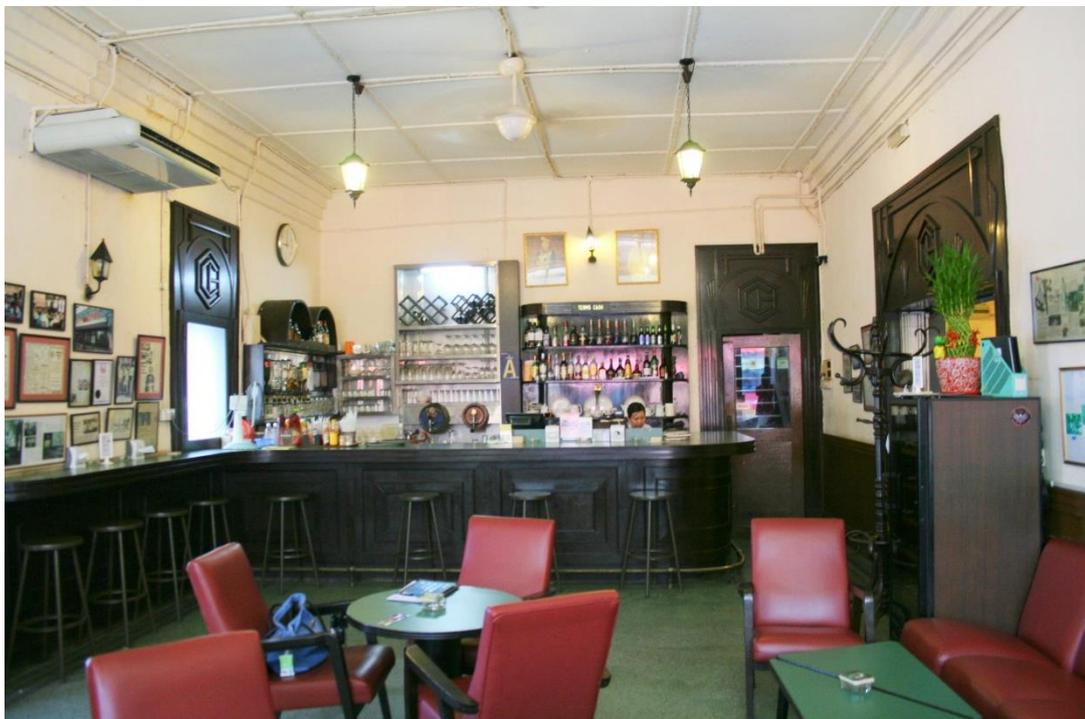


Figure 6.6 Coliseum Café: The bar area with old wooden bar and original seating furniture



Figure 6.7 Coliseum Café: Dining area and its same table layout since 1921

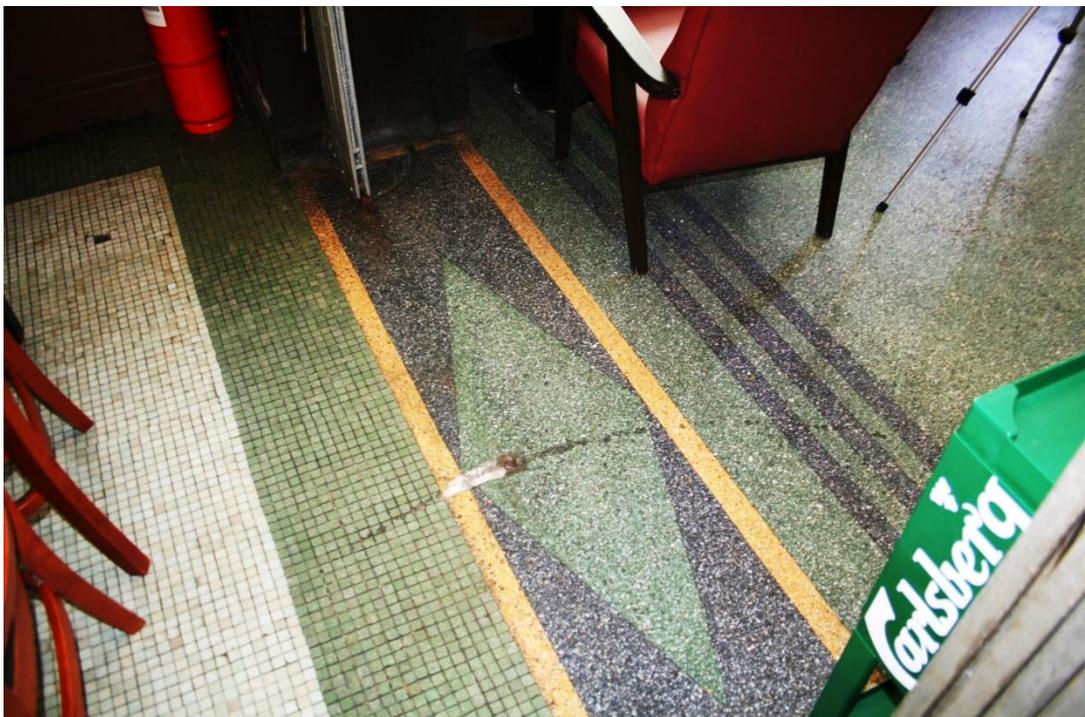


Figure 6.8 Coliseum Café: The yellow lines to divide the dining and bar areas that mark the restriction for women to enter the bar space

Furnishings like seating do more, though, than represent and affectively evoke a restaurant theme. They also shape how customers engage with the restaurant space through their embodied practice. One key example of this in Malaysia is the use by some restaurants of *bersila* (cross-legged) seating. *Bersila* is common practice in Malay dining etiquette, as well as in Indonesian dining. In a number of the studied restaurants, Istana Bambu and Wong Solo for example, dining spaces were created for customers to sit on the floor (with pillows for comfort) and with low tables on which to lay the food and drinks. Usually, these spaces were also more private, divided off into individual dining areas by either curtains or another form of boundary marking material. As people today normally sit on chairs, *bersila* seating offered something different through its directing of diners' bodies. Both restaurants reported on how this seating was favoured by customers seeking a relaxing experience, as well as a space that would allow the freedom for children to move about rather than remain seated.

Most customers prefer the *bersila* [seating] as it is out of ordinary. There are also people who requested for this seating. Sometimes, customers fight for these seats [especially] over the weekend.
(Istana Bambu Manager, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; translated by Author)⁵³



Figure 6.9 Istana Bambu: *Bersila* seating in individual hut gives customers a relaxing and private dining experience

⁵³ Kebanyakan nak bersila sebab ia satu kelainan. Ada yang request nak seat bersila ni. Kadang-kadang bila weekend sampai berebut la.

At Wong Solo, there are a few areas of *bersila* seating provided, each separated by a woven bamboo screen that provides privacy and enhances the Indonesian theming and ambiance (see Figure 6.10). As Bitner (1992) notes, certain materials can communicate cues to establish the character of a restaurant, create an overall aesthetic impression and have symbolic meaning too. Central to *bersila* seating are ideas of comfort. In discussing ideas of comfort from an affective standpoint, the geographer Bissell (2008, p. 1700) suggests three aspects to comfort: it is as an objective capacity (in terms of how an object or environment relates physically with the human body); it is an aesthetic sensibility (associated with particular cultural tastes, desires and values); and it is an affective resonance (a state of feeling generated through affective relations of bodies with the world). *Bersila* seating in these restaurants is comfortable in all three of these senses. It helps to perform a comfortable experience for diners, through their bodies, wider imaginations (of less formal, relaxed cultures), and emotional states.



Figure 6.10 Wong Solo: *Bersila* seating in spaces separated by a woven bamboo screen

Passage Thru India is another restaurant that offers *bersila* seating as a part of its experience. As you may recall, this restaurant's theme was inspired by the owner's journeys to and in India, and thus had four dining areas, each associated with a different Indian region. The Rajashtani area had the lower-level seating (see Figure 6.11 and Figure 6.12). In conversation, the restaurant manager highlighted the area's popularity among the younger generation, as it allowed them to have their meals while relaxing and chatting with friends:

This is the low seating area. It is popular with the sun down light. So this is where a lot of youngsters, lot of friends like to sit at this seating area. It is more relaxing and this is the Rajasthan area [one of the dining sections]. Because they [Rajasthanis] sit on the floor when they eat. Because when they sit straight the food is digested better as compared to sitting on the table like that.

(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)

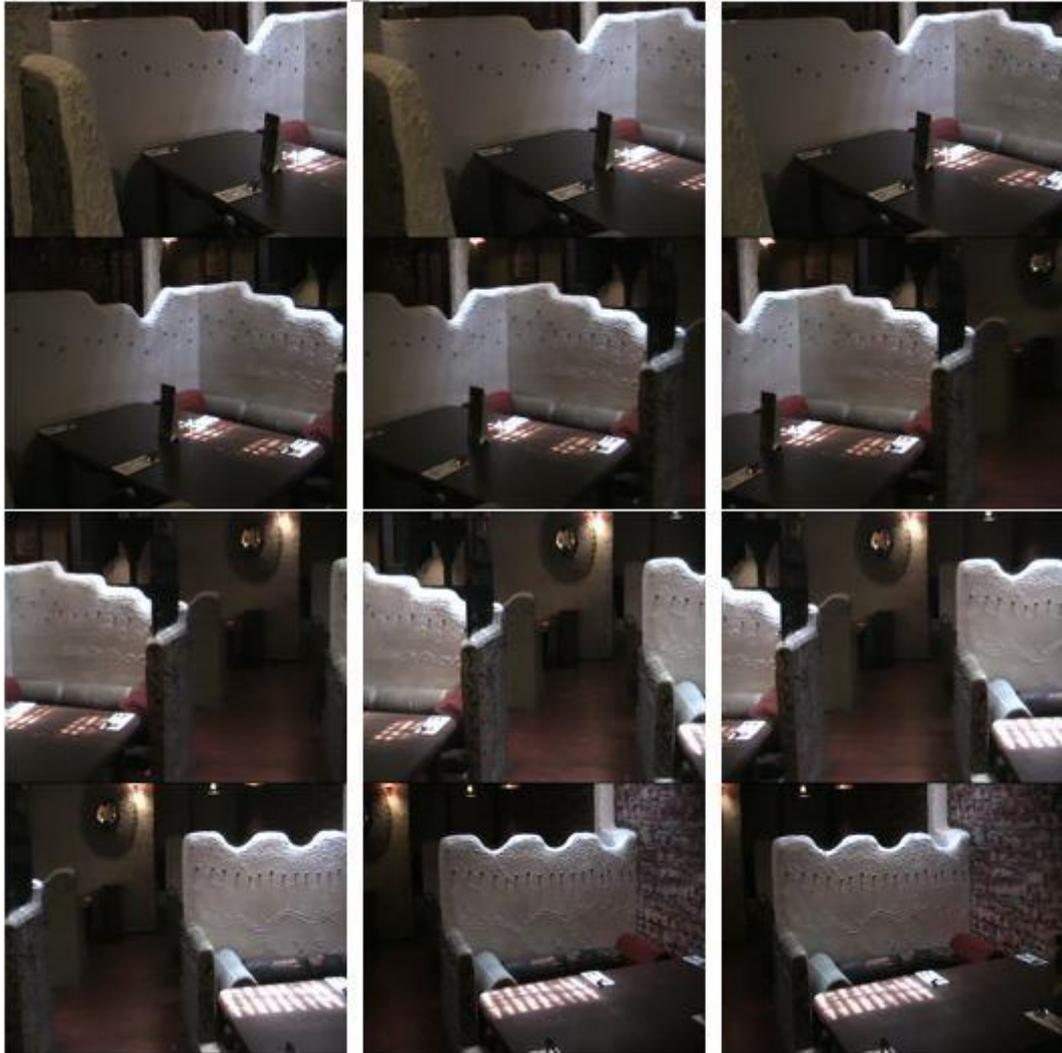


Figure 6.11 Passage Thru India: The lower seating area was quite popular among the youngsters



Figure 6.12 Passage Thru India: Cushion and pillows to give comfort to the diners

The seats themselves work in combination with other material elements, as well as the sociable conduct of the young diners themselves, to create a relaxing, comfortable atmosphere. Given the seats are made of concrete various pillows and cushions are offered. According to Bissell (2008, p. 1706), “to promote a comfortable and relaxed sensibility in places where such affects are impeded, it is often necessary to enlist a range of other objects”. In video documentation (see Video 6.4 in the CD attached) it was noted too, that traditional Indian music is being played, which is soothing to the ear. The music fills the air and enhances the comfortable ambiance. The later part of the clip shows how the design of the roof allows a regulated amount of sunlight to brighten the dining area, as if each table is highlighted with an individual lamp, but in this case it is natural light.



Video 6.4 Passage Thru India: The lower seating style with soothing Indian music

In Istana Bambu, the *bersila* seating's location in separate 'huts' in the garden area further enhances the ambiance. Surrounded by the planted paddy field and other vegetation, customers here are immersed in the sounds of 'nature', such as birds chirping, even whilst being in the heart of the city (see Video 6.5).



Video 6.5 Istana Bambu: Sound of nature to accompany the village theme ambiance

In summary, then, a principal way in which restaurant 'dinescape' are affective is through their orchestration of consumers' bodies: attracting their attention, directing their movements, shaping particular forms of bodily comportment. In turn, these relations of 'push' between restaurants and bodies, to adapt Kraftl and Adey's terminology (2008), combine with other sensory elements to produce distinctive

atmospheres that shape customer experiences. It is to those ambient sensory elements that the analysis now progresses.

6.3 Restaurant ambiances

The importance of combining the DINESCAPE elements (Ryu and Jang, 2007) in ways that staged the right ambiance, and the importance of that ambiance to performing a restaurant's themed qualities, was widely discussed by restaurant managers and owners in interview. Horizon Garden's owner, for example, noted that:

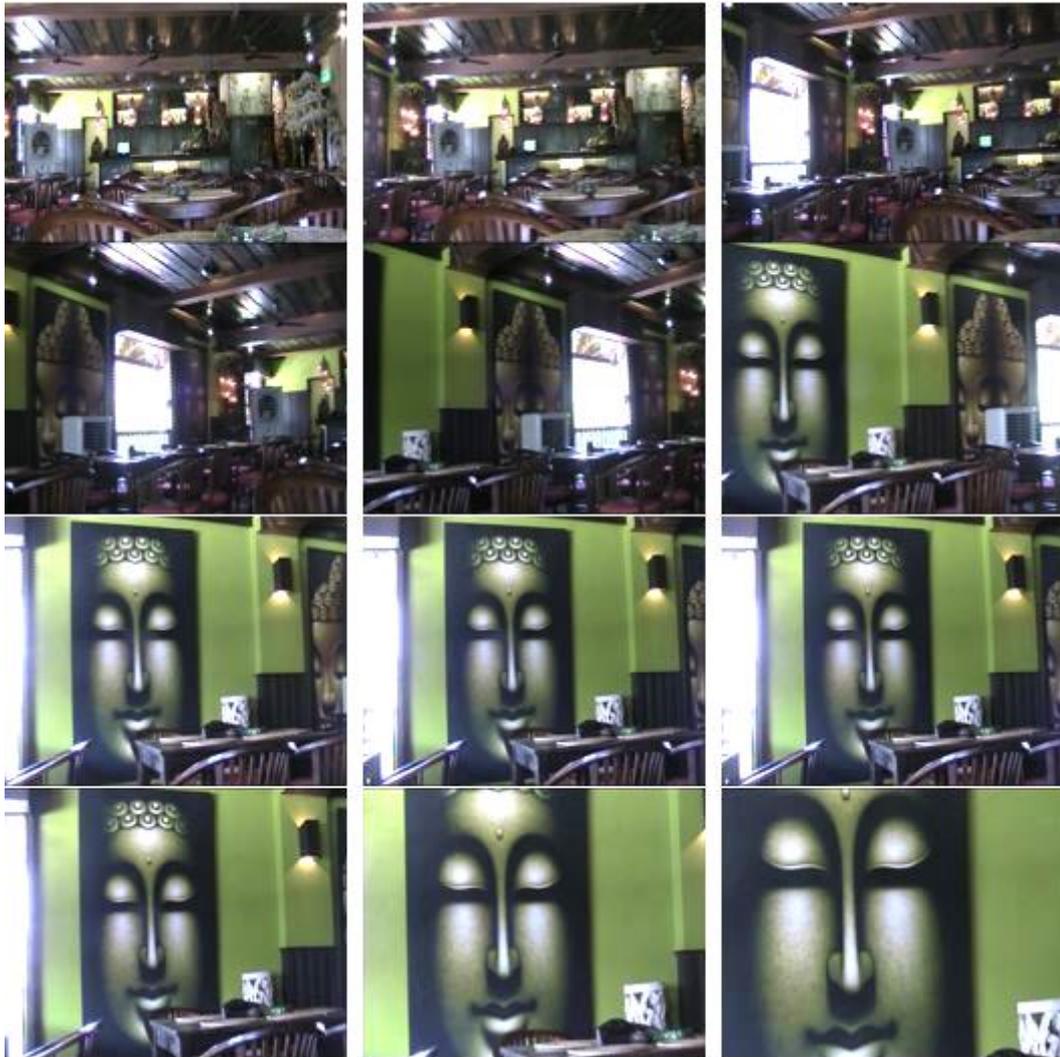
We chose the suitable music, the instrumental one. With the cosy ambiance, dim lighting... so, everything plays their role. The feeling of cool, comfort and peace. That is why it is important to have a concept [theme]. We want the customers who dine here to feel the soothing environment. It's okay for them to take time when dining. As long as they dine, they pay and they are satisfied... We wanted to appear unique and different from others. Hence, we are Malays too so we like green and nature. [Sometimes] we think that it does not give affect. It's just 'green'. But, the impact is big. Let say we are going to other places [restaurants], they got air-conditioning too but once we enter, we feel empty. So when there is green [nature], plants, it soothes our eyes...these living plants make us feel cool and relaxed too.

(Horizon Garden Owner, Interview with Author, June 12, 2014; translated by Author)⁵⁴

Bumbu Bali restaurant, in Puchong in the Klang Valley, also places heavy emphasis on its sensory qualities; the 'philosophy' set out in its website (<http://balibistro.com>) says

⁵⁴ Jadi kita nak jadi lain daripada yang lain. Kita pun orang melayu, kadang nak kehijauan. Kita nampak benda ni kecik..nampak hijau je..tapi efeknya besar. Kalau kita pergi tempat lain yang ada aircond juga, bila masuk tu rasa kosong je. So bila ada hijau, ada pokok-pokok bunga, sedap je mata memandang...Dengan adanya pokok hidup ni pun menyumbang kepada rasa sejuk dan tenang... kita pilih muzik yang sesuai la, yang instrumental. Dengan suasana yang cosy, lampu yang tak berapa terang...jadi semua perkara memainkan peranan. Rasa sejuk, nyaman, tenang...jadi tu yang penting adanya konsep ni.kita nak orang yang datang makan di sini tu rasa tenang. Makan slow-slow pun tak apa. Janji dia makan, dia bayar, dia puas hati.

'We see, we hear, feel, smell and taste; your experience originates right from your senses'. The following Video 6.6 was shot to evoke the ambiance in Bumbu Bali, and to explore its various elements, from the materials used in decoration, to its concerns for thermal comfort, to its 'soundscape'.



Video 6.6 Bumbu Bali: The soothing music in Bali theme ambiance

The footage begins with the facility aesthetics. There are the cultural artefacts that prior discussion (in Chapter 5) would lead one to expect: a display of various types, shapes and sizes of sculpture featuring the Buddha and other aspects of Balinese culture (see compilation pictures in Figure 6.13). There are also displays of natural materials: fruits and flowers, as well as the use of a small fountain. The use of nature

and culture blends in together to give a comforting feeling to customers. The second part of this video shows the use of fans and portable air-conditioning in ensuring thermal comfort. Low lighting is used to enhance the display of materials like the sculptures, and more generally to create a relaxed atmosphere. Slow traditional music is playing in the background. In combination, these various ambient elements provide an environment that gently stimulates and soothes.



Figure 6.13 Bumbu Bali: The element of nature and culture sculptures materialities

I turn now to analyse the various ambient elements apparent in Bumbu Bali in more depth. Research on restaurant design has increasingly recognised these ambient elements: to use Thibaud's (2002) categorisation, sonic, luminous, thermal and olfactory ambiances have all been discussed (and one might also add the haptic, too). Themed restaurants have often been cast as leading the way, given their focus on creating an experience rather than simply a look (Baraban and Durocher, 2001). Reflecting on this trend, Franck (2002) reports that restaurants in Japan, for instance, compete with each other by offering a heavily designed ambiance, where they play with colours, lighting, and music to create their themes. According to Fullen (2003, p.

75), “a restaurant concept that defines, overwhelmingly, the brand instead of its good food and services; a restaurant that tantalizes all of the senses; a masterful blend of fun and fine dining” are emphases mobilised under the rubric of a theme restaurant. Fullen (2003, p. 76) suggests that, to create an influential ambiance in a restaurant, the owner must consider multiple senses: “convince the ears (hip hop music, thunder and rain), delight the eyes (create fantasy, recreate history, travel to another country), entice the nose (wildflower scents, fresh popcorn), encourage the fingers (elegant leather, furry mascots), tantalize the tongue (ethnic cuisine, comfort food, kiddy favourites) and stimulate the mind (fascinate, delight)”. Interestingly, this suggestion echoes what Milliman found in his study in 1986, though his focus was primarily on background music. He noted that the spatial aesthetic or ‘atmospheric’, consisting of elements such as brightness, size, shape, volume, pitch, scent, freshness, softness, smoothness, and temperature, is more persuasive than the product itself in purchasing decisions (Milliman, 1986; see also Kotler, 1973, Turley and Milliman, 2000, Yalch and Spangenberg (2000)).

6.3.1 Sonic ambiance:

While the overall atmospherics of restaurants are composed of, and shaped by, numerous elements, some are considerably more controllable than others (Milliman, 1986). One of the ordinarily controllable elements is music and its influence on the sonic ambiance of a restaurant. Let me therefore begin with these sonic elements. Music was common in the restaurants studied, ranging from loud to soft, from fast beat to slow, from heavy to light rock, from classical to contemporary urban. It is important to choose the right music in creating ambiance; as Fullen (2003) pointed out, properly managed background music is crucial to building the restaurant’s theme

and brand. An interview with a restaurant interior designer in Kuala Lumpur supports this notion:

We should consider how many speakers we want to install on the wall. The technology of the speaker must be taken seriously too. Do not opt for a cheaper one as they produce low quality of sound... another thing is the sound proofing for wall. But normally, they don't install it for the open restaurant. Sometimes, an open restaurant installs one speaker here and one speaker over there. They just play the music at a low volume. There is no need to be loud. The place is comfortable, cosy, dining with sofa, beautiful finishing too, with romantic, dim lighting... but it end with high volume music! So, is it cosy? No, it's not cosy at all.
KC Design Consultants, Interview with Author, July 15, 2014; translated by Author)⁵⁵

Bumbu Desa, for example, chose soothing traditional Indonesian ambient music (to listen to the music played, refer to Video 5.1). Management were clear that the volume of the music had to be controlled so the correct ambient affect was achieved:

We will first adjust the volume. If it is too loud, we will turn it down. But to stop from playing it, it's a no. We will lower down the volume as sometimes customers who came here were for meeting or having conversation. However, if the volume is too low, we will not be happy because the music/song is not a harsh type of music. It is relaxing. Pleasant to hear.
(Bumbu Desa Manager, Interview with Author, January 28, 2014; translated by Author)⁵⁶

The choice of music was also matched to the restaurant theme. In Pondok Malindo the owners played traditional Indonesian songs and on occasions more contemporary

⁵⁵ Kita kene tahu brapa banyak speaker yang kita nak letak untuk dinding. Teknologi speaker kena ambil serius. Jangan pilih yang murah sebab nanti akan rendah kualiti bunyi. Satu lagi sound proof untuk wall. Tapi selalunya dorang tak pasang untuk open restaurant. Biasanya open restoran akan pasang macam speaker satu kat sini speaker satu kat sana. Pasang perlahan je music. Tak perlu kuat. Tempat dah selesa sangat. Cosy dengan sofa nya. Dengan finishing pun cantik. Lighting pun romantik. Skali lagu terlalu kuat! Cosy ke? Haa, tak cosy langsung.

⁵⁶ Sebab first kita akan adjust dulu volume.kalau terlalu kuat memang harus dikecilkan tapi untuk menolak dari muzik, tak. Just hendak kecilkan.sebab sometime customer datang sini untuk meeting, bicara sesama sendiri. Tapi kalau kita gunakan volume yang sangat kecil, kita juga tidak senang sebab muzik kita bukan muzik yang keras. Ia hnaya santai. Yang sedap didengar.

Indonesian music, as part of its production as an Indonesian restaurant owned by a Malaysian and with a 'modern' twist:

Usually I will play the music. So the customers will relax and feel ambiance... by hearing the Javanese or gamelan music. The customers like it too, none of them asked me to change to other music. It's just me who have to alternately play the traditional and modern music. But all of them will be Indonesian music. Because I want the customers to know that this is an Indonesia themed restaurant owned by a Malaysian.
(Pondok Malindo Owner, Interview with Author, February 12, 2014; translated by Author)⁵⁷

Likewise, in the cowboy and American West themed Ayem Burger music was chosen to match this theme, with American country music being played, and forming part of the restaurant's production through the personal collections of the owner:

The songs are for the indoor and outdoor dining areas. I played them through the mp3 player, so even customers who dine in the outdoor area will still be able to listen. The songs will be continuously played. They are the country songs. The old folks love the songs that we played. Sometimes, they purposely came around 12 midnight, where there is less noise, less transportation. So they can relax. They enjoyed the songs while sipping the coffee, having fish and chips. They said "your songs are good. The oldie. Where did you get them?" and we said "these are the boss's personal collections".
(Ayem Burger Manager, Interview with Author, June 22, 2014; translated by Author)⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Tapi biasa saya akan pasang la. So customer akan relax, feel...dengar lagu jawa atau muzik gamelan. Customer pun suka, tak ada minta tukar ke apa. Cuma saya la yang kena tukar lagu.kejap jawa, skejap moden. Tapi memang Indonesia je. Sebab saya nak customer tahu yang restoran ni adalah restoran Indonesia tapi ownernya Malaysian.

⁵⁸ Macam lagu pula kita pasang untuk dalam dan luar. Saya pasang mp3, jadi kalau kita duduk di luar ni pun kita boleh dengar. Nanti lagu tu pusing balik..pusing balik. Lagu country la. Ada customer yang otai-otai ni dorang suka lagu yang kita pasang. Kadang dorang saja datang malam pukul 12, dah tak bising, kenderaan tak banyak...baru boleh relax...dia layan, minum kopi la. Makan fish and chips. Dia cakap 'lagu korang ni best-best la. Lagu lama. Mana dapat ha?'. Hahha... Ni kita cakap 'bos punya collection'.

The use of music was also modulated in relation to the changing character of the restaurant as a social space, at different times of the day and week. Istana Bambu's and Passage Thru India's managers shared their experience:

Usually we played the music and we had live band on every Saturday night. So if there are customers who celebrated birthdays, the band will sing for them. They can request it. However, for other days we will play the music such as instrumental music or slow songs...to make it a bit of a romantic feeling in the air.

(Istana Bambu Manager, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; translated by Author)⁵⁹

But lunch crowd, it's a quick turnaround. It's a come and go. People got work to do so they come in, order quick lunch and go. So, we don't focus on the music. The music will be at low volume, as it is in the background. [For] Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, there is when the energy is in the restaurant. A lot of people are sitting in. Usually houseful. And that time the music takes over. People is more relax.... (So) yes, we do have Indian music playing over the speakers but Friday, Saturday and Sunday we also have live music. We have like ghazal singers. There are two people, one is the singer and the other one is the flute player or the harmony player. That is on Friday 8 o'clock onwards for three days a week. The rest of the time, we have ... [recorded] Indian music.

(Passage thru India Manager, Interview with Author, May 15, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 6.14 Passage Thru India: The specific area designated for the live performance

⁵⁹ Biasanya kita memang pasang muzik, and then hari sabtu malam kita ada live band la. So kalau ada orang celebrate birthday, nanti band akan nyanyikan la. Dorang boleh request. Kalau hari biasa kita akan pasang muzik macam instrumental atau lagu-lagu slow..bagi suasana romantik skit.

The sonic ambiance of restaurants we not limited to music. Other aspects of the soundscape could be important too. In Asmara Fern, it was ‘natural sounds’ that were emphasised as part of the garden and greenery theme. In particular, the sound from the constructed waterfall filled the air and was seen as part of producing a ‘natural’ and ‘calming’ atmosphere (refer to Figure 6.15):

If we were a closed type restaurant, then it would be possible to implement [play music] like instrumental music. But here, we have this waterfall and the sounds of the water falling is enough to express the garden theme.

(Fern Café Owner, Interview with Author, June 14, 2014; translated by Author)⁶⁰

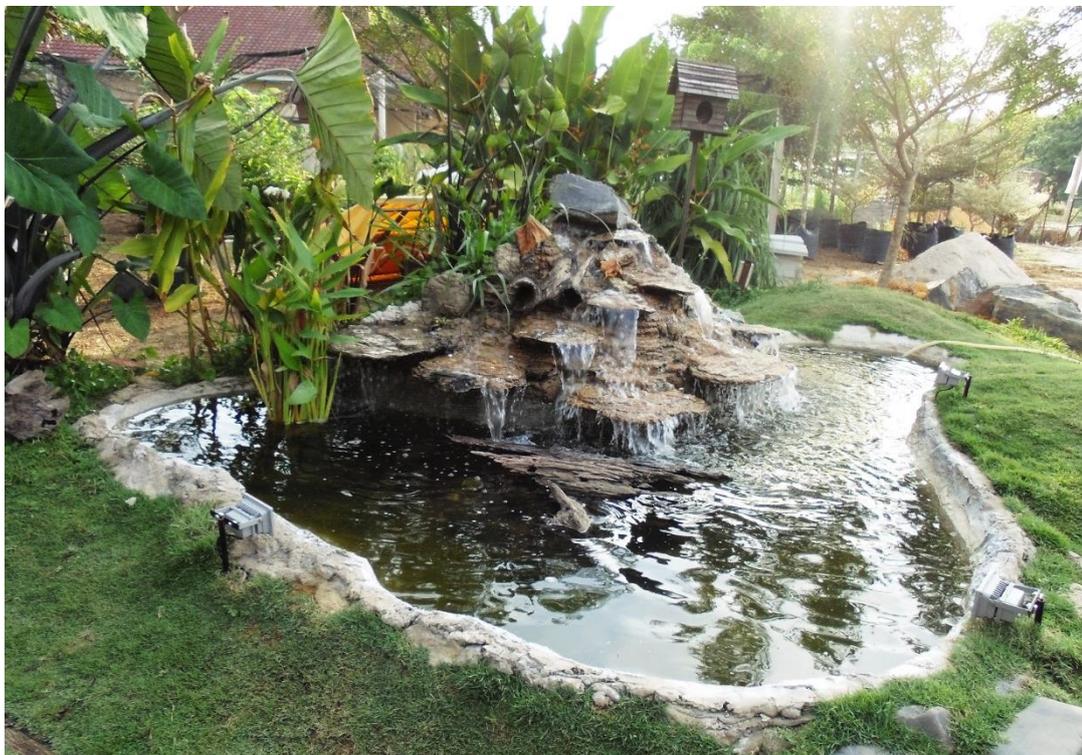
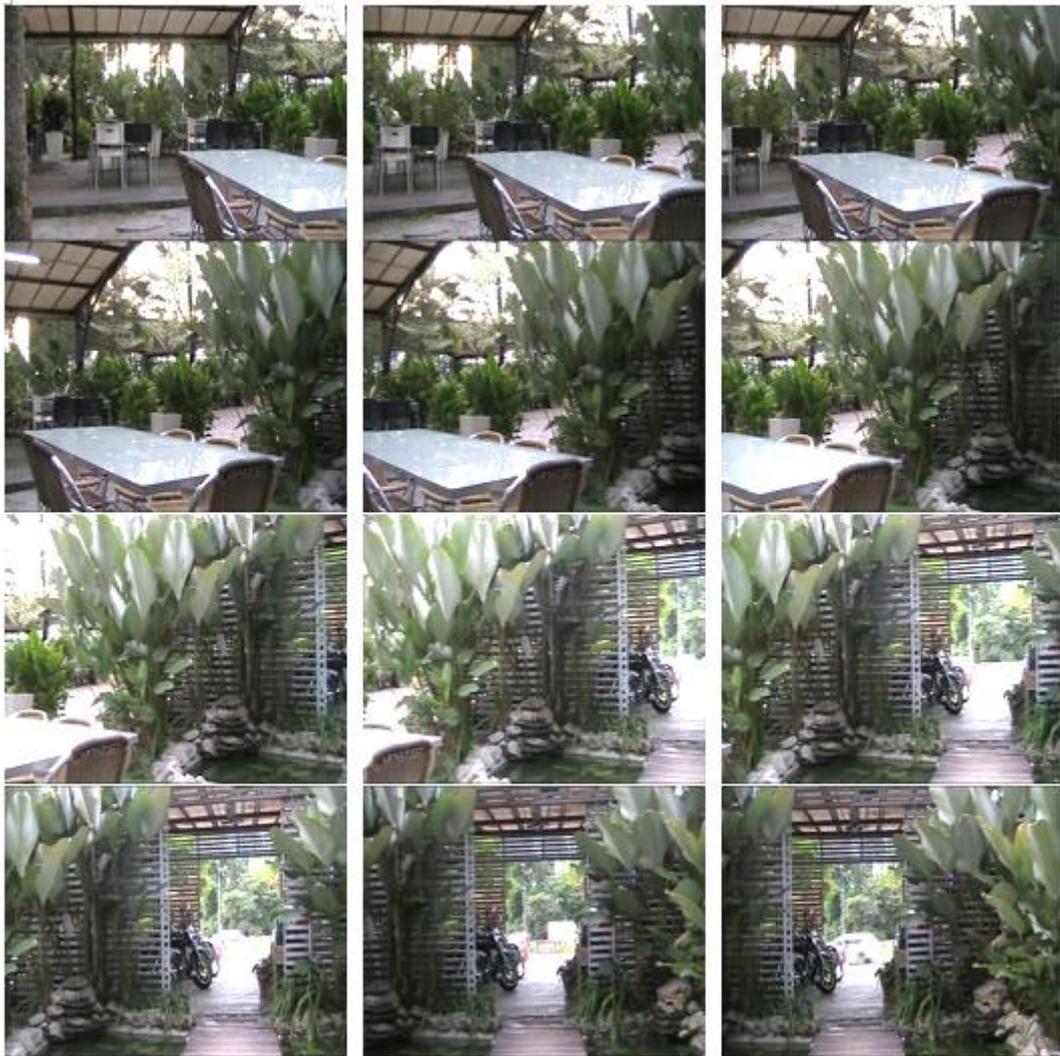


Figure 6.15 Asmara Fern: The natural sound from the waterfall accompany the customer throughout the dining occasion

⁶⁰ Kalau restaurant kita ni tertutup tu mungkin la boleh kita nak implement macam instrument music ke. Tapi dekat sini pun dah ada air terjun ni so bunyi air ni pun dah cukup untuk menzahirkan tema garden ni.

Garden Café sought a similar ambiance but faced a problem – street noise, given its otherwise helpful location on a major highway. In constructing the restaurant the owner realized this threat, and decided to plant tall trees and other vegetation to enclose the restaurant from its surroundings and to limit the noise entering from outside. Both visually and sonically, this greenery thus helps to make the restaurant atmosphere distinct from the busy thoroughfare on which it is located. Video 6.7 documents this use of planting and its ambient affects.

The customer relationship to sonic ambiance is, of course complex. This is in part the product of varied consumer bodies and senses of hearing, and varied tastes with regard to soundscapes. It also reflects the dual role of sound: as both sensory stimulant and comforter. Striking the correct balance of excitement and soothing for multiple diners, in the context of a dynamic social setting such as a restaurant, is not an exact science. According to Christie and Bell-Booth (2004, p. 7), acoustical comfort is defined as “when activities can be undertaken without unwanted sound (noise) annoying other people”. But such distinctions of comfort and annoyance are not fixed: Christie and Bell-Booth (2004) suggest the most annoying sound is other people; Lindborg (2015) argues that while a background din of voices might lead to negative appraisal, the occasional laughter and a sustained vocal communication would be positive. The noise that is comfortable in a library differs from that in a restaurant. In sum, sonic ambiance is far more than a matter that can be quantified into decibels; it is a complex relation between physical experience, emotional response and cultural signification. Staging restaurant experiences means navigating those complex relations.



Video 6.7 Garden Café: Plants and trees to divide the restaurant ambiance with the public area

6.3.2 Luminosity and ambiance:

The restaurant design literature recognises the importance of lighting to restaurant aesthetics and ambiance. Fullen argues that well designed lighting in a restaurant not only creates mood and enhances the décor but also will make the diners and their food look better (Fullen, 2003). Both Baraban and Durocher (2001) and Ryu and Han (2011) agree that lighting is the single most important element in a restaurant design, as if got wrong it can obviate the effectiveness of all other design elements. Baraban

and Durocher (2001) promote the use of specialist lighting engineers within the restaurant sector. They emphasise the role of lighting within restaurants as similar to that within the theatre, and connect its importance to the more generally theatrical nature of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

More generally, publishing in the *Journal of Material Culture*, Bille and Sørensen (2007) provided an early example of a growing scholarly interest in the affective agencies of light. Calling for “an anthropology of luminosity” they proposed “understanding light as a powerful social agent... that... may be used as a tool for exercising social intimacy and inclusion, of shaping moral spaces and hospitality, and orchestrating movement” (2007, p.263). They argued for addressing both the affective power of light and dark and “the social and cultural associations of certain *lightscares*” (ibid., emphasis in original). As part of their subsequent wider development of a field of light research, Edensor and Falconer (2015) focused on the ‘Dans le noir?’ themed restaurant chain, particularly the London branch, “where eating is carried out in complete darkness” as part of a search for “sensory alterity” (p. 601).

None of the case study restaurants used light (or its absence) to the extent of ‘Dans Le Noir?’, but across the field research lighting and light levels were frequently emphasised. There were various aspects to this. First, there was a concern with the materiality of lighting, in the sense of light fixtures and lamps. Lighting in this sense was an important part of the wider material theming and management discussed in Chapter 5. Figure 6.16 through Figure 6.21 show various examples of this.



Figure 6.16 Paradise Inn: Lantern shaped lighting



Figure 6.17 Bumbu Desa: Decorative bamboo lamps to spotlight the food displayed



Figure 6.18 Bumbu Bali: Lamps made of bamboo



Figure 6.19 Fisherman's Cove: Bamboo lamps in the shape of bubu (a type of fish trap in Asia's traditional fishing method)



Figure 6.20 Wong Solo: Bright lightings to accommodate family and kids coming to the restaurant



Figure 6.21 Pondok Malindo: Fretwork lamps symbolised the Indonesia arts

Secondly, though, lighting also important in terms of luminosity, the quantity and quality of light itself within the restaurant environment. This was most often expressed in terms of both intensity (i.e. degrees of brightness, quantifiable as lumens) and the colour of the light. The data showed that most of the studied theme restaurants used warm white lighting in their restaurants. The lights also often featured the option of dimming, so that the staff could control light intensity to suit the dining occasion or clientele. Usually, lights would be dimmed during dinner and when serving couples or middle-aged customers; in contrast, brighter lights were seen as more suitable when serving families with kids during the day (such as at Upin Ipin). Sometimes, the brightness of the lights depended on the occasion and event too. A lower level of brightness was seen as suitable for anniversary or wedding events but birthday celebrations and bridal showers should not be in a darker ambiance. Thus, the use of lighting is important in creating a suitable ambient mood in relation to wider social and cultural associations of different forms of light (or 'lightscares' as Bille and Sørensen termed them; 2007, p.263).

Istana Bambu provides an interesting example of the importance of a lighting scheme and tailored lighting practice:

Here, we use orangey coloured lights. Therefore, it appears more romantic when we played with the lightings that way. It is very lovely during the night. We also put lights in each corner. Most customers who booked for a wedding party preferred it to be a night event because the ambiance will be nicer during the night. The pictures will turn out lovely too.
(Istana Bambu Manager, Interview with Author, June 18, 2014; translated by Author)⁶¹

⁶¹ Macam dekat sini kita menggunakan lampu warna oren. So memang lagi nampak romantic bila kita main dengan lighting kan. Malam-malam memang cantik. Setiap sudut ni ada lampu. Kebanyakan customers booking untuk wedding party pada sebelah malam sebab suasananya lagi cantik bila malam. Ambil gambar pun cantik malam-malam.



Figure 6.22 Istana Bambu: Picturesque night view



Figure 6.23 Istana Bambu: Lights at each corner and covered with long sheer curtain give dramatic impact to the ambience

Others talked similarly.

In term of colours [of the lighting], we are using more on warm white which actually give the whole ambiance. As you can see, when the light is on it will be more orangey yellow so is actually very soothing as well. It gives the overall gold ambiance and suits with the lantern.

(Paradise Inn Manager, Interview with Author, April 2, 2014; interview in English)

Recently, during Valentines, like just last week, I kept them [the lights] at very dim. All the lights. So it was mainly candle lights. And of course you can see the mood, everything is a little bit darker, a bit more of that romantic feel. Definitely creating a different kind of atmosphere.

(Palate Palette Owner, Interview with Author, February 19, 2014; interview in English)

Yes, lighting is very important for comfort. It's not too dim, nor too bright, to create a romantic and peaceful ambiance. It also helps in highlighting the food presentation.

(Bumbu Desa Manager, Interview with Author, January 28, 2014; translated by Author)⁶²

There are customers asking for torch light to read the menu. Sometimes they take the candle light (the floating candle used as a centrepiece on the table) and bring it nearby to the menu [to read it].

(Bumbu Bali Manager, Interview with Author, March 11, 2014; interview in English)

Light thus creates ambiance and has an affective relationship to diners. In the case of the Bumbu Bali quote above, for instance, one can hypothesise on the implications of insufficient general lighting to see the menu clearly. For some, it may result in irritation, the asking for a torch, a discomfort (at least at this point in the meal experience) with one's surroundings. However, it may also be a sensory deprivation that heightens the meal experience and its special qualities. The comparative dark may manage to combine sociality, the pleasurable sense of being with strangers in public, with privacy, as space encloses around you. The manoeuvring of the centrepiece candle to see the menu may heighten the sense of intimacy, drawing

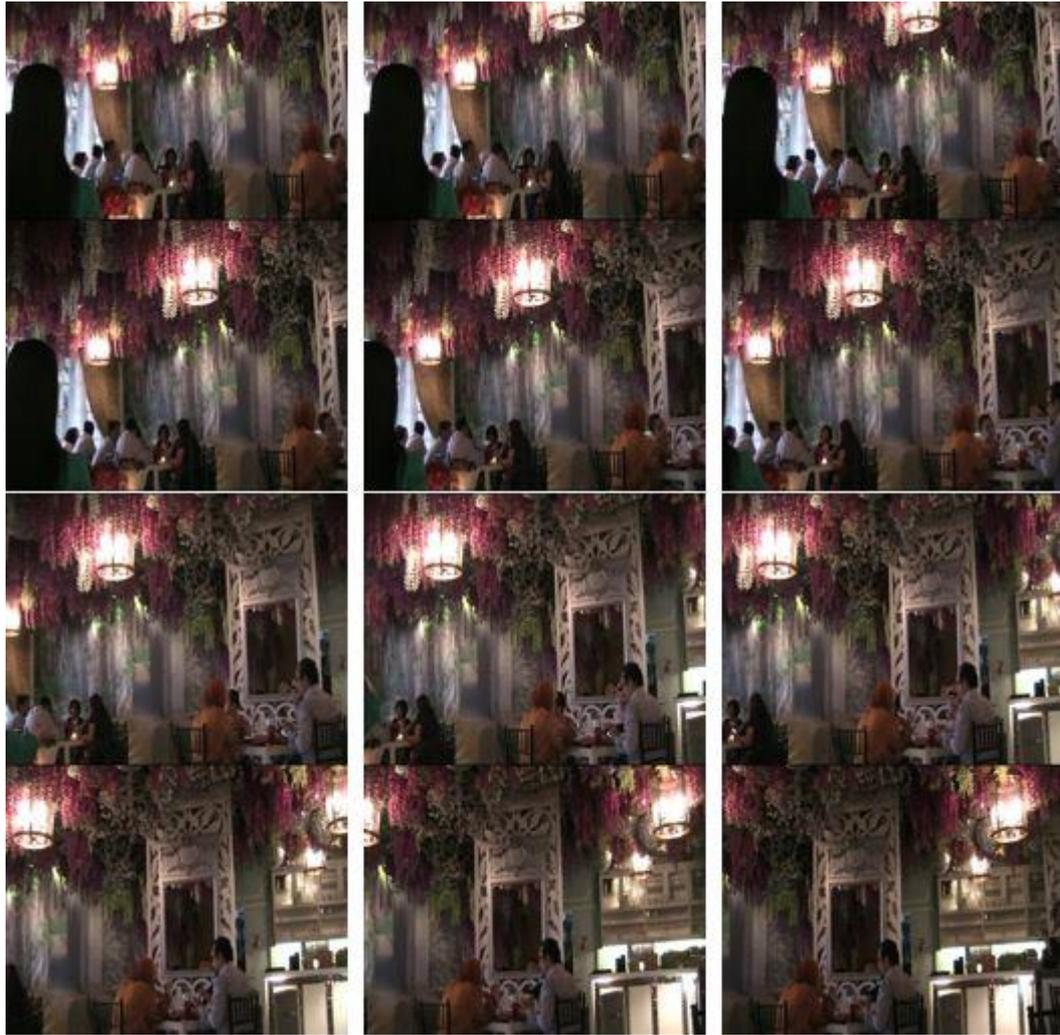
⁶² Ya, sangat penting sekali untuk kenyamanan. Ia tidak terlalu gelap dan tidak terlalu terang, untuk menimbulkan suasana romantik dan tenteram. Ia juga membantu dalam menaikkan warna dan presentation makanan.

people dining together into closer proximity as they draw close to the candle and the menu. Prior research has indicated a connection between lighting levels and individuals' emotional responses. Baron (1990) claims that comfort level increases at relatively low levels of light. Kurtich and Eakin (1993 cited in Ryu and Han, 2011, p. 601) reveal that "the type of lighting could affect an individual's perception of the quality of space, changing his/her awareness of physical, emotional, and psychological aspects of the area and accordingly influencing behavioural intentions".

A final example for consideration is the video documentation of Flora Kafe (see Video 6.8). Embedded within other decorative theme materials (above all the hanging flowers), the lighting here works in relation to the density of decoration, at times enhancing the spectacle and sense of luxury (see Figure 6.24), at times ensuring a delicacy as well as comfortable cosiness to the place.



Figure 6.24 Flora Kafe: Lighting as part of the luxurious, spectacular decoration (Flora Kafe, 2011b)



Video 6.8 Flora Kafe: Comfortable and cosy dining ambiance

6.3.3 Other aspects of ambiance

Another ambient element is aroma. Like light, this is both affective, inducing immediate embodied responses, and culturally framed (Classen et al., 1994). In the restaurant context, especially given the strong links between smell and taste, this is a crucial part of the environment to manage. An unpleasant smell is likely to produce a visceral displeasure in customers, perhaps even disgust. A pleasant smell, on the other hand, has the potential to make the environment more comfortable to the diners, perhaps increase their desire for food, and increase their enjoyment. Thus, owners /

managers recognised the need to be sensitive to the smells in the restaurant and to eliminate any factors that will cause nasty or disturbing odours. In order to manage olfactory ambiance, owners can use natural or artificial aromas. Here, natural aromas are the smells that emerge from the ingredients, cooking processes or cooked meals. Using this smell to welcome the customers, the owners however, have to be careful not to allow too much aroma to travel from the kitchen to the dining area, as it might make the diners uncomfortable. Horizon Garden for example, was very particular with this situation.

The smell is original from the food only... because in the kitchen, we controlled everything so that the smoke did not travel to the dining hall. The cooked food that we serve will indirectly open up other customers' appetites.

(Horizon Garden Owner, Interview with Author, June 12, 2014; translated by Author)⁶³

On the contrary, other restaurants such as Flora Kafe used artificial aromas. The use of this option not only keeps the air with a pleasant fragrance but also was part of using artificial flowers, as they last longer compared to fresh flowers. Here, then, the use of added aromas was central to 'completing' the floral theme:

We use the aromatherapy. We chose lavender and lemongrass [scent]. So the aroma will spread, the entire restaurant can smell it. Not too strong, the odour is just nice. It is smooth and relaxing (...) we used the scents to bring up the mood. Let it suit the theme. Sometimes the customers asked whether it [the scent] is [from] real flowers. If we used fresh flowers, it will only last for few days. In addition, the fresh flowers will attract the insects. Currently we used the artificial flowers and it is okay. We also do not face problem in taking care of them.

(Flora Kafe Manager, Interview with Author, April 15, 2014; Translated by Author)⁶⁴

⁶³ Bau tu memang asli dari makanan sahaja. Sebab di dapur tu memang kita dah control semua dengan asap supaya tak keluar ke dining hall la. Lauk yang kita bawa keluar tu akan secara tak langsung membuka selera customer lain.

⁶⁴ Kami ada pasang aromaterphy. Kita pakai lavender dan lemongrass. So aroma dia akan merebak, satu restoran dapat bau. Tak terlalu kuat, baunya just nice. Smooth, relaxing (...) kita pakai scents tu untuk menimbulkan mood. Bagi kena dengan theme. Kadang-kadang customer ada tanya ni real flowers ke.

Beyond aroma, thermal comfort is another important aspect of the restaurant ambiance. More generally, a range of studies has explored the relationship between thermal comfort, ideals of built space, and thermal technologies (such as air conditioning) (Shove, 2003; Hitchings and Lee, 2008). They relate embodied senses (of thermal comfort) to wider technocultural changes and social norms. Given the fact that Malaysia is a hot and humid country, the use of air-conditioning or fans is essential to keep the customer comfortable and enjoying their visit to the restaurant. Restaurants are often spaces that customers use to escape from the hot sun or heat and on the whole they look for a cooler ambiance in which to dine. Thus, dependent on the size of dining spaces, owners usually install a few air-conditioners in their restaurants. Figure 6.25 shows the use of air-conditioning in Songket Restaurant.



Figure 6.25 Songket restaurant: It is necessary to install air-conditioners in restaurants when considering Malaysia's hot and humid weather

Kalau pakai fresh flower ni mau berapa hari je bertahan. Lagi satu fresh flowers ni akan attract insects. Macam ni pakai artificial ok lah. Dari segi penjagaan bunga ni kitorang tak ada masalah.

Talking about the weather, the manager of Bumbu Bali admitted that it was a failing not to have installed air-conditioning in the initial build; instead they use portable fans and air-conditioners to drop the temperature (see Figure 6.26).

This is our first restaurant so we do have a mistake. If given a chance, we would like to do a renovation. However, in other outlets, we installed air-conditioning and have separate smoking and non-smoking areas. Because if compared, previously is not so hot like today.
(Bumbu Bali Manager, Interview with Author, March 11, 2014; interview in English)



Figure 6.26 Bumbu Bali: The portable fan/air-conditioner ready in the restaurant to ensure customers feel the cool air and can comfortably dine indoors.

Thus, thermal control is another facet of ambient management and design. Generally, the study data highlighted the importance of various ambient elements to the overall restaurant atmosphere and hence the customer experience. They may seem somewhat mundane or inconsequential. In fact, these ambient elements affect customers across different registers: the physiological (physical comfort or

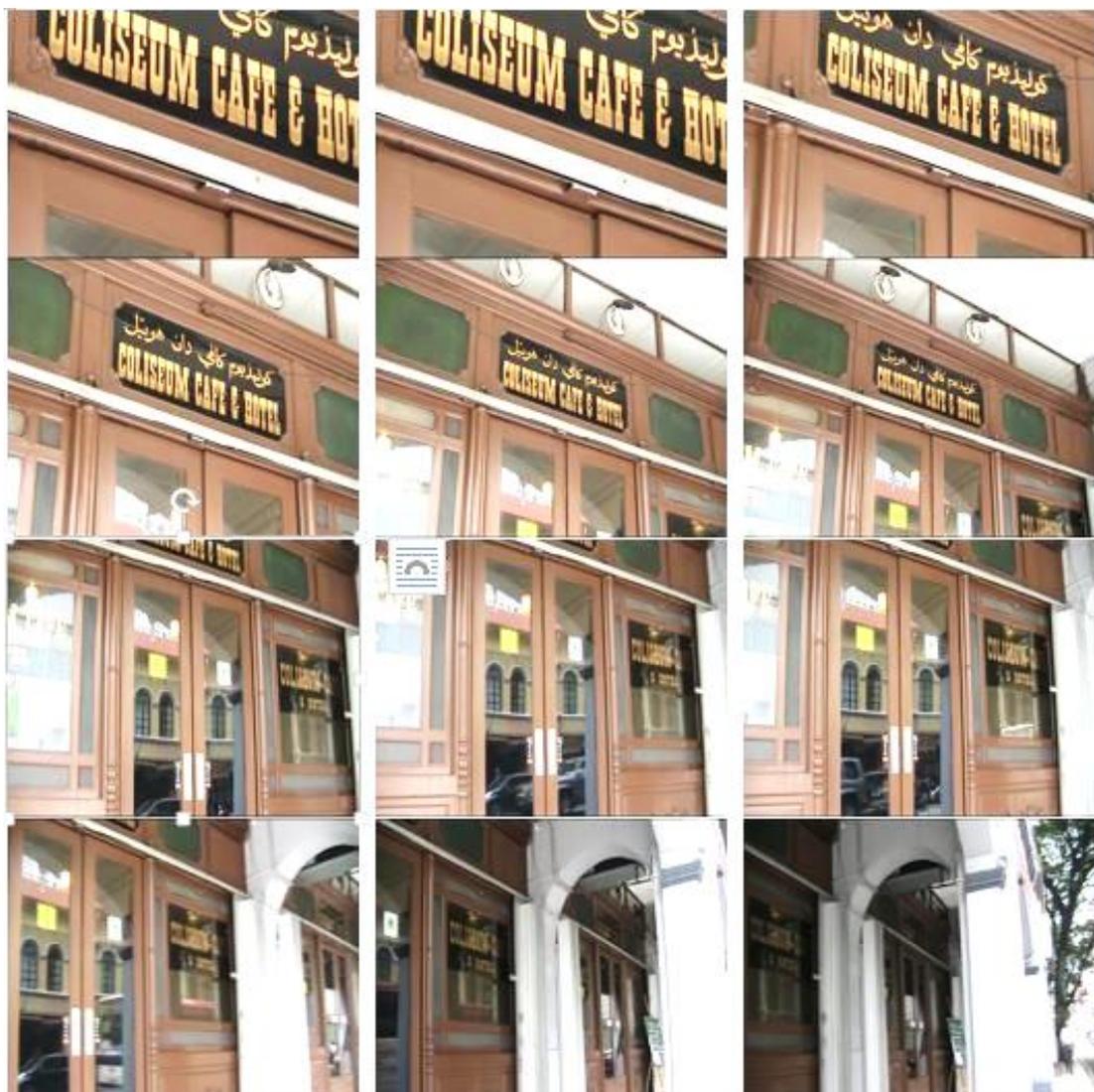
discomfort); the emotional (pleasure-displeasure, degree of arousal); the cognitive (beliefs, attributions, and categorization of the service organization); and the behavioural (approach or avoidance behaviour) (Milliman, 1986; Bitner, 1992; Ryu and Han, 2011; Ariffin et al., 2011). They are central to the staging of restaurant experiences.

6.4 Affective control

In this chapter, I have argued that 'affective engineering' (Thrift, 2004) is an important part of the wider 'imagineering' (Chaney, 1997) of theme restaurants. Restaurant owners need to carefully ensure that the atmospheric elements of the places they (co-)produce enhance the desired experience for the diners (Ariffin et al., 2011). When consumers look for a memorable dining experience, "atmosphere can play a critical role in creating that memorable experience" (Ryu and Han, 2011, p. 600). However, by way of conclusion, let me offer a slight caveat. There is potential for accounts of affective materialism to fall into an overly mechanical style of reasoning, where particular materials have particular qualities that get the embodied people encountering them to react in particular ways. I have tried to signal more complex relations in the analyses above, but it may be helpful to reiterate that so-called affective engineering is a highly imprecise process. Certainly, in the context of restaurant space, its outcomes are far from certain. It is less a form of control over the performers than a production of the stage on which the performance happens.

There are two broader issues here. The first relates to the difficulty in producing fully enclosed spaces. Whilst places like malls (Miller, 2014), or indeed virtual "architectures of affect" like video games (Ash, 2010, p.653), in part attempt to control affective atmospheres through producing bounded places, many commercial

hospitality settings are less enclosed. A simple example of this concerns sonic ambiance. A number of the restaurants could not simply control this. Thus the Coliseum Café, which if you recall had an atmosphere characterised in terms of colonial heritage, is located just near the main road in one of the busiest areas in Kuala Lumpur. The noise from the various types of vehicles using the road, as well as construction works and other street noises, impacted on the restaurant ambiance. The Video 6.9 records how the noises from the busy street of Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman affect the restaurant's ambiance.



Video 6.9 Coliseum Café: Street noise

Likewise, in the Fisherman Cove restaurant in the upmarket Starhill Gallery mall, the manager admitted that neighbouring restaurants' and bars' atmospheres spilt over:

Manager: You know, when you sit here, you can also hear songs and music from the near places like the bar, Indian restaurant... [both are adjacent with this restaurant]

Farah: So, are customers requesting particular songs to be played?

Manager: No, they don't bother about the music. They just come in and enjoy the food.

(Fisherman's Cove Manager, Interview with Author, May 12, 2014; interview in English)

The following video clip (Video 6.10) shows how the ambiance in the Fisherman's Cove becomes 'mixed up' with the neighbourhood atmospheres of a bar and the Indian restaurant named 'Spices of India'.



Video 6.10 Fisherman's Cove: The disturbing/distracting neighbourhood

Secondly, how people relate to the ambiance and are affected by the DINESCAPE elements is not always the same and is not entirely controllable. The affectively engineered designed atmosphere cannot guarantee the feelings that customers will experience. Thus, in Miller's (2014) research on the affective geographies of Abasto Shopping Mall, Buenos Aires, whilst some shoppers were actively appreciated the design and ambiance of the mall, others were unengaged or actively hostile. He claims that excitement is one of the affects that the retailer cannot guarantee. Rose et al.'s (2010) analysis of a Milton Keynes shopping centre as an architectural 'event' provides an important conceptual response to the point. In their critique of Kraftl and Adey's (2008) account of buildings, affect and inhabitation, which I discussed earlier in this chapter, Rose et al. look to complicate the relationship between a place and the feelings of those within it. They do this by distinguishing between: a) the feelings *of* a place (the affective, sensory engagements between a place, its materialities, and those inhabiting it); b) the feelings *in* a place (the emotions of those inhabiting it, which are also influenced by a range of other factors such as who they are with, how visiting this place relates to the emotional currents of their everyday lives, and so on); and c) the feelings *about* a place (the judgements made on it, shaped by questions of taste). In other words, in staging experiences, the restaurants in this study were intervening within complicated realms of feeling. Their attention to affective materialities was a crucial part of this intervention, but only part. The owner of Palate Palette expresses much the same in her own discussion of the importance of the restaurant's feeling or vibe:

Yeah. Some people would come in for food, some people would come for drinks, some people come for parties, and some people would come here for the vibe. I would say maybe the vibe is kind of that invisible thing that you can't see but you can feel. As a customer, maybe. And that would be maybe based on the person who's serving you has a very nice smile. It can also be that music that they playing were your favourite and they make you feel good. Or it could be the fact they serve you popcorn. So all of these elements added together...or maybe it's the food. It's kind of like the movie - Ratatouille. You just need to have the taste to make people remind of something. A special moment that reminds you of your past and that kind of feeling like, ahhh [makes the sound like remembering something

special]... You know. And all this thing kind of play a role. Or maybe it's a place where you first met your first love and eventually married. And I have a lot of those stories. You know, a lot of people have met here, they got together and in the end they got married here. So I know for different people, they have different memories and have different feelings about a place. Maybe it's all about the vibe as it's really visible, but yet it is also made up of all these things.

(Palate Palette Owner, Interview with Author, February 19, 2014; interview in English)

The following Chapter 7 therefore now looks to turn more directly to some of what customers bring to their experience of a restaurant, situating their encounter with its theme, dinescape and atmosphere within a longer 'customer experience' (Shaw and Ivens, 2002) or 'customer journey' (Norton and Pine, 2013).

7

Consuming themed restaurant experiences

The three previous empirical chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) have discussed the staging of theme restaurant experiences primarily from the owners' / managers' point of view. As a complement, this chapter focuses on the theme restaurant experience from the consumer perspective, drawing in particular on the focus group discussion strand of the field research (see Chapter 3). More specifically, the analysis developed here responds to the need identified in concluding Chapter 6 for an understanding of how sensory experience of the theme restaurant space sits within a broader process of consumption. Thus, this chapter is divided into three substantive parts: pre-visit, during visit and post-visit. Why customers visit theme restaurants and what they expect at these places are among the questions raised in the first part. The second part analyses the consumption of themed restaurants, their dinescapes and ambiance, paying particular attention to how the same place can be experienced by different consumers in different ways. The third and final part analyses post-visit behaviour, and in particular discusses how the 'difference' that is central to theme restaurant marketing (see Chapter 4) has implications, whether for patterns of repeat business or for the importance of evaluations, reviews and sharing visits on social media. Across these three foci, the embodied, emotional and affective elements of customer experiences are paid particular attention. Developing the arguments on the material management of restaurant experiences and dinescape elements developed in the previous chapters, the discussion now progresses to consider how consumers relate not only physically but also emotionally to themed restaurant spaces. Particular concerns include: how pre-visit expectations are shaped not only by information but are also powerfully emotionally charged; how visits to restaurants involve complex translations of their affective dinescapes, as I termed them in Chapter 6, to customer feelings; and how post-visit evaluations of a theme restaurant experience are bound up with questions of 'emotional value' (Shaw et al., 2010). In extending the analysis of the materialities of restaurant design to customers' emotional reactions to these spaces, this chapter thus contributes to the increasing attention being paid to how customer emotions can play their role in consumer evaluation and decision making

processes (e.g. Westbrook and Oliver, 1991; Mano and Oliver, 1993; Liljander and Strandvik, 1997; Smith and Bolton, 2002) and to research on how the interaction of customers with food, service and various elements in restaurants can cause both favourable and unfavourable emotions (Ladhari et al., 2008; Han et al., 2010).

Generally, then, this chapter focuses on the customer experience in an expanded sense. This approach draws on wider writing about customer experiences and so-called 'customer journeys' from researchers in critical marketing and hospitality management research. By way of further introduction, I will now set out some of the main tenets of that work. According to Shaw and Ivens (2002, p. 6), in their book *Building great customer experiences*, customer experience can be defined as:

a blend of a company's physical performance and the emotions evoked, intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact.

Thus, customer experience is a blend of the product delivered (in this case, the dining experience in the themed restaurant and its atmosphere) and the emotional responses of customers to this product (and in this case, place). Customer experience is also measured not only during time spent in the restaurant itself but across 'all moments of contact', which would include moments before and after visiting the restaurant. The following Figure 7.1 shows a clearer view of the multiple moments and stages of the customer experience, adopted from Shaw and Ivens' account (2002, p.140).

This model of multiple stages of customer experience suggests that customers have expectations towards a product or service before they make a decision to buy it and experience it more directly. In the theme restaurant industry, the news of the restaurant's existence might travel through word of mouth (WOM) or other effective marketing tools (eg: television commercials, pamphlets, radio advertisements),

leading the customers to anticipate what will they experience and perceive when they visit the place (see also Chapter 4’s discussion of marketing practices by the studied restaurants). Once they enter the restaurant, customers will feel the ambiance themselves and experience the themed restaurant place through embodied inhabitation. After the visit, they will review their experience, making comparisons and evaluating their purchase.

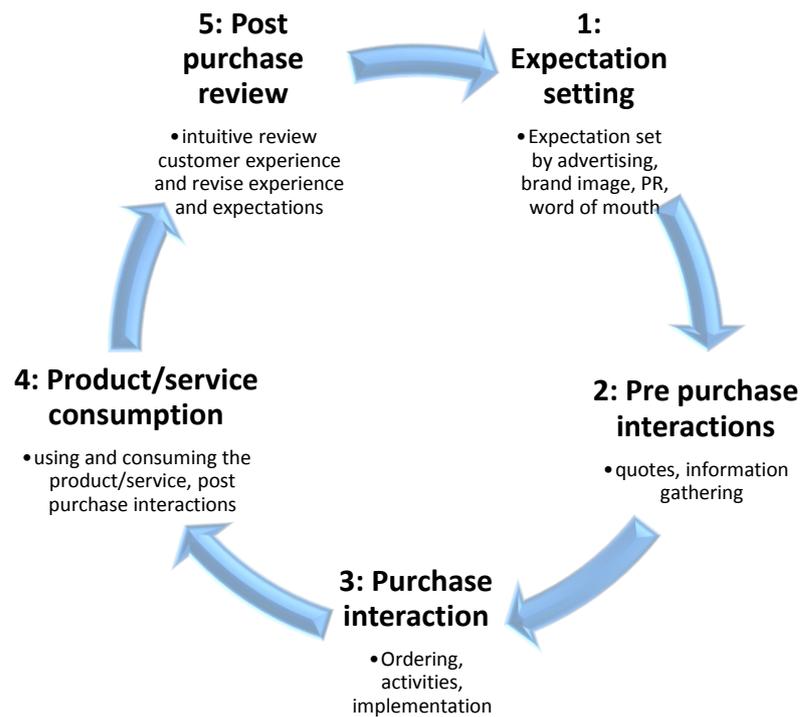


Figure 7.1 Stages of customer experience

In depicting these stages of the customer experience, some scholars also refer to the idea of the ‘customer journey’. A ‘customer journey’ can be portrayed as a walk in the customer’s shoes (Holmid and Evenson, 2008). More specifically, this term is defined as the “sequence of events that customers go through to learn about, purchase and interact with company offerings – including commodities, goods, services or experiences” (Norton and Pine, 2013, p. 12). Throughout this journey, customers will meet various tangible (products) and intangible (human interaction i.e. services) elements, in a specific medium of geographical space (Alves et al., 2012). To evaluate this customer journey, management and marketers have developed Customer

Journey Mapping (CJM) to better understand how customers experience the product and / or service delivered to them. According to Marquez et al. (2015), CJM visualizes the customer journey from start to finish in terms of the various stages, steps and touchpoints that a customer passes through. In addition, this technique is also able to elicit customers' emotional responses towards products, goods and services (Crosier and Handford, 2012) as part of a broader customer experience-centric approach to marketing and management (Voss et al., 2008).

This "experience-centric" approach incorporates specific practices such as the development of knowledge and customer care through platforms including market research and marketing communication systems (Hassanien et al., 2010). As customer experience refers to the customer interaction with the company, its products and services across many moments (Alben, 1996), it is crucial for companies to stage memorable experiences across the whole journey (Pizam, 2010). Laming and Mason (2014) argue that the way customers experience a service or product affects their feelings and emotions towards the providing business and justifies their future actions; customers who have an enjoyable journey experience will reward the company with loyalty and repeat business (Arussy, 2008; van Doorn et al., 2010).

However, attracting and engaging customers are not simple tasks. Companies usually practice Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in order to establish a strong and effective company-customer relationship. The concept of CRM was first developed in the mid-1990s in information technology (IT) industries (Boulding et al., 2005; Payne and Frow, 2005), emphasising systems that not only enable organizations to contact customers but widen their ability to collect, store and analyse customer data in order to provide a comprehensive view of consumers (Khodakarami and Chan, 2014). However, though initially considered in terms of database marketing and information technology (Chen and Popovich, 2003), CRM has evolved into a management philosophy in which an organization focuses on issues and activities pertaining to the customer (Lo et al., 2010), and strives to enhance consumer satisfaction and engage

consumer loyalty (Coussement and van den Poel, 2008; Gibbert et al., 2002). CRM advocates claim that the information gathered through customer interaction prepares the companies with a better understanding of and response to customer needs and expectations (Diffley and McCole, 2015; Mithas et al., 2005). More critical accounts focus on the corporate surveillance of consumers and the forms of power thereby generated (Goss, 1995; Pridmore and Lyon, 2011). More recently, CRM literature and practice has paid particular attention to social media technologies, exploring the two way relations between companies and consumers in a social CRM context (Greenberg, 2010; Gummesson and Mele, 2010; Trainor, 2012; Trainor et al., 2014). Marketing researchers suggest companies implement social CRM with a focus on increasing customer engagement, interaction and information sharing (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010). As discussed and elaborated in Chapter 4, the studied theme restaurants do indeed often practice simple forms of social CRM, engaging customers through their social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as via websites and blogs.

Thus, in the context of the companies' roles in CRM, this chapter will analyse the customer journey and customer experience of dining in theme restaurants in Klang Valley. The data for this chapter are derived from the focus group discussion sessions. These groups were introduced in Chapter 3 but as a reminder, they comprised eight focus groups, given the names of: Food Hunter (FH), Food Blogger (FB), Hospitality (H), Professionals (P1 & P2) and Students (S1, S2 & S3). The details of the participants are attached in Appendix 5.

7.1 Pre-visit

7.1.1 Deciding to visit

7.1.1.1 Awareness of restaurants

The customer journey starts with awareness of a product, service or commercial experience. It requires both consumers' and companies' initiatives to reach each other. Consumers may make efforts to look for more information pertaining to their possible purchases. Today, online information seeking is key (Li and Kannan, 2014), including within the restaurant sector (Namkung et al., 2007). The cheaper costs, easy access to price and product information, as well as the volume of information are among the reasons for increasing online search dependency in customers (Porter, 2001). In response, companies increasingly employ a series of online marketing and advertisement techniques (Anderl et al., 2016). They use websites and social media accounts as a platform to provide information to potential customers. In terms of restaurant businesses, past research revealed that customers are actively seeking price, menu specification and promotion information (Jin, 2004; Cho et al., 2005; Yom et al., 2005). However, with various online channels available, customers are fed with such an array of information source choices that it has become harder to predict how they will make decisions (Nunes et al., 2013; van der Veen and van Ossenbruggen, 2015). Research on consumer information gathering on eating out has highlighted how the Internet works in tandem with 'word of mouth' as the major information sources when deciding where to eat out (Jin, 2004; Namkung et al., 2007; Yom et al., 2005). Often these blur together through social media into so-called 'word-of-click' likes, shares and retweets.

Initially, then, it is the restaurant operator's effort to make sure that everyone knows about the existence of their restaurants. The discussion in Chapter 4 showed how the

studied theme restaurants market their places and make them visible to the market. To recap, across the database the restaurants use both traditional and new marketing media, including leaflets, websites, social media, as well as looking to feature through intermediaries (such as local TV programmes or food blogs for local consumers, and tourist marketing information for tourist consumers). The unique and special feature of the theming is a key selling point in their marketing. However, owners and managers were well aware of the power of word of mouth (WOM) too. In the focus group sessions, it can be said that the majority of the participants agreed that they often knew about the theme restaurants through their friends' recommendations, and saw this a key source of awareness. One of the participants in the student groups claimed that:

SD 19: Normally, I knew from the word of mouth. 'Ooo...this place is good'. Usually these type of restaurants didn't have [a proper] advertisement. So the news travels through the word of mouth. If we wanted to see their advert in television, paper or radio...no, they don't have that. We will hear people say [recommend] 'oh, this place is best. Come and let's try it out'. (Author's translation)⁶⁵

Interestingly, food bloggers, key intermediaries themselves in extending awareness, also noted that they often knew about a specific theme restaurant through friends' recommendations, who knowing their interest in food often suggested restaurants that they might visit.

As well as through personal recommendations, participants also knew about theme restaurants through internet search engines. The food blogger group discussed how their attachment to the internet meant they used online research a great deal. They sometimes searched via general tools such as Google or Yahoo but they also relied on websites which provide ratings or recommendations for food places such as

⁶⁵ SD 19: Biasanya saya tahu bila orang cakap la. 'Ooo best la tempat ni'. Kebanyakan restoran ni dia bukan ade iklan sangat pun. Dia biasanya word of mouth yang menyampaikan. Kalau nak tengok iklan dalam tv, paper, kat radio... memang tak ada la. Dengar orang cakap 'eh sedap la tempat ni. jom try'.

foodlah.com (this website was widely discussed, though it is now closed). The foodlah site worked just like TripAdvisor, providing a medium for people to give comments, recommendations, share experiences and rate restaurants.

Farah: How did you know about theme restaurant that you visited?

FB 26: I normally Google for it or knew through my friends.⁶⁶

FB 27: (Nodding) [Agree with FB 26]. It's quite impossible to just bump into theme restaurant.⁶⁷

FB 28: The restaurant that I visited is just by the main road but most people do not know about it. The restaurant didn't even have its signage. I knew this restaurant as I Googled it first. I searched for 'romantic places'.⁶⁸

FB 29: Usually, I use Google. I Google it as I want to know the restaurant's rating. Sometimes I refer to foodlah.com (a website). Or just type in the search (engine) like you normally do. But if in the foodlah's website, there are details such as halal and non-halal restaurants, etc. but there is a lot more [information] in the [restaurant] website. (All responses: author's translation)⁶⁹

A bit different from the food bloggers, the food hunter group discussion comprised participants who are particularly interested and enthusiastic about food in the city, and keen to look for and try out new foods or restaurants. In other words, food hunters as a group will make substantial efforts to purposely look for restaurants to visit. The group's discussion showed how they were open to WOM, friends' recommendations and viral news in social media. They also purposely watched television programmes showing new or popular food and restaurants in town (see also the discussion in Chapter 4). Among the television shows they mentioned are Jalan-jalan Cari Makan (JJCM), Ho Chak, Best in the World or any programs with food related

⁶⁶ FB 26: Biasa kita google atau melalui kawan-kawan la.

⁶⁷ FB 27: (Angguk) Kalau tiba-tiba terjumpa tu susah sikit la.

⁶⁸ FB 28: Restoran ni tepi highway je tapi ramai orang tak tahu. Signboard pun tak ada. Kita tahu tu sebab google kan kat mana restoran yang romantik.

⁶⁹ FB 29: biasa google la. Kita google sebab kita nak tengok rating dia. Biasanya guna foodlah.com. Atau google type search macam biasa je. Kalau website foodlah tu ada semua food halal ke tak halal ke. Tapi ada banyak la dia letak dalam tu.

segments such as Safiyya, a modern Islamic lifestyle program. These television programs usually include an audio-visual representation of the restaurants' ambiance, as well as information on the specialty menu, price range and location of the restaurant.

FH 06: For me, I knew it from the word of mouth. I wanted to try it myself once I heard the feedback from people (...) just like Flora Kafe, I really wanted to go. It looks really nice in the picture.

FH 08: I went there because Safiyya recommended. You know, the Safiyya, [tv] program. Plus, it's alcohol free. (All responses: Author's translation)⁷⁰

In addition, as this type of customer was always on the lookout for new dining places, a chance encounter could also be important. One of the participants admitted that:

FH 09: So far, I found (theme restaurants) during my leisure walk/shop. If I bumped into one, I immediately walk into the restaurant. (Author's translation)⁷¹

Across all the groups, but especially those with an established interest in food, 'word-of-click' was also important. Through 'Like', 'Share' or 'Retweet' functions either the restaurant's own account or customers' feedback and experience posts can easily spread virally. Most people today in Kuala Lumpur, from a range of backgrounds, use social media, and as such it is becoming an increasingly key medium for restaurant operators to use, either in direct promotion of their dining places or, perhaps better, through staging such memorable dining experiences that customers will share their experiences on the net.

⁷⁰ FH 06: Kalau Dilla, word of mouth kot. Kita dengar feedback dari orang then kita nak try (...) macam flora cafe tu teringin sangat nak pergi. Sebab tengok gambar macam cantik je

FH 08: I went there because Safiyya recommend. Kan program Safiyya tu. Plus dia alcohol free.

⁷¹ FH 09: So far jalan-jalan, jumpa. Jumpa tu terus masuk

7.1.1.2 Purpose

Another aspect of the pre-visit stage of the customer journey that the focus groups discussed was the purpose of visiting a theme restaurant: why they decided to visit this type of restaurant, and with whom they normally shared the experience. Generally, going to theme restaurants was purposive for most customers; in other words, they normally had a special reason to dine there. From the consumer's point of view, then, the restaurant owners' / managers' emphasis on being 'different' and memorable was mirrored by the activity of dining at these places being seen as 'occasional', both in the sense of frequency and in the sense of marking an occasion. Visits to themed restaurants tended to be planned and treated as a special event, to some degree.

Through the analysis of the group discussion recordings, two main reasons for visiting theme restaurants emerged. The first was to celebrate special occasions. Due to the positioning of theme restaurants as special in term of their decoration, they were seen as a potentially suitable venues at which to celebrate momentous and special events such as wedding anniversaries and birthdays. The participants also saw theme restaurants as suitable places where they could organize small parties like school reunions, bachelor parties and baby showers. Most of them noted that they did not visit theme restaurants on a daily or regular basis apart from for these special events. The findings also suggested that customers visited theme restaurants with friends or family members, and rarely enjoyed the ambiance alone. When asked 'What is the purpose for you to go to a theme restaurant?' and 'With whom do you normally go?' participants across the groups answered that:

FH 06: (...) I will have reason [to go to theme restaurants]. Celebrating wedding anniversary, for example. Because it is special, right. So if it is for casual or aimless visit, I have to consider the budget and time availability.

- FH 08: I think the concept is like... everyone is affordable to organize reunion or party at those theme restaurants. Because if you want to hold it in hotels...it's a no, right [due to high price]. So I think theme restaurant is a suitable place for event like small reunion.
- HO 05: It's okay to go there once in a blue moon for special occasion.
- PR 33: We wanted to enjoy the time with our friends... celebrating any occasions. I won't go for no reason.
- PR 31: Normally, we wanted something different when we decide to go to theme restaurant. Or celebrating something... I think. I go to theme restaurant because I wanted to celebrate something special. It might be birthday or anniversary... or just a reunion with friends. It is rare to go without any reason because theme restaurant is quite expensive, right.
- PR 35: I went there with my family for birthday celebration.
- SD 20: I went there with my best friend. Her name is Shami. Both of us got the distinction (excellence in study award). So we like... celebrate each other. So it's a special occasion. (All extracts: author's translation)⁷²

The second main reason for customers to visit theme restaurants was novelty, i.e. because they wanted to try out a new environment and food. When talking positively about the growth of themed restaurants in the Klang Valley area, they expressed excitement with the emergence of new theme restaurants and an eagerness to visit

⁷² FH 06: (...) kita ada tujuan. Contohnya macam kata nak sambut wedding anniversary ke. Sebab dia kan special. So kalau macam untuk casual atau saja-saja nak pergi tu mungkin kena tengok poket macam mana dan availability time

FH 08: I think concept dia macam... semua orang affordable je nak buat macam reunion, party dekat all those themed restaurant. Sebab kalau nak pergi hotel..memang tak la kan. So themed restaurant ni I think a suitable place for event macam small reunion.

HO 05: Once in a blue moon ok la. Untuk special occasion ok la.

PR 33: kita nak enjoy dengan kawan-kawan..celebrate apa-apa occasion. Kalau nak pergi saja-saja tu tak la kan.

PR 31: Selalunya kalau pergi themed restaurant ni kita macam nak something different la. Ataupun nak celebrate something. For me la. I go to themed restaurant because I want to celebrate something special. Birthday ke anniversary ke...ataupun just want to reunion with friends. kalau saja-saja tu jarang berlaku. Sebab themed restaurant agak expensive jugak, kan.

PR 35: I pun pernah pergi dengan family buat birthday celebration.

SD 20: Pegi ngan kawan. Kitorang masa tu kawan baik namanya shami, kitorang dpt dean, so kitorang mcm nak celebrate each other la mcm tu. Special occasion.

them as they wanted to experience a new dining ambiance and taste the unique foods offered. Participants from across the various groups had very similar ideas regarding this:

SD 18: I look for something unique. But not always. It's just like when I wanted to reward myself. (Author's translation)⁷³

HO 03: As for me, I like to try food. If someone recommends a place with new food then I will try. (Original discussion in English)

FB 29: Normally I will like... 'I tasted this one, let's try something else'. Aha, it's like that. No matter whether it's the food or the environment. (Author's translation)⁷⁴

Apart from celebrating special occasions and the desire for novel dining experiences, there was another interesting point brought up by one participant. In his justification, he noted that he occasionally brought his wife and children to international theme restaurants to educate them about international cuisine, culture, arts and heritage. He wanted to broaden their culinary and cultural knowledge:

HO 05: There is one time we went to Al-Rawsha. We dined there but we did not know what to order. We know nothing about Middle Eastern food. The only that I know is... lamb. So I ordered biriyani rice with lamb. And my daughter ordered ...I can't remember what sort of chicken she ordered, but it doesn't taste good. Then I realized that we have to educate our family because they must know. If we go to Middle East restaurant, there will be a lot of tomatoes and everything. Then if we go to western restaurant, these are the foods. So if we visit Chinese, we expect dim sum. If Japanese, there will be sushi, sashimi and so on. So we have to educate our family. (Author's translation)⁷⁵

⁷³ SD 18: saya cari something yang unik la. Tapi bukan la selalu. Macam nak reward diri sendiri ke.

⁷⁴ FB 29: normally kita macam.. 'yang ni dah pernah makan, kita cuba yang lain la'..ha, macam itu. Dari segi food dan juga environment sekali.

⁷⁵ HO 05: Ada satu kali tu pergi ke al-rawsyah. Masuk dalam tu tak tahu apa nak makan. Kita tak tahu pasal Middle East food. Yang I tahu kambing je la. So I take nasi beriani dengan kambing, ok la. And then my daughter ambil chicken apa tu, tak sedap. Bukan apa we have to educate our family because they must know. Kalau pergi this Middle East restaurant, there will be a lot of tomatoes semua. Kalau pergi

As seen in the discussions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, international theme restaurants not only serve a range of ethnic cuisines based on the country / ethnicity with which they are themed but also display cultural artefacts portraying the culture and heritage. Indeed, in some cases, restaurants actively see their role as one of cross-cultural communication and education. Recall, for example, the owner of Sweetree, the Korean theme restaurant, who highlighted his philosophy in 'two-way communication' by offering not only the Korean food and ambiance but a cultural space in which the customers could learn about Korean culture through artefacts, magazines and scheduled cooking classes. The presence of the 'world on a plate' is thus bound up with questions of cultural and geographical knowledge (Cook and Crang, 1996) and at least some of the group discussion participants also framed visiting internationally themed restaurants in those terms.

Overall, the findings showed that customers visit theme restaurants for a purpose, on an occasional basis and plan their visits. Key qualities for which they were chosen included: their special and memorable character, which alongside mid-level pricing was seen as making them suitable for gatherings to celebrate special occasions; novelty, when respondents wanted to experience something new and different; and their educational and cultural value (with respect to international restaurants), which obviously carried with it certain understandings of the value of cosmopolitan knowledge. The experiencing of themed dining environments was seen as best suited to being enjoyed with friends and family, and as a stage that sociability.

western, ha ni dia punya foods. So kalau pergi dimsum, ok macam ni. Macam Japanese mungkin sushi, sashimi and so on.so kita kena educate our family.

7.1.1.3 Research and information

Based on the focus group discussions, it was apparent that after deciding to go to a theme restaurant customers usually make some preparations ahead of their visit. Some read the blog reviews and review websites such as TripAdvisor and Foursquare, to know more about the particular restaurant. Figure 7.2 shows how the Foursquare website works as a hub for people to look for information and hear about others' experiences, illustrating the page for Flora Café. The users can give comments, ratings, post pictures, and freely express their opinions about the particular restaurant.

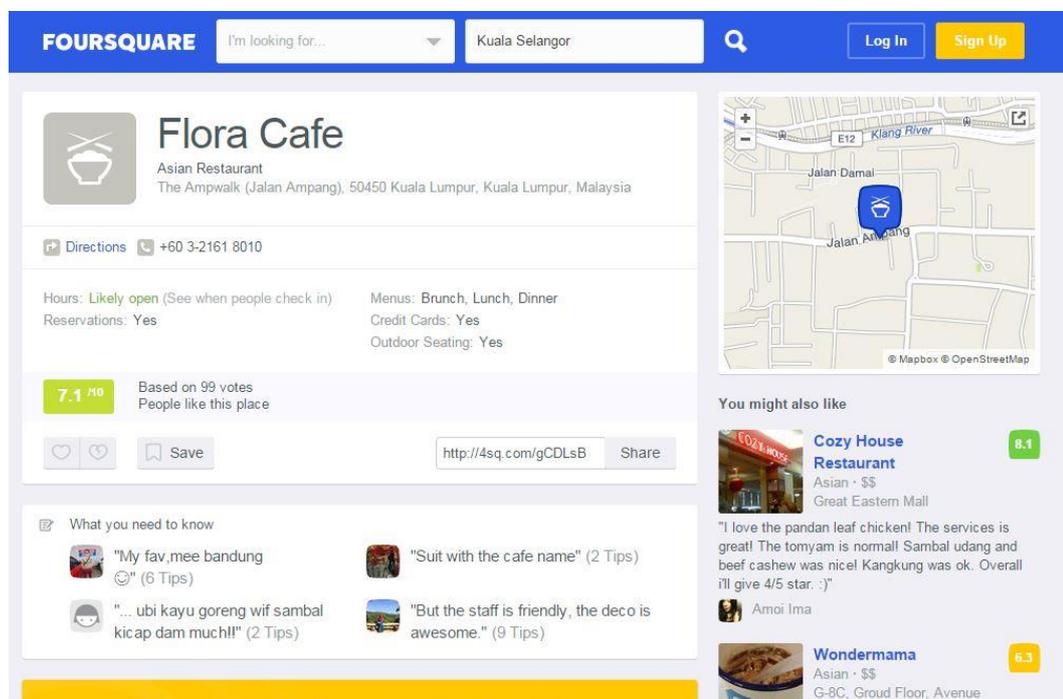


Figure 7.2 Foursquare website listing Flora Café (Anon., n.d.)

Other sources of pre-visit information include food bloggers, some of whom deliberately offer quite neutral accounts, others of whom give not only their views but also ratings. The following figures show the screenshots of Soo Sue's (2012) blog review of Bumbu Bali. The blogger was honest and open in her writing (refer to Figure 7.3) and rated the food, price, service and ambiance (refer to Figure 7.4) from her own point of view.

Puchong - Bumbu Bali

Bumbu Bali serve delicious food from Bali. The whole concept of the restaurant is full with Bali feel..classy and cozy. The food do have good quality and have very strong taste. We order a few dish for sharing. We never notice the portion can be so big..end up we so full that night!



First, we order the Bali Trio. Its a big platter combo consists of deep fried calamari, chicken wings and sate lilit with 3 types of sauces-tartar, chilli lemon special onion oil and spicy sambal. The most special one in this Bali Trio is the sate lilit (lemongrass satay). The minced meat wrapped around a stick of lemongrass and then grilled. The combination taste of lemongrass and the tenderness of the grilled meat really wonderful. While the chicken wing and fried calamari is a bit to the salty side.



Figure 7.3 Blog review of Bumbu Bali (Sue, 2012)

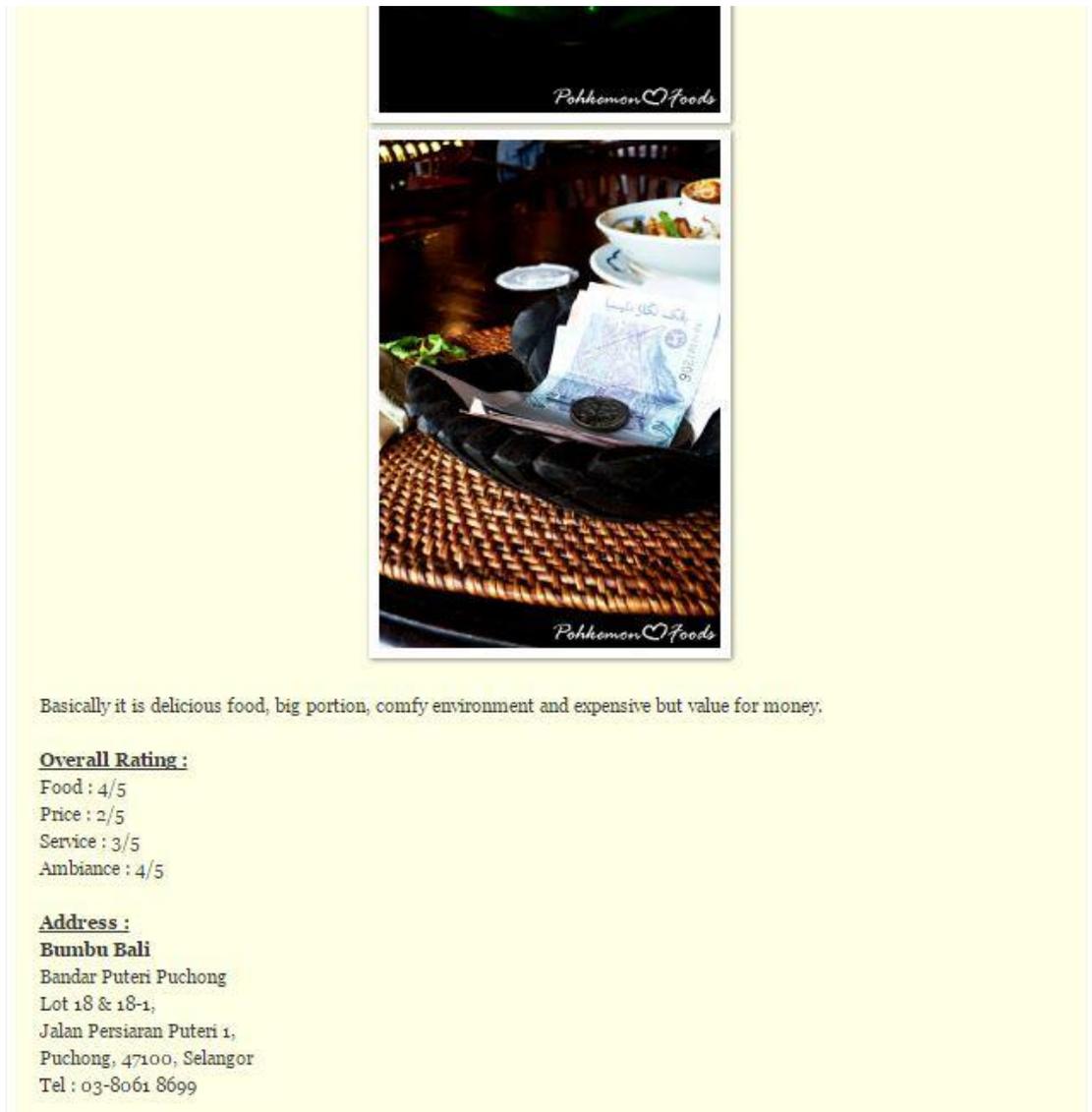


Figure 7.4 Blog review of Bumbu Bali (continued) (Sue, 2012)

In the Malaysian and Muslim context, one important piece of information to research ahead of a visit was said to be *halal* status. The participants stressed that, especially given recent news coverage of cases with vague *halal* status and certification, they became concerned and wanted to be clear on the status of the restaurant. Bound up with *halal* status were issues of religious observance, identity and food traceability and regulation:

HO 04: (...) I will go to *halal* restaurant. So I will make sure that the restaurant does have the *halal* certificate. If there is no *halal* certificate, then I will ask anyone working at the place and confirm to me that the foods served are edible.

Farah: So if there is no *halal* certificate, will it be a factor for not visiting the restaurant?

HO 04: Yes

HO 05: Yes, I agree with that because previously, there was no issue regarding *halal* status and we are free to go to any restaurant, but it stopped when we have Chinese and Indian restaurants with *halal* certification. We didn't know about it before this and now we are educated about *halal*. Because *halal* is not only about religion. *Halal* is about the preparation, how you stock the item, where the suppliers are from... so they also must have the *halal* certificate. So from there we know. So we... like me, I bring my family along and it is the most important thing to know whether it is a *halal* certified restaurant or not.

HO 04: You know sometimes they claim that they are *halal* [certified] but we can see that the restaurants are dirty. We do not even have to ask for the *halal* status... there is a mouse the size of a cat! [Literally mean that the restaurant is too dirty]

Farah: But there are restaurants which we didn't know whether they are serving *halal* food or not because they just put up the Quran verse on the wall [to give a sign that they are Muslim and people might think that they are *halal* in practice] but no *halal* certificate.

HO 05: Yes, we have to educate about that one too. That is right. When we talk about *halal*, there are lots of *halal* types. There are *halal* certificates which are not recognized by JAKIM. So let's say it's *halal* certificate from Thailand or Indonesia or China... but still they have to get the certificate from JAKIM. (All responses: Author's translation)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ HO 04: (...) saya akan pergi halal restaurant. So saya make sure dia ada halal cert. Kalau tak ada halal cert, at least saya tahu siapa-siapa yang bekerja di situ yang boleh confirmkan food tu boleh di makan.

Farah: So kalau tak ada halal cert tu akan menjadi faktor untuk tidak pergi?

HO 04: Yes.

HO 05: Yes, that one yes because dulu ye, bila tak ada lagi isu pasal halal ni, we can go at any restaurant but then we have Chinese and Indian restaurant with halal certificate. Because dulu kita tak tahu tapi sekarang we have educated about halal. Because halal is not only about a religion sahaja. Halal is about the preparation, how do you stock the item, where the suppliers from...so they must have the halal

7.1.2 Price and expectation

The preparations that the customers made before paying a visit – such as reading blogs / reviews, scrolling pictures on social media, and confirmation on certain issues such as *halal* status – produced some expectations of their chosen restaurant. Researchers, have various different emphases on these ‘expectations’. Parasuraman et al. (1988) refer to expectation as the predictions made by customers on what will probably occur during an imminent transaction. In other words, customers may create an imagination of the experience that awaits. For Markovic et al. (2010), expectation is what customers believe about the capability of the service provider, i.e. what a company should offer to its customers. In addition, Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) define expectations as the standards against which actual performance will be assessed. These authors specify customers’ expectations into five levels or types: minimum tolerable expectations, through acceptable expectations, experience-based norms, normative ‘should’ expectations and ideal expectations.

In analysing the data, findings showed that customers form expectations before visiting a particular theme restaurant. In the discussions during the focus group sessions major themes highlighted by the participants included not only price perception towards food in theme restaurants but also the broader emotional states that they feel before making a visit (discussed further in section 7.1.3 below). In terms of pricing, customers normally expected the price to be ‘a little expensive’ or ‘a bit pricy’ as compared to the non-theme restaurants in the market. They were aware that

certificate. So from there we know. So we...like me, I bring my family and that is the most important thing to know whether this is a halal restaurant or not.

HO 04: because sometimes dia kata halal tapi kita tengok restoran dia kotor. kadang kita nak pergi pun..macam tak payah tanya la halal ke tak. Ada tikus sama besar dengan kucing.

Farah: Tapi ada juga restoran yang kita pun tak tahu dia halal ke tak sebab dia hanya tampal ayat-ayat al-quran je tapi tak ada halal cert.

HO 05: Yes. Ha yang tu pun nak kena educate jugak. Memang betul. Tapi kalau halal, sekarang pun ada macam-macam halal. Ada yang not recognized by JAKIM. So katakan halal from Thailand ke Indonesia ke China ke..ha, tapi kena still dapatkan halal daripada JAKIM, especially.

*JAKIM is the Malaysian Islamic Development Department which has the sole right to provide the halal certificate

the restaurant owners put extra effort in decorating and staging the ambiance, and thus they bore this in mind with respect to price.

SD 23: It is now a trend for people to seek for something unique, right? So if we want to visit a [dining] place, we have to set in our mind that the price at this [dining] place will be like this [a certain standard price]. So, there is a range [of price] there. We can't expect the price will be the same as other [non-theme] restaurants. (Author's translation)⁷⁷

In this, they might differ from consumers who would refuse to be customers of theme restaurants, such as those who would see investment in décor as wasted and resulting in less high quality food than the whole meal price might suggest. Not only that, whilst many people tend to have a perception of a higher price charged at theme restaurants due to the heavy decoration, this anticipation is not always borne out in practice:

PR 37: For me, most Malaysians are reluctant to try themed restaurants because they think that it will be expensive. But actually, when they dine at other places, the prices are almost the same. For me, it is more appropriate to opt for ethnic or themed restaurants if people want the experience. But their perception is, it is expensive. But not necessarily. Sometimes it is expensive but the [food] portion is enough to share with two or three people. But when we go to other restaurants, the price is cheap but the portion is just for one person. So, literally, it's the same [calculation]. (Authors's translation)⁷⁸

FB 29: It looks like an expensive place. But actually it's not that expensive. It's just normal [common price range]. (Author's translation)⁷⁹

⁷⁷ SD 23: Sebab sekarang kan trend people seek for something unik kan? Kalau kita nak pegi tempat tu so kita kene set mind kalau makan tempat ni so harga dia mcm ni la. So ada range dia. Tak boleh la nak expect harga dia sama dengan harga di restoran lain.

⁷⁸ PR 37: Pada saya, Malaysian ni takut nak try themed restaurant sebab dia tengok je dari luar dia dah rasa mahal. Tapi sebenarnya bila dia makan kat tempat lain pun harganya lebih kurang je sebenarnya. Pada saya, rasanya lebih teratur kalau kita pergi ethnic atau themed restaurant ni kalau nak experience. Tapi perception dorang mesti cakap mahal. Tapi tak semestinya. Tapi kadang-kadang mahal tapi portion you can share untuk dua tiga orang. Kadang-kadang kita pergi yang biasa, murah tapi portion untuk sorang je. Jadi sama je la sebenarnya.

⁷⁹ FB 29: Nampak macam kedai mahal. Tapi tak ada mahal sangat sebenarnya. Biasa je.

A number of group members talked about how they researched prices pre-visit, looking for the menu list on the website or seeing what other internet users posted about how much they were paying during their visits. Others formed their expectations of price less factually, for example making a judgement based on the profile of other customers they saw before entering the restaurant. One of the participants in the student focus group shared his sense of this customer profiling:

SD 21: When we find out that most of the customers in the restaurants are teenagers, we assume it's okay [affordable]. The price is not bad. (Author's translation)⁸⁰

Due to the limited financial budget among students, price was an important determinant factor for restaurant choice raised by the student focus groups. Some students outlined how information was exchanged regarding price in order to avoid any misconception based on the theme restaurant's image:

SD 24: I had an experience at Full House [restaurant], with a friend, because she recommended it. I felt like I wanted to have western [food] at that time. She told me that the place is cheap. Affordable for students. So we went there. Once we stepped in, we were fascinated with the decoration. There was a [mock-up] car, the feel was like in Korea. The tables and everything are white in colour, the flowers too... it felt nice in there. Then the food was tasty. And they offer packages for students. (Author's translation)⁸¹

⁸⁰ SD 21: Bila tgk dia punya customer tu mostly mcm teenagers youngsters, so kitorang assume that ok. Price is not bad.

⁸¹ SD 24: Saya pernah ada experience pergi Full House, dengan kawan. Sebab kawan yang rekomenkan. Macam nak makan western. Dia kata kat situ murah. Affordable untuk student. Pastu kitorang pergi. Mula-mula masuk tu macam tertarik dengan decoration dia. Ada kereta, pastu feel macam kat Korea. Dia punya meja semua tema macam putih, bunga... rasa best la duduk kat situ. Pastu dia punya makanan pun sedap. Lepas tu dia ada pakej untuk students.

7.1.3 Emotional expectations

Whilst information is central to pre-visit behaviour and expectations, important too are customer emotions. The process whereby consumers decide to visit restaurants is not purely rational; it has more emotional, indeed even ‘passionate’, elements that require attention (see Matus Ruiz, 2012). Given that themed restaurants offer ‘experiences’ and emphasise ‘novelty’ and ‘difference’, customers’ pre-visit encounters are not simply ‘fact-finding’ missions but also shaped by emotional predispositions and matters of taste (Alonso and Neill, 2010; Auty, 1992). For example, desires for novelty in dining out experiences have long been linked to tastes for adventure, as past work on the links between cultures of travel and cultures of food has shown. Here, research has pointed to how many tourists opt for the local cuisine in order to gain new experiences (Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Lee and Crompton, 1992) that they are unlikely to encounter at home (Fields, 2002). Participants in the focus group discussions agreed that novelty and difference were important factors in choosing theme restaurants as places to dine out:

PR 33: Sometimes, we visit the restaurant because we want to try something new. And we wanted to enjoy it with friends, or celebrate a certain occasion. It’s not what we do normally. (Author’s translation)⁸²

PR 34: For me, I like to go to new places. I wanted to try. Maybe it will just be once, but I will revisit if there is something that I like at the place. (Author’s translation)⁸³

However, adventure is not the only emotional tone that can be connected to novelty and difference. At the other end of the spectrum, emotions of calm and comfort may also be the difference that a theme restaurant offers, as when themed in relation to

⁸² PR 33: Kadang--kadang kita kita pergi kat restoran tu sebab kita nak try something new. And kita nak enjoy dengan kawan-kawan, celebrate apa-apa occasion. Kalau nak pergi saja-saja tu tak la kan.

⁸³ PR 34: Macam I, suka pergi tempat baru. Nak cuba. Mungkin sekali pergi tu kalau macam ada sesuatu yang kita suka baru kita akan repeat.

nature. Here, themed restaurants present a difference through offering an escape from the atmospheres of modern urban life. Natural elements and materials, such as plants and water, have widespread cultural associations with relaxation and rejuvenation (Carr et al., 1992; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). These are not just representational connections; they signal anticipated physical and emotional qualities to the experience, and suggest particular forms of fascination (Kaplan et al., 1998). A participant shared that:

FH 09: Sometimes when we are overwhelmed with work, we wanted to go to a place for us to relax. It's not to eat or whatever, just to take a sip and sit back. And I think a theme restaurant offers this. (Author's translation)⁸⁴

Crucially, the emotional qualities of theme restaurant experiences are not limited to the actual experience of dining out. They are part of the longer customer journey, including the processes that precede a restaurant visit. For a start, pre-visit preparations shape the emotional feelings of customers. This can be positive (e.g. heightening excitement in anticipation) but can also be problematic with regard to the management of the restaurant experience (e.g. leading to dissatisfaction or anxiety over whether expectations will be met). In consequence, the emotional outcomes of the restaurant experience, so central to theme restaurant hospitality products, are not simply dictated by the production of the restaurant and its atmospheres; they are shaped too by the emotional dynamics of the customer's own journey, their expectations and hopes.

In the focus group sessions, discussants identified a series of emotions and feelings that arose before visiting restaurants. The most prominent of these was excitement, stimulated by the information gathered ahead of a dining experience. Respondents spoke about actively looking forward to experiencing the restaurant ambiance that

⁸⁴ FH 09: Macam kadang-kadang bila dah overwhelming dengan kerja, kita nak jugak pergi tempat untuk kita nak relax. Bukan kita nak makan ke apa, kita just nak minum and seat back. Theme restaurant ada ni semua.

they had seen represented on the restaurants' websites, pictures on social media, or in social media content and messages shared by family and friends. Thus, the restaurants' affective powers were not confined to the atmospherics of the physical dining place, but had a reach through marketing media into the customer experience ahead of a visit. This was particularly so when novelty was at play and picked up in 'word of mouth' and 'word of click' communications. Respondents talked about how news on a particular theme restaurant might go viral on social media, with 'everyone' talking about it and sharing experiences and photos of their visits, and how this made them even more eager to have the same experience themselves, to take pictures too and to share them on social media so that they could feel that they were 'on trend' or 'up to date'.

Furthermore, this emotion of excitement developed pre-visit is important for the experiences consumers had during their visits (something to be discussed more generally below). For example, a participant shared that she was told by her friend that there would be regular performances by the waiters at Johnny Rocket restaurant. Knowing this, she was more excited to witness them dancing during her visit. As she expected this upon arrival, she kept looking at her watch and asked the staff a couple of times for confirmation. Her eager excitement extended from before her visit into the dining experience itself.

FB 26: I went to Johnny Rocket that day and eagerly awaited the performance as someone told me that the staff will dance during the service. So I waited. After half an hour, there was nobody dancing. I called and asked the waiter when will the performance be and he told me that it will be soon. After a while and nothing happened, I was dissatisfied and asked the manager. He too said it will be soon, yet another ten minutes. Then, I know that they have the timing [for the performance]. I was so excited to watch them dancing. (Author's translation)⁸⁵

⁸⁵ FB 26: Hari pergi Johnny Rocket dan tertunggu-tunggu sebab ada orang cakap dekat situ ada orang menari. So ktorang pun tunggu la. Lepas setengah jam tak ada orang menari. Kita panggil waiter tanya

However, less pleasurable emotions can also occur ahead of visits. Given the novelty associated with theme restaurants, a nervousness and insecurity was also articulated by some of the customers who participated in this research. In particular, such anxious feelings often concerned food quality, with a common worry being that this would not match the the level of décor and ambiance:

FH 06: Do we go to the restaurant because of the food or for its ambiance? Some people do not mind if the food is not tasty because what they wanted is the ambiance. They want to feel it. Want a romantic [ambiance] for example... even if the food is not good at all. But for some people, they really go for the food itself. If it was me, decoration is a bonus. But to go there for the first time, it is because of the food. Because we pay for it. So it's not worth it if we pay for tasteless food. (Author's translation)⁸⁶

The feeling of insecurity is not only generated around the taste of foods; it also surrounds the *halal* status of the food served. As discussed previously, Muslim customers are concerned with the *halal* status of the foods that they consume. Failing to display a *halal* certificate made customers question the status of the food. One group participant talked about the importance of trust in this regard, seeking to counter a negative anxiety through insights from trusted sources:

FH 08: But in terms of *halal*... there was no *halal* certificate displayed on the wall but I went there because Safiyya recommended it. You know Safiyya, the Muslim TV Programme. Plus the place is alcohol free. Because you know at The Curve [mall], even Chilli's, TGI Friday... we can't go because they serve alcohol, right. Well, you can go but I just don't want to. (Author's translation)⁸⁷

bila?dia kata kejam lagi. Tak puas hati tunggu lambat sangat, kita tanya manager dia pula. Dia pun kata kejam lagi, 10 minit lagi. So dia ada timing dia. So macam best la dapat tengok dorang menari.

⁸⁶ FH 06: Kita pergi restoran tu sebab food atau sebab decoration? Ada sesetengah orang dia tak kisah pun food tak sedap tapi sebab orang kata nak ambience tu, nak rasa. Nak romantik ke... Walaupun food tu orang kata main tolak-tolak je ..tapi setengah orang tu memang dia nak rasa food tu. Kalu saya, decoration tu adalah bonus. Tapi untuk first tu pergi sebab food lah. Sebab kita bayar, so tak worth it kalau kita bayar tu benda tak sedap.

⁸⁷ FH 08: Tapi in term of halal tu..dekat wall memang dia letak halal tapi I went there because Safiyya recommend. Kan program Safiyya tu.plus dia alcohol free. Because you know dekat the curve tu even chili's, tgi friday pun kita tak boleh pergi sebab dia serve alcohol kan. You can go but I just dont want.

In other words, even what may seem to be a question of factual information, namely whether a restaurant serves *halal* food, is also an emotional matter, bound up with feelings of (in)security. More generally, the experiential nature of theme restaurants ensures that diners engage with them not only as rational consumers but as emotional beings. This is apparent even in the selection of and preparation for restaurant visits, but comes even more to the fore in the interaction with the restaurant space itself. It is to consumer perspectives on those restaurant visits that I now turn. The discussion is in two parts. Firstly, it begins by highlighting the emotional and affective nature of theme restaurant consumption, developing the analysis of ‘affective dinescapes’ presented in Chapter 6 through attending to the testimonies of focus group participants. Secondly, it then highlights how different customer journeys can result in different consumptions of restaurant experiences and affects, manifest in different feelings in and about the same themed place.

7.2 During the visit

In Chapter 6 it was argued that themed restaurants can usefully be thought of as ‘affective dinescapes’. Building on suggestions that hospitality consumption has an ‘affective’ quality (Lugosi, 2008), it was shown how the production of restaurant places involves the corporeal orchestration of diners, the design and management of various ‘ambiances’ (including sonic, thermal and luminous qualities) (Thibaud, 2002), and an ‘affective engineering’ (Thrift, 2004) of restaurant ‘atmospheres’ (Anderson, 2009). However, my perspective in Chapter 6 was focused on the production of restaurant spaces and experiences; I now want to supplement that analysis with the views of customers, as generated in the research’s focus group discussions. I want to focus, then, on customers’ accounts of their experiences in theme restaurants and on how customers respond to their affective dinescapes.

In so doing, the materials presented below also develop my argument on affective dinescapes conceptually. Here I draw in particular on the work of Rose et al. (2010) on how consumers related to a shopping centre (or mall) in the British city of Milton Keynes. In a sympathetic critique of work focusing on the affective engineering of architectural spaces (such as Adey, 2006; Kraftl and Adey, 2008), Rose et al. argue that one should not over-simplify the relations between a place's affective qualities and the emotional responses of those inhabiting it. In particular, their own findings suggested an important distinction to be made between three different sets of responses, which they frame in terms of the 'feelings' of their shopping centre visitors. First, they identify their feelings *of* this place; i.e. the sensory engagements with its various affective materialities (including the 'solid' materialities of building and furniture and the more ambient dimensions of aural architecture / soundscapes, luminosity and thermal dis/comfort). Second, they identify feelings *in* this place: i.e. the embodied emotions felt by the shopping centre's inhabitants whilst within it. Crucially, they suggest, the feelings of people in a place cannot simply be read off their feelings of a place, the former being shaped too by people's varied subjectivities, biographies and immediate circumstances. Third, they also identify feelings *about* the shopping centre they were studying: i.e. the judgements that people had formed and developed about this place and which shaped their response to it. These sorts of feelings about, in and of a place interact and impact on each other, they suggest. Broadly speaking, then, Rose et al.'s key insight for this study is that the consumer feelings generated in theme restaurant experiences need to be thought of at multiple, interacting levels that combine embodied sensing, emotional states and culturally inflected judgements. The brief discussions below attempt to give some flavour of this complexity in showing how diners' feelings were engaged by theme restaurants during their visits.

7.2.1 Affective dinescapes and consumer emotions

In discussing their experiences and evaluations of theme restaurants in Klang Valley, participants in the focus groups demonstrated an active engagement with the dinescape elements and with the restaurants' ambiance. It was also notable how they articulated the restaurant experience in emotional terms.

First, then, an engagement with dinescape elements and restaurant ambiance was evidenced. A couple of examples make the point that restaurateurs' efforts on design, décor and ambiance are not in vain and form part of customers' experiences:

PR 34: I once went to D'Tandoor. It was an Indian restaurant. The decoration was heavy. When we entered the restaurant, we could smell the jasmine. It's kind of India's signature smell. And all the dishes are the true Indian cuisine. I can't really eat some of it... but the most popular is the masala. And the dessert too, called *payasam*. The one with the yoghurt. And the ambiance is quite dark, with dim lighting. The wall was red, brown in colour. The significant colour of India. (Author's translation)⁸⁸

PR 30: Have you heard about Tajine Restaurant? It's at Bukit Bintang [a popular tourist spot in Kuala Lumpur]. If we want to compare with Saba' [an Arab theme restaurant], Tajine is heavier and more obvious in its theming. I state this because I purposely went there to examine the restaurant's concept at that time. So, you instantly feel like you are in the Middle East once when you enter the restaurant. Because in terms of the music, ambiance... and the host, he is wearing the tarbush and everything [traditional wear]. The seating is just like at Sahara Tent, the one with cozy cushions. The design and décor are showing the Middle Eastern culture. And the equipment...they serve the Moroccan cuisine in tajine pots. The tajine pot is originally from Arabian countries, and is made

⁸⁸ PR 34: Dulu pernah pergi D' Tandoor. Restoran India. Decoration dia memang heavy. Bau dia pun memang bau India. Masuk tu bau bunga melur tu. Masakan dia memang India betul la. Tapi tak semua la boleh makan...Popular dia yang masala la. Lepas tu ada desert nama payasam, yang letak yougurt tu. Suasana dia pun kelam, dim gitu. Warna merah, coklat..warna india la.

from clay and has a flat base with a cone cover. So they use tajine to cook the dishes and serve the food. It really feels like we are there [Middle East countries]. (Author's translation)⁸⁹



Figure 7.5 Food cooked and served in tajine pots (Eatdrinkkl, 2014b)

Second, it is apparent in these discussions that restaurant aesthetics, the way restaurants look, are engaged with in embodied, sensory and emotional ways. For sure, in part theme restaurant aesthetics are encountered as texts to be read, decoded and to be understood, such that PR34 understands they are in an Indian restaurant and PR30 associates Tajine Restaurant with the imaginative geographies of the 'Middle East'. However, apparent too is a sensing of restaurant aesthetics, a rendering of them less as meaningful texts but as material forms that engage with customers' bodies and emotions (more generally see Postrel, 2003). One common way in which this was evidenced in focus group discussions was an emphasis on how theme restaurant visits were associated with 'excitement' and other associated (if slightly different) emotions (such as 'awe'). Here, for example, a participant shares her

⁸⁹ PR 30: Pernah dengar tak Tajine Restaurant. Dekat Bukit Bintang. Kalau nak compare antara Saba' dengan Tajine ni konsep dia lagi nampak dekat Tajine ni sebab memang time tu pergi nak tengok konsep of restaurant. Cam bila pergi tu, kita masuk je dah rasa macam kita dekat Middle East. Sebab macam in term of dia punya lagu, ambience...memang ada la. And then orang yang...host tu, pun pakai tarbush semua. Satu memang dia punya seat memang sama macam yang dekat Sahara Tent tu, ada cushion tu. Lepas tu dia Moroccan punya cuisine. Lepas tu kalau nak tengok design dia memang design Middle East, decor dia pun sama, all the equipment tu..in term of..dia serve dia punya food tu memang dekat tajine. Tajine tu macam bekas yang 3 segi tu.tu nama tajine. Memang dia masak dan serve dalam tu. So ememang rasa macam dekat sana la.

excitement during her visit with family members to an Arabic theme restaurant that is known for its dramatic design:

PR 31: It was a heavy decoration. The moment we stepped in [into the restaurant] the entrance made us feel like we were in the Middle East. It was beautiful. We instantly started to take pictures. It was really exciting! We had not even had our meals yet but we were excited to snap pictures. The decoration was heavier than Sahara Tent's. But maybe at Sahara's, it was just a small lot in a mall so it didn't intrigue us to take pictures. But, this restaurant is really big, so when we arrived, the entrance was...wow! There was an array of cutlery, the big vase and water container at the entrance door, the camel mockup, which is a must, and everything. It made us want to snap pictures to remember it. Beautiful. (Author's translation)⁹⁰

'Beauty' was another key feeling expressed by respondents, a notion that combines cultural conventions (of what is beautiful) and a visceral, felt response to an environment. As discussed earlier in the thesis, Flora Kafe is known for its lush décor, dim lighting and decoration with flowers on the ceiling, at the entrance and at the corners of the restaurant. The dialogue below showed how the perceived beauty of the restaurant décor went hand in hand with feelings of excitement and pleasure when visiting Flora Kafe:

FB 28: That place is beautiful. Really beautiful.

FB 29: Yes, it is. When we arrived we just like...wow...we felt like we wanted to get married there instantly. [laugh].

FB 28: You are right. I felt like I wanted to go there just because it is beautiful. (All responses: Author's translation)⁹¹

⁹⁰ PR 31: Decor dia memang heavy. Kita masuk depan dia je memang sangat Middle East la. Memang cantik. Kita pun memang siap tangkap-tangkap gambar, excited! Tak makan lagi rasa macam teruja nak tangkap gambar. Dia memang lagi heavy kalau compare dengan Sahara Tent. Tapi mungkin sebab kecik kot dekat shah alam mall tu. Kita pun tak ada la rasa nak bergambar sangat kan. Tapi kalau macam restoran ni, sebab dia sangat besar, so kita masuk dekat depan je tu pun dah rasa macam...wow. Dia susun la semua dia punya cutleries, dengan pasu bunga besar dan bekas air dekat entrance, dengan unta tu wajib la mesti ada kan, and everything. Memang kita akan tangkap gambar la untuk kenangan. Cantik.

⁹¹ FB 28: Tapi tempat dia memang cantik.cantik sangat.

FB 29: Aah, kita masuk tu macam...wahhhhhh...kita rasa macam..nak kahwin. haha..

Thirdly, as defined by Arora (2012, p.333) pleasure is “a sensual and emotional delight”. Architectural theorists have increasingly explored how places can be designed to ‘touch’ their inhabitants and generate pleasure (Wernick, 2008). The senses are key here, as Wernick (2008, p. 58) notes in his book on ‘building happiness’:

Smells are often linked to a particular memories, and so the smell of a wood fire, or even that of coal smoke gives me a warm nostalgic feeling. In a house the smell of cooking brings back feelings of support and succour.

In the discussions, most participants highlighted that they were happy and at ease with theme restaurant environments; in fact, their comments emphasised how restaurant environments actively worked on their emotional states by placing them in environments that felt different from everyday settings:

FB 27: The restaurant is fascinating. I feel like I am literally in Bali. (Author’s translation)⁹²

FH 07: The restaurant near the highway has an interesting theme. The location is quite hidden at the back [of a building] but there is a large pond there and the dining tables are around the pond. They are arranged on the wooden floor. So when customers, especially the kids, walk or run, we can hear the clatter of the wooden floor. And there is sound from the water too. These all make the feeling...like in the rural village. (Author’s translation)⁹³

SD 12: I had experience to Upin Ipin Restaurant at Malacca. The ambiance matched with Upin Ipin character. They also selling the Upin Ipin souvenir [merchandise] such as the t-shirt. The ambiance is like...we feel like in Upin Ipin world. Like we go back to our childhood moment. (Discussion in English)

FB 28: Betul. Rasa nak pergi tempat tu sebab dia cantik je.

⁹² FB 27: Tapi tempat dia memang cantik la. Rasa macam konon dekat Bali je.

⁹³ FH 07: Restoran yang dekat highway tu theme nya agak menarik. Memang tempat dia agak tersorok kebelakang tapi dia ada kolam and then kita punya tempat makan tu di sekeliling kolam. Dia punya tempat makan tu atas lantai kayu. So bila kita atau budak-budak naik dengar la derapan bila dorang berjalan berlari atas kayu tu kan. Dan ada bunyi air semua. Itu yang buat rasa lagi...macam kampung-kampung.

As discussed in Chapter 6, ambient elements have an important role to play here. Ryu and Jang (2008) discuss the role played by music, aroma and temperature on diners' emotions. Wernick (2008, p.60) notes how lighting "helps us to communicate with other people, and to experience our surroundings", as well as stimulating the body to produce serotonin and lift mood. Kurtich and Eakin (1993) also emphasize that lighting is able to influence customers' perception of the quality of a space and change their physical, emotional and psychological relations to it; whilst, on the other hand, Bennett (1977) highlights how poorly designed lighting creates glare and discomforting affects.

One common discussion point for this nexus of ambient elements and emotional states was how themed restaurants could produce 'romantic' settings and moods. Participants shared that:

FB 26: I went to the Gardens at The Curve. It's an English theme. It's like dining in the garden. There are flowers, but not too much. I think its artificial, not fresh ones. They are white flowers. And other decorations are all white in colour. There is also a piano in there. So there is someone playing the piano while we dine. So it's like romantic dining. We even can request any song. (Author's translation)⁹⁴

FB 29: I went to Subak, at Bukit Lanjan. It was romantic there. The theme was romantic. When we stepped in we just like...wow. It is suitable for both couples and families. But that day, I went there with my partner. There is a botanic garden at the side of the restaurant, so it feels like you dined in a garden. The water uses the electricity, so there were constant waves. So we can hear the sound from the water. And then they also played music. During that night, they played romantic songs because there were a lot of couples dining there. (Author's translation)⁹⁵

⁹⁴ FB 26: Saya pergi The Gardens dekat The Curve. Macam English theme. Macam restoran dalam taman gitu la. Bunga-bunga sikit. Bunga palsu rasanya, bukan yang fresh. Bunga putih. Semua putih rasanya. Lepas tu ada piano dalam tu. Ada orang main. Kita tengah makan kang ada orang main piano macam tu. Romantikla. Siap boleh request lagu lagi.

⁹⁵ FB 29: Saya pergi restoran Subak dekat Bukit Lanjan. Dekat situ romantik la. Tema dia romantik la. Masuk tu terus...wow. Kalau datang berdua pun boleh, kalau datang dengan family pun ok. Dia ada tempat juga untuk family. Hari tu saya pergi berdua je. Kat sebelah tu siap ada tasik botani. So rasa macam makan dalam tasik la. Air tu dia pakai yang elektrik, so macam ada gelombang gitu. Boleh dengar

FH 09: I like restaurants with pleasurable ambiance. Because when we are in a cosy ambiance, we feel romantic...the moment and tone of conversation with your partner also changes. Because it's not the same like you converse at home, or in mamak restaurants, with kids around... the tone is different. We also dine at a slower pace. (Author's translation)⁹⁶

Another common combination of feelings that was raised in the discussions related to senses of curiosity and wonder. For example, most theme restaurants create a signature dish, usually named after the theme itself, which is therefore unfamiliar and novel for customers. Sometimes, customers are unable to guess its character from the menu as the name is unique. This creates curiosity among the customers as they guess what it will be:

FH 08: Okay, the best part was the name of the recipe [menu] itself. Although it's like Europe theming, but ironically, there is food called San Francisco. Just San Francisco, so you cannot guess what it is. But there is a menu description available. Like pancake with grilled dory and mushroom sauce. So there are a lot of menu names after American states. That is savoury. The desserts have different names. Drinks too have range of categories. Like me, I personally like the feeling of trying new food. What it looks like, how it tastes. So it's satisfying to me everytime. Like you will never be disappointed. But, if it is not tasty, you'd learn the lesson. [laugh]. (Author's translation)⁹⁷

bunyi dari air tu. Lepas tu dengar lagu. Time tu dia pasang lagu-lagu romantik la sebab yang datang tu pun ramai couple.

⁹⁶ FH 09: Akak suka restoran yang ada pleasure ambiance. Sebab bila kita ada macam ambiance yang rasa cozy, romantik-romantik sikit..ha, moment and tone of conversation dengan partner tu macam capture banyak tau. Sebab macam lain kalau borak dekat rumah atau dekat mamak, bawak budak-budak ke..tone tu lain tau. Makan pun perlahan.

⁹⁷ FH 08 : Ok, yang best nya the name of the recipe itself. Although dia macam Europe like, tapi ironically dia punya nama contohnya San Francisco. San Francisco je, you cannot like guess what it is kan tapi dia ada description. Contoh pancake with grilled dory and mushroom sauce. So ada banyak nama lagi ikut US punya states. Tu savoury. Kalau dessert ha ada nama lain. Dan jus dia pun best. Drinks pun ada banyak kategori. Macam I personally like the feeling of trying the new food. How it looks like, how it taste. So dia macam satisfy me everytime la. Macam you never be disappointed macam tu. Rasa macam food la. Tapi kalau tak sedap, you learn the lesson la. Hahaha

FB 29: The food in the restaurant is quite 'weird'. It's a combination of Malay and western dishes. They even serve ostrich's egg. At that time, we ordered this fried rice but I can't remember its name. It's their own signature dish. (Author's translation)⁹⁸

However, for other customers the feeling is less one of curiosity and adventure than it is insecurity and worry that they may encounter something that is unusual and distasteful to their palate:

FB 29: When I was there, I just ordered a fresh orange because I'm afraid I can't drink the other drinks options. You know, it's [the menu names] kind of odd. (Author's translation)⁹⁹

For others, it is more a case of curiosity being overpowered by disappointment when the mystery is revealed:

SD 18: When I went to a theme restaurant, I have this kind of expectation. You know, because the menu itself is different from other restaurants. So we expect it to be tasty. But sometimes, it's not that tasty. It's just like a common dish. (Author's translation)¹⁰⁰

FB 29: Most of the time the menu will be linked with the restaurant's theme. But the food is just at a standard taste. It's just the name which is glamorous. (Author's translation)¹⁰¹

FB 28: The food is common but they change its name. For example, there is an unusual menu name and I would like to try it but when they serve it, it's just a usual fried rice. (Author's translation)¹⁰²

⁹⁸ FB 29 : Makanan dia kat situ macam pelik sikit. Dia campur Malay food pun ada, western food ada. Telur burung unta pun ada. Lepas tu hari tu kita order nasi goreng apa tah. Ada dia bagi menu nama sendiri kan.

⁹⁹ FB 29 : Hari tu minum fresh orange je sebab takut tak boleh minum benda lain. Ye la sebab dia macam pelik-pelik sikit.

¹⁰⁰ SD 18: Bila saya ke theme restaurant, kita punya expectation lain. Sebab menu dia pun kan different daripada restaurant lain. So kita expect sedap la. Tapi kadang-kadang x terlalu sedap. Biasa je la biasanya.

¹⁰¹ FB 29: Kebanyakannya ada berkenaan dengan theme dia. Tapi makanan tu biasa je cuma nama je la glamor

¹⁰² FB 28: masakan biasa je cuma nama dia tukar. Contoh ada nama pelik so nak cuba la tapi bila sampai nasi goreng kampung je.

In summary, then, customers clearly recognise theme restaurants as places that stage opportunities for generating 'feelings': physical sensations; emotional states; and, from these, overall senses of an experience. Associations of theme restaurants with ideas such as excitement or romance were common manifestations of this. However, the focus group respondents also recognised the potential for these feelings to go 'wrong', for restaurants to generate negative emotions such as anxiety or disappointment. The emotional journeys of customers' restaurant visits were not pre-determined.

7.2.2 Customer journeys through experiencescapes

This variability was apparent in other ways too, reflecting the diversity of 'customer journeys' through any one restaurant and its experiencescape. Not only do customers come to a restaurant with possibly varying expectations, they also potentially relate to the experience in different ways. The focus group discussion data highlighted how differing tastes, sensibilities and circumstances meant that customers' perceptions of the same themed environment could render very different emotional and cognitive responses.

To illustrate this point, the discussion below considers how three participants, from various group discussions, differently perceived, consumed and experienced the same restaurant, Sahara Tent, an Arab theme restaurant.

FB 26: I went to Sahara Tent. Last year or the last two years. Hmm...it's in Plaza Shah Alam. The environment was great, we sat at the middle of the dining area. There was seating decorated just like in the tent by the side of the dining area. There were also cross-legged seating but we got the seating in the middle as the restaurant was full that day. I went for the break fast occasion with friends. The food was okay, authentic Arab food. Then there

was music played. It's like the sound of a musical instrument like tabla or something. I quite like it but I can't really feel it as we sat in the middle. I think I can feel the ambiance more if sat in the 'tent' seating. But overall it was a great environment. Tip top I can say. There were the pictures of camels and the desert on the wall. And at the 'tent' seating, they provide the cushions and small pillows. (...) the chairs were also comfortable. But the waiters wore a common uniform [not related to the theme]. And then they served the Arab tea I think. Mint tea I suppose. It's hot. That's the best part. I think it's tea with apple. They blend it and there was the pulp. So it's tasty. Plus, it's a free flow so we can ask for more. In terms of the price... as we went for the breakfast so the package was RM 60 plus per person. It's an affordable price. It's buffet style too. The foods were delicious. The Arab rice was okay too, everyone can accept its taste. The one that was quite weird was the dessert. It's something like milk with nuts. Like yogurt, and you eat it with bread. So it's quite weird but the one with chocolate flavour was okay. Just the one with spices flavour was not acceptable. (Author's translation)¹⁰³

FH 06: Sahara Tent was a real authentic Arab restaurant and I was there with my family and my in-laws (...) So, once I entered the restaurant, I can instantly feel the Arab ambiance when I smell the attar. The aroma was like... the flower scents and the smell of cloves. The restaurant was heavily decorated. There was the tent, cross-legged seating and the waiter was into the theme as well with the tarbush and all. But the problem was, all the staff were foreigners. So they can't really understand when we speak Malay and the same when we talked in English too. That was the weakness. We hardly communicated with them. They supposedly have good workers as they are an outstanding restaurant. I don't

¹⁰³ FB 26: saya pernah pergi ke Sahara Tent. last year atau last 2 years. Erm..dekat Plaza Shah Alam. Environment dia bagus, makan dekat tengah-tengah tu. Dekat sebelah tu dia ada macam tent kan, macam dalam khemah macam tu la. Lepas tu seating dia duduk bersila tapi ktorang dapat seat yang tengah-tengah sebab dah full kan. Pergi untuk occasion berbuka puasa dengan kawan-kawan. Food dia ok, memang arab la. lepas tu dengan lagu nya. Lagu intruments dia macam tabla gitu. Agak best tapi sebab duduk tengah-tengah so tak feel sangat la. Yang dalam tent tu lagi feel kot. Tapi dia punya environment tu memang cantik la. memang tip top la. Dalam tu ada gambar unta, gambar kat padang pasir. lepas tu kebanyakan dekat tepi-tepi tu dia letak tent la. Sebab tu seating dia dia letak macam bantal (...) Dia punya kerusi agak best. Waiter/ss dia pakai biasa je. Lepas tu dia ada hidangkan teh arab kot. Mint tea. Panas. yang tu best. Tea pus apple kot. Dia blend lepas tu jadi macam habuk-habuk gitu kan. So sedap la. Then, free flow so boleh tambah la. Dari segi harga.. ktorang pergi tu untuk buka puasa so pakej buka puasa dalam rm60++. Affordable la. Buffet style. makanan dia sedap. Nasi arab dia pun ok, acceptable oleh semua orang. Yang pelik sikit adalah dessert dia. Macam susu lepas tu letak kacang. macam yogurt gitu, makan dengan roti. Agak pelik tapi yang rasa coklat tu ok. Cuma satu lagi yang rasa rempah tu agak pelik la.

know if that was in the Shah Alam branch only, and it might not be applicable to other branches. But the one in there was problematic with the staff communication. But the ambiance was really dramatic with the background music of Arab songs. And an Arab restaurant is known for 'heavy' foods, meaning that one portion of rice for example, can be eaten by 2 or 3 people. So at Sahara Tent, the cost is quite expensive where we have to pay approximately RM30 to get a plate of Arab rice with just a common Mandy chicken. But the foods there were numerous. Really authentic Arab cuisine but in term of taste, it's actually quite similar with food offered by other Arab theme restaurants. It's just the decoration that might make it look expensive. But the food was actually common. Whoever is a fan of Arabic food might have found it was okay and worth to go to an expensive restaurant like that. (Author's translation)¹⁰⁴

PR 31: Okay, the one that I most remember was Sahara Tent. At the Plaza Shah Alam. I went there with my family to celebrate my brother's birthday. So all the family members went there. The ambiance was really nice. The seating was like the Arab seats, red colour theme, and then there was camels, I think. There was a camel at the entrance (laugh). Yes, there must be a camel there. And then the seating was the Arab style seats... Arabs like the cushioned seating, right. There was a table with chair but there was also [lower level seating] with the cushion. So we wanted to experience this. So everyone was fighting for the cushion seating. It's not the cross-legged seating but it's like a lower seating. So the

¹⁰⁴ FH 06: Yang Sahara Tent tu memang betul authentic Arabic restaurant and masa pergi tu dengan family tapi campur dengan family in law (...) Jadi masuk je restaurant tu kita dah dapat rasa dia punya ambience tu memang Arab sebab bau ala-ala minyak atar gitu. Macam bau dia punya aroma..macam bau bunga-bunga..bau cengkih pun ada. dia punya decoration tu memang heavy la. dia ada tent, ada tempat duduk then waiter waitress dia pun sama jenis yang pakai tarbus semua. Tapi tu la, pekerja dia semua foreigners. So macam kadang-kadang kita cakap melayu pun dia tak berapa nak faham, english pun tak berapa nak faham juga. Itu satu la dia punya weakness. Kita nak communicate tu susah. Suppose kalau dorang memang restaurant yang memang outstanding macam tu dorang kena ada workers yang bagus la. Tak tahu la mungkin sahara tent yang dekat situ je kot, tak tahu la. Tapi kalau dekat shah alam tu pekerja nya memang ada masalah communication. Dia punya ambience tu memang high la. Lepas tu dari segi music background tu memang ala-ala arab gitu kan. Restoran arab ni memang kita tahu food dia memang heavy, maksudnya dia punya macam nasi arab pun boleh makan 2 3 orang punya portion. So bila dekat Sahara Tent ni, tambah plak dengan kos expensive tu, memang dia punya plate kos tu macam lebih RM30 untuk satu plate tu, untuk dapat nasi arab yang setakat mandi chicken yang biasa tu. Tapi di situ food dia memang banyak la. Memang Arabic food, tapi dia punya rasa tu sebenarnya lebih kurang je dengan arab punya restoran yang lain. Cuma dia mungkin harga dia based on decoration yang buat benda tu nampak expensive. Tapi dia punya food tu biasa je. Siapa yang memang penggemar arabic food mungkin dia akan rasa ok, worth it untuk restoran yang mahal macam tu kan.

ambiance... there was Middle East songs played. But the waiter just wore a semi-formal uniform, nothing fancy. The foods were all Arab cuisine, no western food or anything. (Author's translation)¹⁰⁵

The overall views of these three group participants were not dissimilar: finding Sahara Tent's Arab theme, and especially its décor and the option of low level seating on cushions, potentially attractively different. But we can also see that each individual perceived the same restaurant ambiance in subtly different ways. FH06 is much more sceptical about the value of such a themed experience than the other two respondents, particularly in relation to food quality. Clearly, the 'success' of any theme experience staging depends to a large extent on the pre-dispositions of the consumer in relation to the theatrical dining cultures they enact. Some of the descriptions tended to be general in narrating the place that they had consumed; others paid more attention to the details. The difference in the food produced different reactions, from intrigue to nervousness. That nervousness was magnified for one of the respondents by the difficulty in communicating with the waiting staff. Whilst the staff's non-Malay nationality for some helped to emphasise difference, and could have been further accentuated through a more fully themed uniform, for others it diminished the trust they were able to place in service staff, widely recognised as a crucial component of appreciation of restaurant experiences (Sundaram and Webster, 2000; San Martin et al., 2004; Tan et al., 2004; Hess and Story, 2005; Barger and Grandey, 2006; Dimitriades, 2006; Luoh and Tsaur, 2009; Abdelhamied, 2011; Randall et al., 2011; Arora, 2012; Ban, 2012). At play here too are different cultural tastes with regard to the internationalization of food in Klang Valley (Jamal, 2003; Jang and Ha, 2009). The

¹⁰⁵ PR 31: Ok yang paling ingat, Sahara Tent lah. Dekat Plaza Shah Alam. Pergi dengan family, celebrate birthday adik. So pergi the whole family la. Ramai la, penuh la. Ambiance dia memang cantik la. Setting dia, kerusi dia semua ala-ala arab, warna merah, lepas tu ada unta rasanya kalau tak silap. Ada unta kat depan tu.haha..dia mesti ada camel tu. Lepas tu dia punya kerusi tu memang style arab..arab kan dia suka macam kerusi empuk. Dia ada la meja yang kerusi biasa tapi cushion kat bawah pun ada. So kitorang mestilah nak rasa yang ni. So semua berebut la nak duduk yang cushion kat bawah tu kan. Nak cakap bersila tak jugak, macam dia rendah gitu. Nak cakap bersila tak bersila. So dia punya ambiance...lagu Middle East punya lagu la. And then waiter dia pakai biasa je. Tak heavy sangat. Food dia memang menu Arab la, tak ada western ke apa.

awareness, acceptance and preferences of international cuisines vary. All in all, then, the ways in which customers perceive restaurant experiences and are affectively engaged by the material 'dinescape' vary, dependent on customers' own 'journeys' to the restaurant and their different cultural tastes and predispositions.

7.3 Post-visit

7.3.1 Evaluation and emotional value

The consumption of a restaurant continues after it has been visited. For Shaw and Ivens (2002) this is cast as a stage of 'post-purchase evaluation' (see Figure 7.1). After the narrowly defined stage of consumption, i.e. the paid encounter with goods and services, customers frequently examine and evaluate the products or services they have experienced. The result of this evaluation decides their satisfaction with the experience. Although scholars define this term differently, they generally agree that the fundamental element provoking customer satisfaction is an evaluation process of their customer journey (Back and Parks, 2003; Ladhari et al., 2008). As Collier and Bienstock (2006) noted, customer satisfaction results when customers experience a particular service and compare it to what was expected. Kotler and Keller (2006) further note that this post-purchase evaluation can only occur when there are expectations before making the purchase. These conceptualizations show that customer satisfaction is determined through a judgement process of prior expectation and the actual consumption experience, as part of the customer journey (Abdelhamied, 2011). Moreover, results from previous studies in the hospitality and restaurant industry have linked customer satisfaction and the future behaviour of customers. For example, Kivela et al.'s (1999) study on post-dining behavioural intentions found that dining satisfaction positively influenced revisit intentions. On

the other hand, Soderlund and Ohman (2005) highlighted the relation of satisfaction and repatronizing behaviour in restaurant settings and found that customer satisfaction is significantly related to two specific intention constructs - intentions as expectations and intentions as wants.

In this study, participants discussed about the experiences and evaluation of such experience in many ways. Thus, through the analysis, I can classify their comparison of expectations and experiences in terms such as 'as expected', 'less than expected' and 'beyond expectation'.

Farah: So, are the theme restaurants meeting your expectations?

FB 29: As so far, yes, they are. I feel...'wow' [with the ambiance]

FB 28: I saw [the picture] in the website that the place is beautiful. So when I made the visit, the place was really fascinating.

FB 26: Yes, the ambiance was as it was portrayed.

SD 24: I have experience, went to Dip n Dip (a chocolate cafe), as recommended by my friends. They told me that everything is delicious at this place. So when I dined there, it was not disappointing at all. (All extracts: Author's translation)¹⁰⁶

The above quotes are extracted from the focus group sessions where participants were being asked whether the ambiance was just like the one that they imagined or expected. Especially given the somewhat ephemeral and complex nature of ambiance, it is impressive for the local restaurant industry that expectations were sometimes met, especially whilst also allowing for emotions of surprise and excitement ("wow" feelings, as one respondent expressed them). On the other hand, sometimes the

¹⁰⁶ Farah: So, adakah theme restaurants ni meet expectation?

FB 29: So far pergi...haa...macam tu lah. Rasa wow...

FB 28: Tengok dalam website tempat tu cantik so bila pergi memang betul la tempat tu cantik.

FB 26: Ambiance tu macam tu la. Seperti yang dikatakan tu.

SD 24: Mcm sy experience pernah pegi Dip n Dip ngan dorang ni, itupun recommendation drpd kawan, kata situ sedap semua. So bila dah sampai sana memang x mengecewakan la.

ambiance at theme restaurants did not meet the customers' expectations. Data analysis signalled that many customers highlighted how the ambiance of theme restaurants was not what they had expected from pre-visit engagements with social media, websites or word of mouth from others.

PR 30: (...) based on what people had told me, I imagined that it [ambiance] was going to be great but it was just dull when I made the visit.

PR 32: Yes, it's normally like that. I heard that it is an outstanding place but when I went there, it's not that fascinating. (All extracts: author's translation)¹⁰⁷

Another area of common disappointment was the food. Focus group participants commented that the taste of the food often did not match with the excellence of the ambiance staged in the particular restaurant they had visited. They thought that the foods were overrated, looking good on television and social media but in fact less impressive when eaten. These situations occurred for various reasons, including: variations in the embodied tastes and preferences of diners; a potential for a cultural taste for food novelty to conflict with visceral senses of taste and reduced enjoyment of the unfamiliar; a sense that investments in the restaurant space were not matched by the quality of the food; and too much pre-visit expectation or positivity from others. The following transcript extracts present some of the participants' thoughts and comments on experiences at theme restaurants that they felt were 'under expectation':

HO 02: The kids concept was not matched with the food that they offered. If we look at the ambiance, there are cartoon stickers on the wall, the merchandise and everything. But the food did not suit the theme, it didn't match. They opened [the restaurant] for

¹⁰⁷ PR 30: (...)dari cerita tu gempak la tapi bila pergi eh biasa je.

PR 32: Ha biasa macam tu. Cerita bukan main hebat tapi bila pergi tengok biasa je. Sedap lagi makan dekat sini. So dari comparison tak sama mungkin sebab taste bud kita tak sama.

kids but they didn't serve kids' meals. They are [offering] more adult menu items such as noodles. (Author's translation)¹⁰⁸

HO 05: I tried [dining at a theme restaurant] once before but the food did not match the 'wow' ambiance. Let's say one person orders an a la carte [food] and it cost around MYR20 to MYR30, but the food [quality and taste] is not there. So we are a bit upset. (Author's translation)¹⁰⁹

FH 08: Sometimes it's overrated, you know... because for me, taste is very subjective. So sometimes people told me that the foods were delicious but when I tried... yes, it is yummy but it's not too delicious. It's just at the normal level. Not that tasty. (Author's translation)¹¹⁰

PR 35: Yeah, sometimes it looks fascinating and tasteful in Instagram and we are attracted to go. But when we were there, it's just... common. (Author's translation)¹¹¹

FH 07: When we first entered the restaurant, we were impressed with the decoration, the flowers and everything. But when it comes to the food, the taste is just the same as other places. Nothing special. (Author's translation)¹¹²

SD 18: When I go to theme restaurants, my expectation is different because the menu is different from other restaurants, right? So I expect the food to be delicious. But sometimes it's not that tasty. (Author's translations)¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ HO 02: Konsep kanak-kanak tu tak match dengan food yang dia offer. Kalau ambience tu ada la kartun tu punya sticker, patung semua tu. Cuma food dia dengan theme tu tak suitable la. Tak match. Dia open untuk kids tapi dia serve bukan kids meals. Dia more to adult punya food macam mee.

¹⁰⁹ HO 05: Tapi kadang-kadang kita pergi cuba tapi the food doesnt match with the wow ambience. Contoh kalau one person order a la carte and cost around RM20 to RM30 but the food is not there, so we are a bit upset.

¹¹⁰ FH 08: Sometime dia macam overrating tau. Because for me taste tu kan subjective. So sometimes dia kata ye ye sangat tapi bila kita makan, sedap la. Tapi biasa je. Takde la macam sedap giler.

¹¹¹ PR 35: Ha tu la.kadang kita tengok kat instagram macam cantik bestnya, nak pergi kan. Tapi bila pergi, rasa biasa je.

¹¹² FH 07: Memang first kita masuk tu kita akan impress dengan dia punya decoration, flowers dia semua. Tapi when it comes to food, makanan tu rasa sama je. Tak rasa special.

¹¹³ SD 18: bila saya ke theme restaurant, kita punya expectation lain. Sebab menu dia pun kan different daripada restaurant lain. So kita expect sedap la. Tapi kadang2 x terlalu sedap. Biasa je la biasanya.

In terms of group discussants' comments on 'beyond expectation' evaluations, a number of these related to price. There were one or two places which charged a rather lower price on the menu than people had expected based on the character of the decoration / restaurant space. They were not as expensive as people thought or as they assumed they would be from how they looked.

FB 29: It looked like an expensive place (referring to Flora Kafe). But it's actually not that pricy. They charged at a normal rate. (Original discussion in English)

SD 25: Recently, we went to this café near the Subang area. The owner is a chef. I think the place is called FIQ. Stands for Food Innovation Quality. So the place is a trending café right now. There are western foods, dessert. So, when we were there, we were sure the price will be high but it's not. It's just average. The value of the food and the price are at the same level. We were satisfied with the food, the price. I ordered s'morse (a type of dessert) in a jar. It's a big jar. It's worth the money.¹¹⁴ (Author's translation)

Shaw and Ivens (2002, p. 40) present a model of 'customer expectation zones' concerning the relationships between an experiential product, customer experiences, and customer evaluations (see Figure 7.6). The model shows customer expectations at its centre, both physical and emotional. The model is designed so that restaurant owners can evaluate whether they exceed or meet the expectations of customers on physical and emotional scales. The physical expectations concern the products, place, information or anything that is directly connected with the customers. They might find it pleasing, for example, if the car park is close to the restaurant, they are greeted when entering the restaurant, the waiter takes the order promptly and the food looks appetising when it arrives. Emotional expectations, in the model of Shaw and Ivens (2002), concern how customers feel about and during a restaurant experience. In part,

¹¹⁴ FB 29: macam kedai mahal. Tapi tak ada mahal sangat. Biasa je.

SD 25: Recently kitorang pergi cafe ni dekat subang, owner dia memang chef la. FIQ. Stands for Food Innovation Quality. So kedai tu memang trending cafe sekarang. Ada western, ade dessert. So kitorang pergi masa tu ingatkan memang mahal tapi harganya average. The value of the food dengan price, sama. Kitorang puas mkn, kitorang pun puas bayar. Sy order s'morse, di dlm jar la. Jar dia besar. So puas makan. So the price kena la

this is another facet of physical services: a nearby car park means they feel their car is safely parked at the space allocated, the host smiles and knows their name and thus they feel a personal connection, the server explains the menu items and thus they feel at ease. It was notable how in the group discussions the evaluations of restaurant experiences were often associated with strong emotions, both positive and negative. As an example of the latter, extracted below is a response concerning a disappointing visit to an ethnically Chinese themed restaurant in the city:

HO 05: Sometimes you bring your friends from overseas who come and visit Malaysia, and you bring them to Baba Nyonya restaurant. But it's not an authentic baba nyonya restaurant. It's not original. It's just a copy from an ordinary [Chinese] restaurant but with Baba Nyonya decoration. So it's upsetting and shame. That's from my personal experience. (Original discussion in English)

Here, the common observation that ethnically, religiously and regionally associated foods are appreciated for their differences (see Ingerson and Kim, 2016; Kirkendall, 2010; Oum, 2005; Jang et al., 2012) generates an emotion as strong as 'shame' when expectations are not met.

Referring to Shaw and Ivens' model, a restaurant in the 'Dead Zone' achieves neither the physical nor the emotional expectations of customers; this is a recipe for commercial disaster and this type of business will not survive. In the 'Commoditization Zone', restaurants tend to offer quick service and cheaper food but less focus on creating memorable dining experiences. They concentrate on the physical products offered only and often fail to meet customers' emotional expectations, and as such, their distinctiveness and ability to add value is reduced. In the 'Danger Zone', the restaurant is exceeding customers' emotional expectations but not achieving their physical expectations. This business is depending on its emotional relationship with its customers (an example would be a reliance on regular customers dining at the restaurant as they are comfortable and appreciate the ambiance, even if they know its shortcomings). In contrast, the 'High Performance Zone' involves exceeding both

the physical and emotional expectations of customers, ensuring not just a reliance on existing loyalty but the production of new loyal customers.

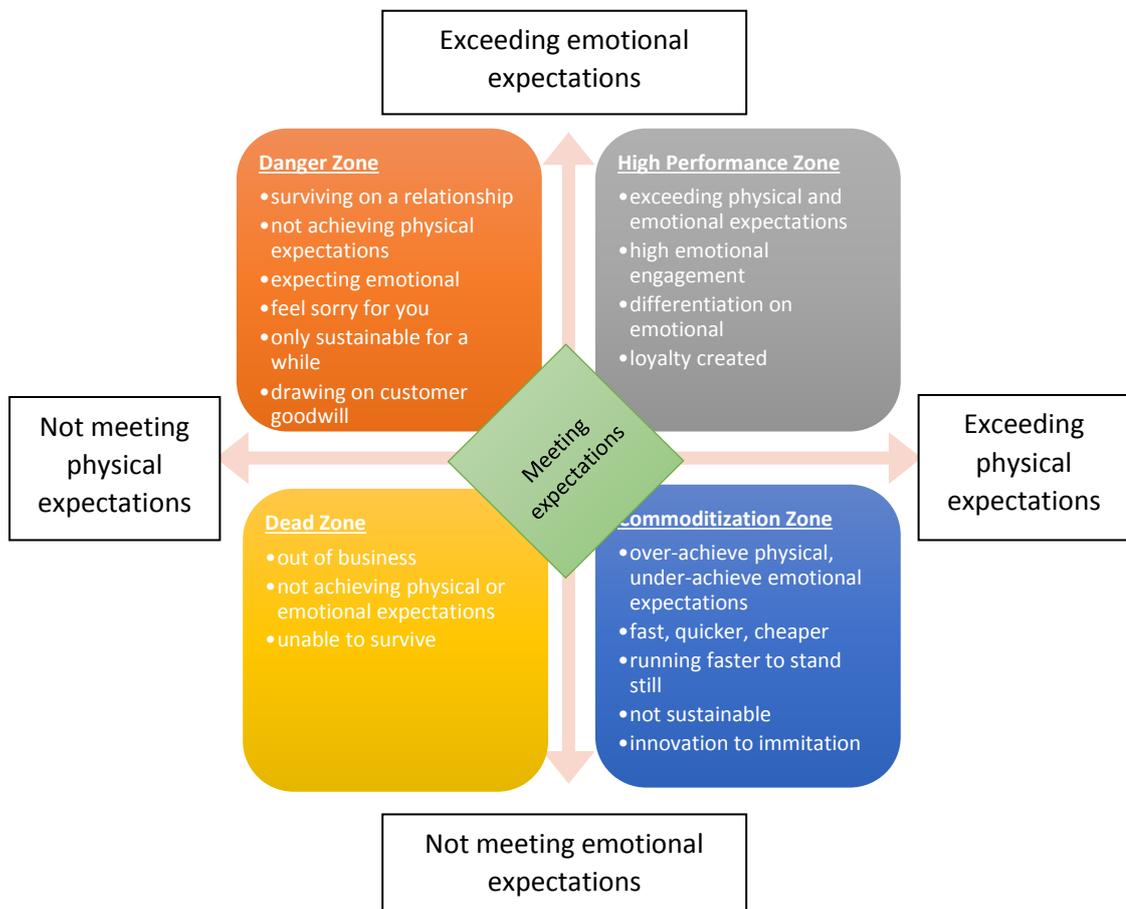
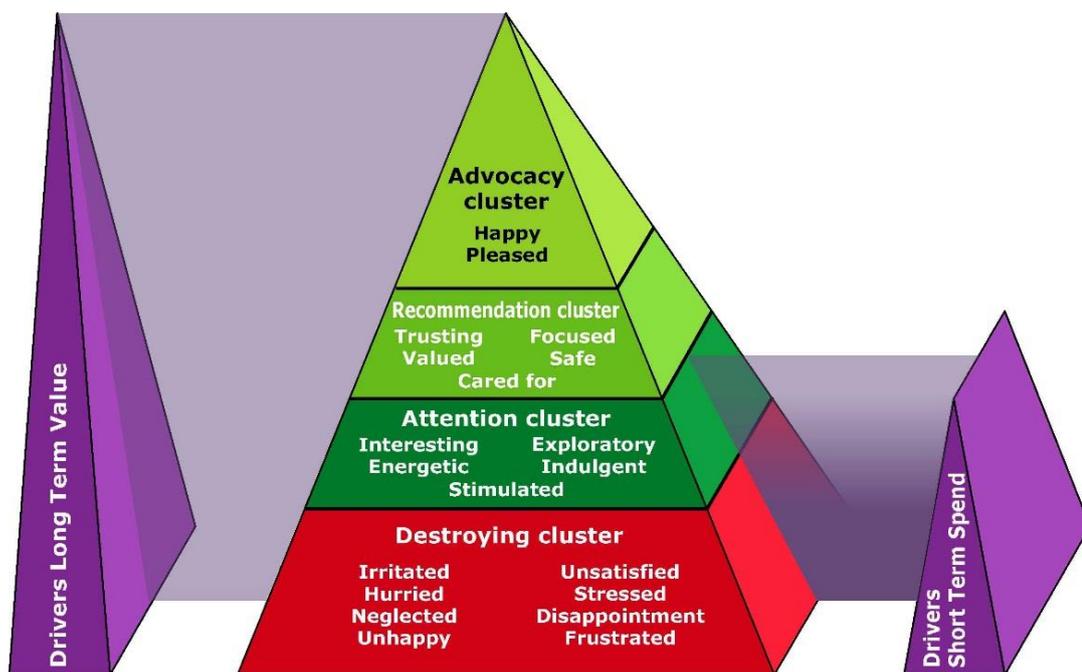


Figure 7.6 Customer expectation zones (Shaw and Ivens, 2002, p.40)

In summary, data on customer evaluations of these restaurants showed this to be far from a purely rational calculation, instead a process imbued with what Westbrook and Oliver (1991) term 'consumption emotions'. For Westbrook and Oliver these emotional responses can be categorised into distinctive emotions, in particular joy, anger, disgust or contempt; or distinguished into underlying categories of emotional response such as pleasant/unpleasant or calmness/excitement. The data presented above illustrates this range. Another way of conceptualising the emotional nature of the post-visit consumption dynamic is through the notion of 'emotional value' (Shaw et al., 2010). Figure 7.7 portrays Shaw et al.'s model of a hierarchy of emotional value.

They grouped 20 emotions into four main clusters, rising from those that are problematic for experiential economies to those that are of greatest value. At the bottom of the hierarchy are negative emotions that destroy value (such as irritation, frustration, disappointment). Greater in value are the 'attention cluster' emotions, such as interest, stimulation and energy, which make something appealing. Notably, though, this attentional economy is not of the highest value. Still greater in value are the 'recommendation' and 'advocacy' clusters, associated with emotional registers like trust, care and happiness (Shaw et al., 2010, p. 34). In other words, the attention and excitement produced by themed difference may prove to lack the value generating possibilities of sustained relationships of trust and care. At the least, theme restaurants face some difficult issues about how to sustain their markets. Customers who are emotionally driven will be looking for places which are able to fulfil their needs, not only to catch their eyes but also winning their hearts.



Hierarchy of Emotional Value

Figure 7.7 Hierarchy of emotional value by Shaw, Dibeehi and Walden (Shaw et al., 2010, p. 35)

7.3.2 Intentions to revisit

Previous research promoting aspects of the experience economy argument has suggested a somewhat simplistic relationship between investment in the physical environment of consumption spaces, the psychological reaction of customers, and subsequent consumer behaviour. Wakefield and Blodgett (1999), for example, note that physical environments play a key role in stimulating excitement in leisure settings, resulting in the intention to revisit and a willingness to recommend the place to others. Berry et al. emphasise the importance of atmospherics in generating enticing first impressions which in turn lead to memorable and satisfied experiences (Berry et al., 2006). The focus group data suggested a slightly more complex relationship between theme restaurants, customer experiences, emotional responses and subsequent potential for revisiting. In part this relates to the emphasis placed on 'occasional' consumption when discussing the motivations to visit theme restaurants in the first place; in part it relates to how the affective dinescapes of theme restaurants engage with consumers' 'attentional' emotions (Shaw et al., 2010) and perhaps less with emotions such as care and trust associated with revisiting.

First of all, then, most participants emphasised that they would visit a restaurant again only if the food had been appreciated. They claimed that a first visit would likely be because of the theme and ambiance, but on-going loyalty would be because of the food. If the food is not delicious, then that will be the first and last time they visit the restaurant. Participants across the focus groups sessions had similar comments to make on this:

FB 26: Well, it depends on the food. If the food is tasty, I will surely be coming back. If not, then that will be my first and only visit.
(Author's translation)¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ FB 26: haa, depends pada food la. Kalau food sedap mesti nak datang lagi. kalau tak sedap sekali je la.

- PR 34: If there is one particular thing that I like during the first visit, then I might want to revisit. I will go because of the food, not because of the ambiance anymore. The first time I went there was because I wanted to feel the ambiance. But on the second visit, I will not be excited with the ambiance anymore, right? Because I already know it. So the second time will be because of the food itself. (Author's translation)¹¹⁶
- PR 32: (...) normally, to make a repeat purchase at a theme restaurant, it will be because of the food. Because we already felt the ambiance. When the food is tasty, the ambiance is great, then we will automatically recommend it to friends. Or bring over the family members to revisit. (Author's translation)¹¹⁷
- FH 06: For me, I will evaluate the food. So if the food is not tasty then it will be the first and last time I go. If I wanted to try other food [on the menu] which might be tasty, but I sort of... banned the restaurant it's hard for me to go again. Unless if there is an event held at the restaurant. So I will just join them. But for me, to come again and dine in for the second time, it will be a no. (Author's translation)¹¹⁸
- HO 03: Does it taste good or not? (...) When a customer order a dish, let's say I order fried mee. If I can finish the food it means I enjoy the food. If I eat halfway or quarter, means your food is lousy. I can't finish it if it is tasteless, means the food is not good. You tell me why should I come again? I can't finish it even I hungry. (Original discussion in English)

On the other hand, at times, especially in relation to novel food choices, the 'difference' of themed restaurants can attract customers to revisit. One of the participants told her group that due to the unique and mysteriously themed menu and its variations, she purposely made several visits to the same restaurant to try different

¹¹⁶ PR 34: Mungkin sekali pergi tu kalau macam ada sesuatu yang kita suka baru kita akan repeat. Kita akan repeat because of food, bukan because of ambiance lagi dah. first kita pergi sebab kita nak tengok tempat tu. Kalau pergi second time tak ada la kita excited lagi tempat tu cantik ke apa kan. Sebab kita dah tahu. Second time kita akan pergi sebab food je

¹¹⁷ PR 32: (...) biasanya untuk repeat purchase dekat themed restaurant, nak pergi lagi dia kena because of food la. Sebab kita dah tahu dah. Tapi bila food dia bagus, theme dia hebat, ha memang akan automatically akan recommend pada kawan-kawan la. Atau bawa family untuk repeat.

¹¹⁸ FH 06: food jugak la. Kalau dilla memang kita firstly tengok food. Jadi kalau food tu dah tak sedap tu memang that's the first and last time la pergi. Kalau kita nak try makanan lain yang mungkin sedap, tapi kita dah macam ada banned restaurant tu. Dah tawar hati. Melainkan kalau ada event..so kita just join je la. Tapi kalau untuk kita datang dine in dalam tu lagi untuk second time tak la kan.

menu items on every visit. As she highly appreciated the theme and its uniqueness, she recommended it to her friends and families and brought new and different people to dine with her on each visit. Here Shaw et al.'s (2010) distinction of attentional and advocacy levels of emotional value (see Figure 7.7) is perhaps overstated. Strong appreciation of attentional emotional responses (such as excitement or curiosity) can generate advocacy. Likewise, at times the 'occasional' character of consumer relations to themed restaurants – i.e. their frequent use as settings for special occasions – can generate further custom, as the same restaurant is chosen to celebrate a different occasion. Consumers will arrange for another special celebration due to the fact that the theme restaurant is a suitable place to consume and capture memories on a special day in an extraordinary place. The following transcript extracts are examples of rationales for revisiting particular theme restaurants:

SD 11: Yes [agree to revisit] because I want to try another type of food. Especially on the dessert. It's quite expensive. RM13 for one slice. (Original discussion in English)

FH 08: That is why at every time I went there with a different person. Because I want to introduce [the restaurant] to them as the food is so good. I love it when the person I recommend does like the food and ambiance too. So we will not be bored because there are so many menu [items] (Author's translation)¹¹⁹

SD 21: If the food is tasty but it's expensive, I will come back but at certain times. [Maybe] reserve it for special occasion (...) bring other people. It depends. It might be for birthday or reunion for example. (Author's translation)¹²⁰

However, other customers reacted differently after experiencing the themed setting of the restaurant. They said that they would not return for the same experience. As they had 'felt' the different ambiance of the restaurant there was no point in them feeling it all over again. They would opt instead for other theme restaurants to explore

¹¹⁹ FH 08: macam saya suka la kalau orang yang kita recommend tu suka kan. So dia takkan boring la sebab banyak sangat menu.

¹²⁰ SD 21: sebab kalau makanan dia sedap, tp mahal, kita akan datang lagi cuma kita ikut time la. reserve for special occasion ke ape (...) bwk org lain la. Depends la. kalau birthday ke. reunion ke.

and in which to experience other new environments. Here, then, novelty and difference were ambivalent qualities to have produced; attracting initial custom but sometimes problematic when it came to encouraging customer loyalty. Customers were usually thrilled and excited during the first visit by experiencing something new and different; and thus revisiting the same place was unlikely to keep the excitement at such a high level as before. In addition, as dining at theme restaurants was occasional, some customers preferred to use the opportunity of a new occasion to discover a new experience, choosing to celebrate special occasions at different places in order to create distinct memories for distinct events. For example:

PR 34: Okay, It's quite hard to say that I will repeat my visit, unless.... I don't know. I personally like to go to new places. I love to try. (Author's translation)¹²¹

PR 31: I like to go to new places each time I want to celebrate a special occasion with my family. I want to explore. I will try other places. So the possibility to repeat the visit is unlikely to occur. (Author's translation)¹²²

SD 14: I think I will visit other themed restaurant in the next future. To experience the different ambiance and not the same restaurant all over again. (Original discussion in English)

More generally, Shaw and Ivens (2002) propose a negative relationship between the frequency of visits and the positive self-evaluation of the customer experience (see Figure 7.8). According to them, the frequency of visits affects the customers' emotional response too. What was initially exciting and different falls prey to the 'blight of the bland' through repetition and familiarity:

Frequency moves the customers from a highly differentiated experience at the beginning to a bland experience, if the company delivering it is not careful.

¹²¹ PR 34: Ok, kalau nak kata kita akan pergi lagi tu agak susah la. melainkan kita..tak tahula. Macam I, suka pergi tempat baru. Nak cuba.

¹²² PR 31: kalau celebrate something with family, so kita akan suka nak pergi tempat yang baru each time. Nak explore. Kita cuba tempat lain pula la. So possibility untuk repeat tu kurang la terjadi.

When you first have a new experience, the emotional impact will be large; however, as you experience the same customer experience over and over, your expectation changes (Shaw and Ivens, 2002, p. 55).

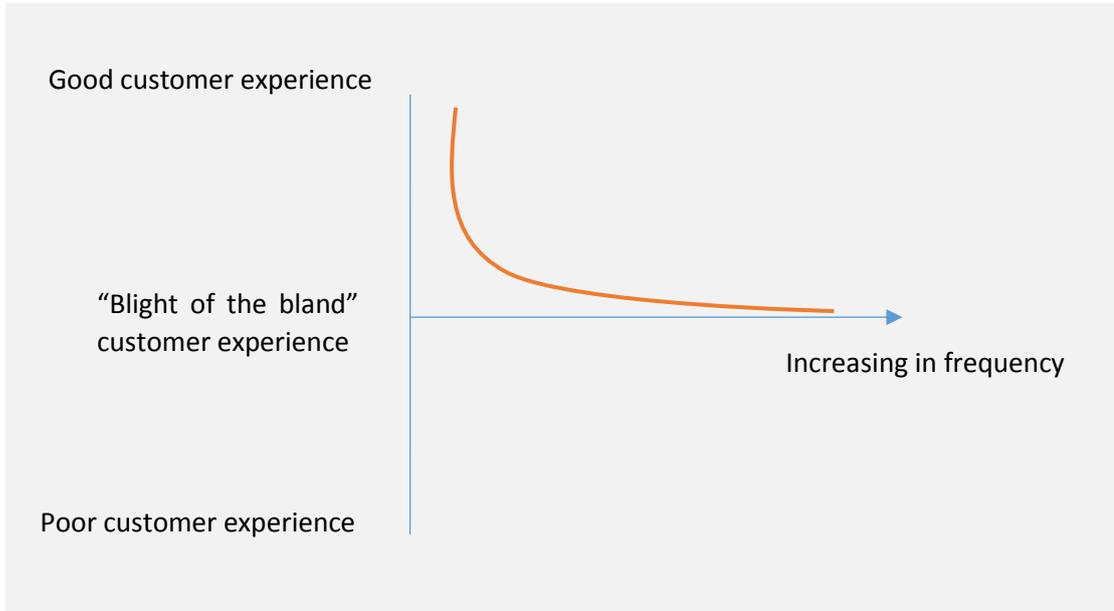


Figure 7.8 How frequency of exposure to an experience leads to the ‘blight of the bland’ by Shaw and Ivens (2002, p.56)

In other words, the market positioning of themed restaurants as ‘different’ (see Chapter 4), and their emphasis on affective engagements (see Chapter 6), can be difficult to sustain, undercut by consumers’ own patterns of exposure to them. Certainly, within the ‘food professional’ focus group there was concern that individual theme restaurants, if not the whole genre, would be unable to sustain themselves in the food and beverage industry.

FH 07: I think sometimes theme restaurants...are doing right. A lot of people dining there. But when it is time for us to go again, it’s not there anymore. I have experienced this a couple of times. It’s like they are not sustainable.

FH 10: ...because most of the time, it is the theme itself that gives the impact, but not the food. So it can't stay longer [in the market]. (All extracts: Author's translations)¹²³

Of course, there are potential commercial responses to this. You may recall from Chapter 5 how Flora Kafe regularly overhauled its ambiance within its floral theme (approximately every six months). Some of the group discussants had noticed and appreciated this practice:

FH 06: Flora Kafe will change its decoration in every six months so I will definitely be coming back as I know that I will be surprised...again!

SD 23: Flora Kafe... the ambiance is changed seasonally. It's great! They create a new environment to make us come back... to feel the different ambiance. (All extracts: Author's translation)¹²⁴

More generally though, in summary, there is a wider issue that theme restaurants wrestle with in terms of post-visit evaluations and intentions to revisit: the relationships between the emotional registers generated pre-visit and during a visit and the emotional registers that generate repeat custom. These are not unproblematically aligned. One further potential aspect of these emotional relations between different stages of the customer journey is how customers remember and share their theme restaurant experiences and it is to that issue that I now turn.

¹²³ FH 07: Rasanya, themed restaurant ni kadang-kadang erm..ok la. Ramai orang pergi. Tapi bila time kita nak pergi, dah tak ada. Ada juga la terkena macam tu sekali dua. Macam tak sustain.

FH 10: ...Sebab selalunya dia punya theme yang bagi impact, dia punya makanan tak seberapa. Jadi benda tu tak tahan lama.

¹²⁴ FH 06: Flora Kafe akan tukar decoration setiap 6 bulan dia tu, so kita mungkin akan datang sebab kita tau kita akan surprise...lagi!

SD 23: flora café... ambiance dia akan bertukar ikut season. So best la. Dia buat benda baru la untuk kita pegi balik...untuk rasa ambiance dia yang lain tu.

7.3.3 Remembering and sharing experiences

Shaw and Ivens' (2002) focus on post-visit evaluations is useful, but runs the danger of obscuring other vital post-visit practices. The remembering and sharing of experiences are particularly important. Theme restaurant customers do not only evaluate their experiences after their visits; they also share them. Satisfied customers normally showed forms of generic post-purchase behaviour such as spreading a positive image of the company (Boulding et al., 1993), making recommendations (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990), and on occasions even expressing loyalty to the company (LaBarbera and Mazursky, 1983; Rust and Zahorik, 1993) (though see the discussion above for some important limiting factors to this). More specifically, various forms of sharing and memory making practices were central to extending the customer experience beyond the actual restaurant space. These sharing activities might go through various forms such as WOM (word of mouth), chat groups and, of course, social media (chiefly Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). Smart phone technology and culture, in particular, encourage customers to share immediately what is happening, where they are, what they are doing, how they are feeling. In other words, through customers' own social practices the eventful situated experience of a theme restaurant is mediated, and extended in space and time.

When being asked about the use of social media in sharing the experience of themed restaurants, most participants agreed that they did share visits on social media, uploading photos and even recommending or condemning their visits to particular restaurants. The extract below from the discussions in one of the groups clearly portrays some key aspects of these practices:

Farah: So with the current trend of selfies and everything, do you take pictures during your visits to theme restaurants? Do you share them on social media then?

PR 30: Yes, I do. I definitely take pictures. Not necessarily to share it [on social media] but I want to promote it to others.

- PR 32: For me, it's for my personal collection. Before 2006, I share everything [online]. But now, it's no more. Because I don't have the time to do it and I think I want it for my own memories.
- PR 34: The trend to upload [pictures] started when facebook was invented. In 2008, I think. We have Friendster before that. But with Friendster, we didn't share the pictures because the uploading process was quite complicated. Because those pictures were in the camera and we have to transfer it first [to the laptop or computer]. Today, it's easy with the smartphone. We take pictures and instantly share them.
- PR 30: For me, it depends. If I think that everyone must visit this place, must try [the foods], then I will share it [my experience]. It is not necessarily at facebook. Sometimes at our personal group [chat group]. So we will share together the information.
- PR 31: Sometimes I share it with the family's chat group. But I share with the people close to me.
- PR 30: You know, because sometimes when we share at facebook, people will say we wanted to show off. [laugh]. (All responses: Author's translation)¹²⁵

The current trend of selfie culture (see Levin, 2014), particularly with the young generations, is important here. It encourages customers to take photos of the restaurant's ambiance, foods, drinks, cutlery, or even the parking lot! These pictures in part act as personal mementoes, but they also attract other people's attention and there are users who comment on or contact the person and seek for more information

¹²⁵ Farah: So sekarang kan trend selfie semua tu, korang ambil gambar tak masa pergi restoran? Then share tak kat social media?

PR 30: Ambil. Confirm ambil gambar. Sebab kita nak tunjuk, promote to the others.

PR 32: For me untuk personal je. Before 2006 tu everything share. Tapi lepas tu no more. Sebab tak ada masa and rasa macam nak untuk kenangan sendiri.

PR 34: Trend upload ni kan start bila ada facebook. Kita ingat lagi time tu kita buat master. Tahun 2008. Sebelum tu friendster. Tapi friendster kita tak share lagi gambar-gambar tu sebab nak upload tu macam leceh tau. Sebab gambar dalam kamera lepas tu nak kena transfer dulu. Macam sekarang mudah dengan smartphone. Tangkap gambar terus share.

PR 30: Kita depends, kalau kita rasa semua orang kena pergi tempat ni, kena cuba, so kita share la. Tak semestinya dekat facebook. Kadang dekat group kita. Kita share tu sekali dengan information la.

PR 31: Kadang share dengan wasap family ke. Tapi share pada orang terdekat la.

P30: Sebab kadang kalau kita share dekat facebook, orang cakap kita menunjuk. [ketawa]

regarding the visit. Reflecting generally on the relations between visual and consumer cultures, Schroeder (2002, p. 67) argues that:

Photography shapes experience: it guides how people see, what they see, what they remember, what they consider worth seeing, how they imagine things look, how they think about their own identity and that of others, and how they think of their ancestors. Photography surrounds consumption: it informs, it shows, it communicates, it structures choices, it dazzles and it offers a creative way of thinking about consumer experiences.

As a photographic culture, the selfie is implicated in new experiential consumer cultures, where the looping between different customer journey stages is intensified. Momentary experiences are digitally archived, but also act as pre-visit stimuli for other consumers (the activity of sharing the experience influencing other potential customers in making a decision to visit the place). Information shared on social media accounts can be a key determinant in shaping the potential customer's expectation towards the theme restaurant before they make their visit. The following figures show some screenshots of uploaded and shared photos from themed restaurants on social media.



Figure 7.9 A tweet on visit to theme restaurant (Noona, 2015)



Figure 7.10 Checked-in at theme restaurant (Lala, 2015)



Figure 7.11 A post of a visit to Sweetree on instagram (Aliffoslan, 2015)



Figure 7.12 Video of birthday celebration at theme restaurant posted on Facebook account (Lala, 2015)

These sharing practices are also ‘practices of remembering’ (Anderson, 2004, p. 1). When shared with fellow diners they allow collective experiences of the restaurant to be continued post-visit. Via their presence in social media displays, often on digital platforms with their own memory functions such as the highlighting of old content at future dates (e.g. to remind users of photos date marked one year before), the photos taken can operate as an active archive for both individuals and groups. Unfortunately, the focus group discussions did not explore these issues further. It might have required work with individuals on their post-restaurant visit social media and photographic practices to explore these issues fully. Nonetheless, the data generated

from the group discussions did suggest the importance of remembering to the post-visit stage of the 'customer journey', and hinted at the emotive nature of this process.

In summary, then, restaurant experiences and the emotions that they generate continue after visits, supported by new visual cultures of consumption. Three broader points can be made. First, the social media sharing of restaurant experiences is important for theme restaurants, engaging others in the restaurants' affective dinescapes, potentially recruiting new customers and enhancing pre-visit emotions of excitement and expectation. However, the extract from the focus group discussion presented above also illustrates how restaurant diners' investments in the new visual cultures of smartphones and social media require careful analysis. Social media sharing of experiences and emotions has its own (multiple and contested) modes of conduct, as illustrated by concerns over 'showing off' and by the tendency to share to known groups rather than general audiences. This research project did not fully pursue the nuanced emotional geographies of experiential consumption, photography and social media, but it suggests the potential for future work in this area. Second, the discussions on this subject in the focus groups also highlighted the importance of memory in the use of photography and social media. Literatures on both the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and affective materialities (Anderson, 2004) recognise how consumption practices combine an immediate eventfulness with 'practices of remembering' (Anderson, 2004, p. 1). In particular when considering the 'emotional value' (Shaw et al., 2010) of restaurant experiences, these practices of remembering would be a fruitful area for further research exploring how consumption continues well after a restaurant visit. Thirdly, the discussion of these issues highlights how the 'customer journey' (Norton and Pine, 2013) cannot simply be considered in terms of stages that follow in a linear progression (i.e. first the pre-visit stage, then the visit, then the post-visit stage). Rather, we see here a cultural-economic circuit of practices that interconnect: post-visit sharing and archiving practices shaping and shaped by conduct in the restaurant and activity before visiting it. There are fascinating questions about how affective experiences and emotional

responses are shaped by this circuit, some of which the focus group discussions investigated (e.g. the importance of social media attention in generating an emotional pre-disposition to visit a restaurant), some of which were little addressed and could be highlighted for further study (e.g. consumers' practical navigation of photographic and video recording as part of their dining experiences; e.g. how smartphone technologies and social practices relate to the materialities of theme restaurants, and whether this differs between the more staged and the multi-sensorial, ambient qualities of their experiencescapes). Here the research was not exhaustive but offers guidance for further future work.

7.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has analysed theme restaurant experiences from the perspective of the 'customer experience' (Shaw and Ivens, 2002). Drawing on material from the focus group discussions undertaken in Klang Valley, the analysis was structured in terms of a generic 'customer journey' (Holmed and Evenson, 2008; Norton and Pine, 2013), attending to the customer experience pre-, during and post-visit. Generally, the data from the focus group discussions emphasized how the experiential consumption of themed restaurants cannot be limited to the placed encounters between restaurant and customer, but extends through the wider geographies of the 'customer journey'. I further argued that this journey should be conceived of as a circuit or circuits of practices rather than a linear progression through separate stages. In terms of more specific findings, it can be concluded that customers primarily visited this type of restaurant on an occasional basis and for special celebrations. They normally knew about a particular restaurant through 'word of mouth' or social media reports from previous customers, rather than from direct advertising. They often made some preparation before making the visit, such as

reading reviews from blogs or looking for photos of foods and ambiance on the internet. This pre-visit activity promoted certain expectations ahead of arrival. During the dining occasion, customers' experiences were not uniform, shaped not just by the performance of the restaurant but also their own tastes and circumstances. After their visits, customers made evaluations and comparisons based on what they expected and what they really experienced during the visit. That evaluation obviously had an impact on decisions about further visits, but these were also shaped by a wider tension. Themed restaurants often appeal for their novelty, difference and excitement, but this may not always translate into loyalty from customers, as repeat visits dull these very qualities that attracted consumers in the first place.

This chapter has further argued that customer journeys are emotional journeys. Over the last decade, Human Geographers have suggested that we need to take emotions seriously and think through 'the body' to explore further how we feel because "our emotional relations and interactions weave through and help form the fabric of our unique personal geographies" (Davidson and Milligan, 2004, p.523). This argument can be usefully adopted in studies of hospitality consumption. Attending to the emotional geographies of commercial hospitality consumption also helpfully extends concerns with the affective materialities of restaurants into an exploration of their subjective encounter. Adopting Rose et al.'s (2010) terminology, I have argued that investigating diners' feelings of, in and about a restaurant space provide a way to overcome crude distinctions between the representational and non-representational, or in other words between meaning and sensing. As place must be felt to make sense (eg: Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Thrift, 2004; Anderson, 2006), the elements and interactions between the elements and people within a hospitality space are central to (but not the totality of) the meaningful feelings it produces. Hospitality marketers and operators have also recognised that understanding customers' emotions is important (Ladharia et al., 2008; Barsky and Nash, 2002; Yuksel and Yuksel, 2002). In that context, this study suggests that attending to emotional dynamics should be an important component of any work on customer journeys and consumer experiences.

8

Conclusion

In concluding the thesis, this final chapter has two main aims. First, it revisits the four research objectives set out in Chapter 1, summarising the main findings and arguments with regard to each. Second, this chapter reflects on the delimitations of the current study, and identifies trajectories from this study for future research directions.

8.1 Research objectives

The overall aim of the research was to investigate the production and consumption of Klang Valley theme restaurant places. In general terms, the study thus argued for approaching the hospitality industry through a focus on the production and consumption of 'hospitable' places. More specifically, the research explored this production and consumption of space in relation to four more specific objectives:

5. To analyse theme concept development in Klang Valley restaurants, and its role in their marketing;
6. To analyse the material 'dinescapes' (Ryu, 2005) of Klang Valley theme restaurants, and their role in the staging of dining out experiences;
7. To analyse the atmospheric, ambient and affective materialities of theme restaurants in Klang Valley;
8. To analyse the consumer experiences of theme restaurants in Klang Valley.

8.1.1 The marketing of themes and the marketing of experiences

With respect to the first research objective, three main findings can be highlighted. First, realizing that the growth of theme restaurants is due to the fact that diners are looking for a pervasive atmosphere rather than simply a good or different meal (Susan, 1992), owners and managers seek to differentiate themselves from their competitors. In so doing, the studied theme restaurant developers foregrounded longer standing recognitions in the hospitality sector of the importance of the overall 'atmosphere' of the places they (co-) produce for and with customers; as Finklestein (1989, p. 59) puts it, "the restaurateur has long accepted atmosphere as a feature of dining out equal in importance and sometimes more important than the food itself". The differentiations pursued can come from more specific perceptions of consumers and 'the market' too. Many of the studied restaurant themes and concepts emerged from more or less formal market research and understandings of consumer desires. Balancing the dual marketing concerns with 'connecting' their products to consumers, and 'differentiating' their product from others and from the 'bland' standard product, restaurant developers designed concepts as what I termed 'bridges', that could take consumers from their current tastes to somewhere new and different. In marketing themselves as 'different', such theme restaurants were careful to determine their 'style' (the combination of service, décor, price and atmosphere; see Susan, 1992) to appear unique and rare but at the same time familiar to customers, ensuring that they make a distance from their competitors yet concurrently stay close to their potential diners. In addition, though, many of the studied theme restaurant concepts also emerged from the owners' personal passions and biographies. Here, the theme developed can be imagined more as a 'destination', I suggested, that is designed to attract consumers to travel to it through some sharing of this passion.

Second, the research found that the themes staged in the restaurants engaged with, and shaped, wider consumer cultures, via the customer profiles. Sometimes, the staging of theme ambiance and its atmosphere create an appropriate environment for

niche groups of customers (Susan, 1992). A theme can be attractive to particular segmented groups of consumers and plays a part in the reproduction of those groups. These groups may relate to shared passions with the theme developers (for example, the enthusiasm for country music or motorbikes at Ayem Burger café); or to a specific fraction of cultural taste (e.g. the 'alternative', 'urban bohemian' aesthetic of Palate Palette). More generally, though, most of the studied theme restaurants sought to be places where consumers could come together in groups sharing the distinctive atmosphere putting aside differences in age or background in shared enjoyment and 'fun' (Josiam and Henry, 2014). This was particularly expressed in the targeting of families and friendship groups coming together for special occasions. The empirical research on consumer experiences, presented in Chapter 7, extended this analysis. It showed how this focus on providing memorable occasions was a chief marketing advantage of theme restaurants, but also problematic, above all because of the difficulties this posed for generating repeat business.

The third set of findings on marketing concerned the mediums used. The study showed that owners worked at 'introducing' their place to the world and engaging with customers through various platforms. This includes conventional promotional media and working with key intermediaries (e.g. in some cases, tourism authorities and operators). Increasingly important though, and based on the consumer research also found to be effective, are websites and social media engagement, including the enrolling of customers as advertisers through their social media sharing. The power of 'word of mouth' (WOM) is widely known; the current trend of WOC (word of click) extended the 'aura' of customer experience into the spaces of digital/viral marketing.

8.1.2 Material design, management and staging of experiences

With respect to the second research objective, the study yielded three main findings. First, it showed that the 'imagineering' of a theme (Chaney, 1997; Flusty and Raento, 2010) is much more than an imaginative process. It is profoundly material too. One key expression of this is the attention paid in the studied restaurants to the material culture of the 'DINESCAPE' (Ryu, 2005) elements. This study develops those ideas of 'dinescape', setting them within wider interests in 'experiencescapes' (O'Dell, 2005, 2010) and connecting them into insights from material culture studies on how things come to matter (Miller, 2010). Themed materials were the most obvious manifestation of the importance of material culture to the studied restaurants, acting as 'ambassadors' for the theme through: a) their representational power (acting as texts that can encode meaning and be decoded / read by consumers; e.g. greenery as 'natural', associated with 'relaxation' and 'escape' in the urban context of Klang Valley); b) their practical powers / affordances (acting as tools or technologies that invite and allow certain uses; e.g. the books, magazines and artefacts to develop cross-cultural engagement at Pondok Malindo, or the costumes to be worn at Sweetree Korean restaurant and Ayem cowboy Burger café); and c) their affective power (acting as bodies, with the power to be felt, to produce visceral responses).

Second, the research showed something of the complexity of the process of staging experiences, in terms of material design and on-going material management. In line with wider work on successful restaurant design (Baraban and Durocher, 2001), the research suggested the potential value of design practices, through the power of design and architecture to "sharpen, focus and integrate our senses" (Pallasmaa, 2008, p. 6), see beyond an array of physical materials and beginning to inhabit another world. In reality, most of the studied restaurants engaged in this complex process with limited resources and staffing. On the one hand, this opened up weaknesses and invited problems before or after the business began operation. On the other hand, it

could also lend the material designs an evident 'authenticity', driven forward by the creative capacities of an individual owner or small team.

Third, and relatedly, the research suggested how the relationships between restaurants and their material 'dinescapes' included questions about the poetics and politics of representation. This was most evident in the 'international theme restaurants', where the theming carried the weight of representing existent places and cultures.

8.1.3 Affective dinescapes, atmospheres and ambiance

With respect to the third research objective, three main sets of findings and arguments emerged. First, the idea of 'affective dinescape' was developed, highlighting the affective qualities of the DINESCAPE elements (Ryu, 2005) identified in the existing hospitality management literature. Specific suggestions included analysing restaurant design in terms of its 'affective engineering' (Thrift, 2004; Ash, 2010; Miller, 2014). One example of this was the role of seating design in orchestrating the bodies of diners. Seating options, such as low level cross-legged *bersila* seating, are not merely decorative, nor solely representational (conveying meanings); they directly engage the bodily practice and comportment of diners, in so doing adjusting their moods through shaping their bodies.

Second, and relatedly, the study added to wider debates over how 'theatrical' framings of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) extend beyond an emphasis on the organisational production of a show for an audience (consumers) (Crang, 1994), and into more 'immersive' forms of theatre. In drama studies, immersive theatre "ensures the audience, their presence and sentient involvement within the work is the central concern" (Machon, 2013, p. 26). As Machon (2013, p. 67) highlights, in "this live(d), *praesent* experience, the participant's physical body

responding within an imaginative environment, is a pivotal element of an immersive experience". In other words, immersive theatre practice provides useful parallels with the commercial production of experiencescapes or stages, placing particular emphasis on the embodied immersion of consumers into these worlds. Recent geographical theorisations of 'affective atmospheres' (e.g. Anderson, 2009) are helpful here, suggestive of how our senses of places' distinct qualities work through material productions of, and immersions in, their 'affective fields' (Conradson and Latham, 2007). This atmospheric immersion takes customers into the particular theme's space/time/place or world: "I feel like I am in Bali!" said one customer.

Third, the research argued for the importance of 'background' or 'ambient' elements of the restaurant experiencescapes. Deploying ideas of ambiance from Thibaud (2002, 2011) (see also Adey et al., 2013), the research discovered the importance of the multi-sensual nature of themed space and the multi-sensory methods of appreciation required in experiencing it (Pallasmaa (2005). More specifically, it showed how the production and consumption of themed places works through various different ambient dimensions, including sonic ambiance, luminous ambiance, olfactory ambiance and thermal ambiance. For the industry, the research endorsed previous emphases on the importance of designing and managing these ambient elements. Attending to ambiance, usefully reinforces the understanding that restaurant design is about creating experience not just a look (Baraban and Durocher, 2001) (though clearly the visual sense is part of experience creation).

8.1.4 The consumer theme dining experience: A total customer journey

The fourth research objective was 'to analyse the consumer experiences of theme restaurants in Klang Valley'. Here there were two main sets of findings. First,

developing and complementing the findings on the production and staging of experiences outlined above, the research highlighted how ‘customer experiences’ (Shaw and Ivens, 2002) were complex and not simply controlled by a design process. In particular, the research argued against seeing the ‘affective engineering’ of these spaces as impacting upon consumers in some simple way. In part this was a matter of consumer agency; diners were not simply dictated to by restaurant design, rather invited to perform in particular ways on the stage. However, also crucial was a more complex understanding of the customer experience, and the multiple levels at which their experiences and feelings exist. The empirical findings set out in Chapter 7 bore out Rose et al.’s (2010) arguments on the complexity of people’s feelings in relation to place. Otherwise, the findings in this chapter highlighted the ambiance and creation of feeling in theme restaurants. In the context of research on ‘architectural geographies’ and shopping centre inhabitation, Rose et al. (2010) argued that sensitivity towards any building consists of the feelings *of*, *in* and *about* that building. This was apparent in consumer experiences of theme restaurants. These involved feelings *of* these restaurants, i.e. the affective and immersive responses and senses discussed in Chapter 6. However, it also involved consumer feelings *in* these restaurants, specific emotional states and processes that were related also to the customer’s own emotional life, the dynamics of their social group etc.. Furthermore, in Chapter 7, and in the marketing discussions of Chapter 4, it was apparent that customer feelings *about* these places was important, with sensory and emotional reactions being filtered through lenses of cultural judgement and evaluation.

Secondly, the thesis (in Chapter 7) argued for understanding consumer experiences in terms of a ‘journey’ (Norton and Pine, 2013) that involves a circuit of pre-, during- and post-visit processes (Shaw and Ivens, 2002). A key finding here, then, is that customer experiences extend beyond the time-space of immersion in the theme restaurant environment itself. Pre-visit, ‘virtual experiences’ are important with ‘word of mouth’ and ‘word of click’ triggers being especially prominent. These spaces of viral and digital marketing (as also discussed in Chapter 4) generally helped customers in making their

decision to pay a visit, and more specifically gave them ‘physical and emotional expectations’. ‘Post-visit’, informants talked about the evaluations they made, in part through comparing expectations and actuality. They also discussed their complex reasoning with respect to revisiting, with implications for the extent to which a marketing based on difference through ‘novelty’ (as opposed to ‘translocalisation’ or ‘destandardization’; see Chapter 4) is sustainable. Chapter 7 also collected some valuable insights from the customers’ points of view on post-visit ‘*re-enacting of the experience*’, in particular through digital media archiving and sharing practices. Avenues for further work on these issues were highlighted.

8.1.5 Functions of theming space

These specific findings and arguments with respect to the four thesis objectives also suggest some broader insights for approaches to the theming of hospitality spaces. Specifically, I propose that they suggest a four-fold schema for thinking about the functions of theming space. This schema is set out below as a contribution to wider scholarship on themed environments in the field of CHMR. In line with the development of this PhD research, the schema is illustrative of how scholarship in CHMR can be enhanced through engaging with debates in the social sciences generally and Human Geography more particularly. In outline, the schema suggests understanding the theming of commercial hospitality spaces through four lenses: as a mode of ‘introduction’, signaling the product and experience on offer; as a mode of ‘representation’, using material decoration of the restaurant space to attach wider cultural meanings to the dining experience; as a mode of ‘affect’, engaging with consumers through the body and its physical senses; and as a mode of ‘guidance’, choreographing customer experiences.

An understanding of theming as mode of *introduction* engages with wider understandings of brands and branding; i.e. it understands theming as a form of branding. Brands are crucial commercial and cultural forms in the twenty-first century (Lury, 2004, 2011). In Chapter 3 I discussed how themed environments might be thought of as ‘brandsapes’ (Klingmann, 2007), spatial expressions of branding processes. Let me now elaborate. Originally used simply as a designation for “an identifiable kind or variety of good or service” (Pike, 2009: 619), brands have now become central motors of contemporary cultural economies, a process for entangling products within wider cultural networks and thereby generating value. Thus, Goldman and Papson (1998) explore how Nike branding operates at two levels: as an identifiable naming of products, using technologies such as logos (e.g. the swoosh, the Nike name and font); and as extension of those products into a much wider brand-space, as when Nike relates its products to sporting achievement (via sports celebrity production and sponsorship) and other forms of personal transcendence and authenticity (in particular, Goldman and Papson offer a rich analysis of Nike’s complicated relationships with Black American culture). To put that differently, brands both condense products (distilling them to the brand logo) and extend products (entangling them with a range of other phenomena, with the aim of generating value). In framing themed restaurants as performing ‘introductions’, I seek to point to these dual dynamics. Thus, on the one hand, a restaurant theme seeks to offer a shorthand for the experience that the consumer might have within it. A theme is a sign, signaling in condensed form qualities of the dining out experience. It introduces that experience to the consumer, aiding marketing endeavours, and helping to differentiate the restaurant from its competitors. On the other hand, though, a restaurant theme also seeks to introduce diners to experiential elements beyond dining per se. It operates as a ‘hyperlink’ (Lury, 2004) to other worlds and spaces. It entangles the restaurant and its hospitality with other cultural forms. By way of illustration, let me take just one example, the ‘Upin Ipin’ restaurant, themed in relation to the Upin Ipin animation series (as discussed in Chapter 4). On the one hand, this restaurant theming is part of

a project designed to condense Malaysian childhood cultures into a singular brand that can operate across product areas (television, magazine, restaurant). Part of its success comes from the ability of the Upin Ipin iconography (the name, the animated pictures of the characters, etc.) to communicate with consumers immediately and without further explanation. The Upin Ipin restaurant needs no additional introduction; the theme introduces it. On the other hand, the restaurant theme is designed to entangle a dining / hospitality experience with something else, with a media product, with the imagined world that Upin and Ipin inhabit. It introduces its customers into that world. This is not a simple process. There are complex translations to effect. For Upin Ipin the food menu proved particularly tricky, manifesting a wider difficulty in entangling a restaurant where parents / adults accompany children to a television series and world directed at children alone (you may recall discussion in both Chapters 4 and 7 from manager and customers, over the degree to which the menu should target only children's tastes or adults' food tastes too).

Secondly, I suggest that theming restaurants also operates as a mode of *representation*. Here, my argument is that the entangling or associating of a theme restaurant with wider cultural meanings (cf. Pike, 2009, on branding) is in part a representational process. Within Human Geography, interest in processes of representation is particularly associated with the resurgence of anglophonic 'cultural geography' from the late 1980s (see, for example, Duncan and Ley, 1993). Drawing on wider theoretical developments in cultural studies (Hall, 1997), representation was theorised across two axes. First, in terms of poetics and politics: as a power-laden process of signification. Second, in terms of text and context: as forms of meaning-making shaped by, and shaping, their socio-cultural contexts. In part, Cultural Geographers used the lens of representation to examine the meanings of places and landscapes produced and circulated through expressive forms, such as the visual arts, literature, film and so forth. However, crucially, they also recognised places themselves as representational forms, for example interpreting built environments and their aesthetics in terms of the meanings they conveyed (i.e. as a text with poetics)

and the socio-cultural dynamics in which they were implicated (i.e. as part of political contexts) (e.g. see Duncan and Duncan, 2004). With respect to theming and hospitality spaces, these representational approaches to place thus suggest a number of matters for analysis. First, as already apparent in work by the likes of Gottdiener (1997) and Goss (1993), they point to the need for critical interpretation of what themed environments choose to represent, and what they do not. Theme restaurants are part of wider trends in consumer and culinary cultures to deploy imaginations of other times and places for commercial ends (Cook and Crang, 1996). Studies of theme restaurants can usefully consider the reasons for common themes being adopted (e.g. 'nature'; see Goss, 1993) and how themes differ across specific contexts (e.g. in Klang Valley, the 'Indian' restaurant themes differ in interesting ways from 'Indian' restaurants in a context such as the UK). Secondly, and this was more the concern of this thesis, there is a need for research on the process of theme representation, and in particular the material design and management involved. This thesis points to the importance of understanding how commercial experiences are staged through material environments and objects. It suggests moving beyond a narrow rendering of Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theatrical metaphors for the experience economy, which place emphasis on the commercial performances put on for consumers, broadening it to consider the stage itself as part of a more immersive process. Furthermore, whilst Gottdiener's (1997) accounts of theming were part of his broader semiotic approach to architecture and the built environment (1995), this thesis suggests that attending to theme environments involves more than a purely semiotic approach and instead proposes a 'material semiotics', that addresses not just what theme environment materials mean but also how they come to be assembled and to perform experiences.

Thirdly, this material-semiotic emphasis can usefully lead to an explicitly 'more-than-representational' approach, which recognises theming as a mode of *affect*. As discussed in more depth in Chapter 6, over the last decade Human Geography has been less pre-occupied with the representational concerns of Cultural Geography and increasingly focused on questions of affect (see Anderson, 2014 for an introductory

overview). More specifically, bodies of work on material culture and its representational meanings have been joined by various sorts of 'affective materialism' (Anderson and Wylie, 2009). For CHMR research on theming, I do not think it is helpful to view representation and affect as mutually exclusive, competing concerns. Instead, an affective emphasis usefully extends a representational emphasis. First, it does this by paying greater attention to the immersive character of themed experiences and environments. Themed environments are not only experienced as external material forms that can be perceived and interpreted; they are also spaces that consumers inhabit. Second, this inhabitation involves the full array of senses, with which themed environments can potentially be designed to engage. In other words, theming a restaurant involves designing immersive, sensual experiences. In Chapter 6 I highlighted a number of concepts that aid the critical understanding of this affective theming, including 'ambiance' (Adey et al., 2013; Thibaud, 2002), 'affective atmosphere' (Anderson, 2009) and 'affective fields' (Conradson and Latham, 2007). This thesis provides a rare piece of work within the CHMR field using such ideas (though see also Lugosi, 2008) and argues for their further development in other future studies. It has offered an original contribution in attending both to the 'affective engineering' (Thrift, 2004) involved in restaurant design and to the embodied, sensual character of restaurant consumption (see also Edensor and Falconer, 2015). Whilst the dense theoretical vocabularies of affective approaches (for an example, see Anderson and Wylie, 2009) may be off-putting to many in the CHMR community, their insights are of clear practical import and value, as we seek to understand better the production and consumption of restaurants that produce memorable dining out experiences.

Fourthly, the thesis also presented an approach to theming that recognised it as a mode of *experience guidance*. One potential criticism of the three approaches outlined above is that they downplay the active and performative nature of consumption. Viewing theming as a mode of *introduction* leaves open the question of how consumers relate to the restaurant brand. Seeing theming as a mode of

representation runs the danger of casting theme restaurants as texts to be read and of occluding the actual processes of 'reading' that consumers undertake. Framing theming as a mode of *affect* centres the encounter between restaurant environments and the embodied consumers, but can downplay the varied nature of those encounters and the feelings they generate (Rose et al., 2010). Finally, then, this thesis also suggests a more performative rendering of theme restaurant production and consumption, one which sees theming as a way to guide that encounter between customer and restaurant in the context of a longer 'customer journey' (Norton and Pine, 2013). Here, emphasis is placed on how a theme intervenes in and guides this customer journey, shaping (but not determining) how consumers prepare for a visit and what they expect from it, how they behave when visiting a restaurant, and how they recall and share their experience afterwards. As a 'guide', theming is neither simply a textual sign to be read nor simply an engineered environment impacting on the customer's body, senses and emotions; it is part of the practical performance of the customer experience. This thesis points to the value of further work within CHMR that examines exactly how this guiding process develops, whether through marketing materials, spatial design of restaurants (Svabo et al., 2013) or the management of post-visit relations.

8.2 Future directions for research

All studies have limits. This helps provide focus but also can leave important questions unanswered or under-explored. Looking back with hindsight at the eventual findings of this work, and reflecting from that perspective on the research design process through which specific conceptual and empirical foci developed (see Chapter 3), two broad areas for future work are apparent that take forward and extend this study.

The first of these areas is further work on the restaurant as a produced and consumed place. As it developed, this study became increasingly focused on the place of the restaurant and its findings suggest further avenues for work within restaurant studies. I hope that one of its contributions within CHMR is to propose further work on restaurants as places and further engagements between hospitality management studies and Human Geography. There are obviously many potential areas for work here, and many that have already been pursued. However, areas for further development might include ethnographic and autoethnographic research on restaurants as multi-sensorial places, including both the ambient dimensions discussed in Chapter 6 and the sensory pleasures of food (deliberately excluded from this study in order to foreground the environmental materialities of restaurants) (Edensor and Falconer, 2015, provides an inspiration here, with its focus on the exceptional cross-sensory dynamics of 'Dans le noir?').

The second area for future research is more concerned with various issues that became 'contextual' rather than central to this study. Here, then, there is potential for further work that moves beyond the theme restaurant place per se and explores theme restaurants' wider geographies. For instance, in the Klang Valley setting, the current study could be developed into a project focused on the relationships between global and local geographies in theming practice. The work presented here contests the assumption that themed environments are associated with the spread of a corporately designed, pre-programmed commercial culture of 'non-places' (Ritzer, 2004). The restaurants studied are local innovations, not imported branches. Tellingly, Planet Hollywood outlet in Klang Valley closed. However, they are local innovations deploying variously globalised cultural forms: the very language and aesthetic of theming; the ideas of elsewhere that circulate globally (such as aesthetics of Indonesianness). Further, they often explicitly strive for a trans-localisation of experience as they take customers 'elsewhere' (see Chapter 4). Exploring how Malaysia's themed restaurants variously articulate ideas of the global and local would

be a separate study that could usefully extend broader arguments about the cultural geographies of consumer culture and post-modernity in the country.

Another potential extension of the current work would be to engage restaurant theming and experience with broader debates on cultural politics in Malaysia, in particular with reference to the country's multiculturalism. As noted, Malaysia's population consists of three major ethnic identifications, which are Malay, Chinese and Indian. The initial option of studying restaurants 'themed' in relation to these Malaysian ethnicities was, in the end, not taken up in this study (see Chapter 3 for discussion). A future study based on these three 'themes' for restaurants would allow for investigation of how owners 'map' their restaurants in the multiracial consumer market of Malaysia. It would also allow analysis of the extent to which the development of material 'experiencescapes' is directed at intra-community consumption or cross-community consumption. The material and imaginative representation of ethnic identities could be considered, allowing the hospitality industry to be understood as a realm of multicultural poetics and politics (for a study of this kind see Vadi, 2016). The material management of theme ambiance could be investigated, with consideration given to how such affective dimensions relate to cultural relations between ethnic groups. On the consumer side, such research could consider how customers with different ethnic backgrounds accept or reject the food, material culture and ambiance of other Malaysian cultures within the restaurant sector.

Finally, another area for future development concerns the policy connections or practical applications of the findings from this study. In the future, I want to apply these discoveries into policies or as guidelines to benefit related parties, such as the local hospitality industry and entrepreneurs. In part, this will be a pedagogic task; using the findings from this study to assist hospitality students' courses or subjects. In part, it might mean developing guidelines to assist new or existing entrepreneurs in the food and beverage industry, with a particular focus on theming ambiances.

Alerting the owners and their management teams to best practice suggestions will help them to stage successful and affective ambiances in order to offer memorable dining experiences.

Appendix 1 Participant Information Sheet



DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY
ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

I would like to invite you to participate in this original research project. You should only participate if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

Title of the research

DINESCAPE: Themed restaurants and consumer culture in Malaysia.

What is the aim of the research?

This research aims to investigate the relationship between restaurant ambience and customer experience. The researcher is interested in understanding: the forms of design, decoration and ambience in themed restaurants; and how customers value the experience of dining in themed restaurants. In particular, the research focuses on three types of themed restaurant across the Klang Valley area in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: the Malaysian ethnic restaurant, the internationally themed restaurant, and special theme restaurants.

Do I have to take part?

Your participation is voluntary. You are invited to participate in this study as it is believed that you can make an important contribution to the research. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form that will be stored separately with the response given). You are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you are happy to participate in the research, we will arrange for an interview/focus group session at a mutually agreed upon location and time. Each session will last for approximately 1 to 2 hours. During the session, you will be asked about the restaurant that you ****own/design/built/visit** and tell your experiences at the restaurant. You are free not to

answer any question if you do not wish to. You also have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed.

Will I be recorded?

The interview and focus group session will be recorded using a voice recorder and video camera to facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed for analysis. Photographs of the restaurant design will be taken and a short video of the restaurant environment will be recorded.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All information provided will be kept strictly confidential. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to it. All data collection, storage and analysing will comply with the law.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

All information provided by you will be stored on a computer with analysis of the information obtained undertaken by the researcher and the supervisor. The results from this analysis will be available in one or more of the following sources; PhD theses, scientific papers in peer reviewed academic journals; presentations at a regional conference; local seminars.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

You will be given a souvenir as a token of appreciation and to thank you for taking the time to participate. Light foods and drinks will also be provided (for focus group session only to thank you for your travel to the session's place). You will not, however, benefit financially from the research in any other respect.

Contact for further information

You are free to contact the researcher or the supervisor at any time for further information.

RESEARCHER

Name : Farah Adibah Che Ishak
Address: Department of Foodservice Management,
Faculty of Food Science and Technology,
Universiti Putra Malaysia
43400 UPM Serdang
Selangor, Malaysia

Email : Farah.Chelshak.2012@live.rhul.ac.uk

Tel : +603-89468367

SUPERVISOR

Name : Prof Philip Crang
Address: Department of Geography
Royal Holloway, University of London
Egham Hill
Egham
Surrey
TW20 0EX
United Kingdom

Email : P.Crang@rhul.ac.uk

Tel : +44 1784 443645

Appendix 2 Consent Form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Research Title: DINESCAPE: Themed restaurant and consumer culture in Malaysia.

Researcher: Farah Adibah Che Ishak

I have read the information sheet about this study.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I have received satisfactory answers to any questions.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

YES

NO

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Participant's Name:

Contact Details (including telephone number and e-mail address):

Researcher's Signature:



Date:

Researcher's Name: Farah Adibah Che Ishak

This project is supervised by: Prof Philip Crang

Note: This Consent Form will be stored separately from the responses you provide. There should be no data collected on the consent form as this will be stored separately from data.

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE - RESTAURANT OWNERS/MANAGERS

1. Can you share the history of this restaurant? Perhaps how you get the idea of the theme or the factors contributed to generate the theme.
2. From the owner's view, what is the concept or theme of this restaurant? (This might differ from the customer's view)
3. How long does it take to operate the restaurant, from the idea generated, the process of designing and building to the opening ceremony?
4. Can you tell me the process of designing this restaurant?
5. Is there any team formed to design this place? Who are parts of this team?
6. In your opinion, what is the strength element of this restaurant? Or the uniqueness of this restaurant that draw the customers to dine in.
7. How was the customer's feedback on the theme? Do they like it or are there any comments from them? Be it positive or negative.
8. From an academic view, there is a term DINESCAPE, which means the physical man-made aspects that contribute to the environment in a themed restaurant. There are 5 elements which are:
 - **Facility aesthetic** (décor, colour, furnishing, material)
 - **Ambiance** (temperature, lighting, noise, music, and scent)
 - **Layout** (the arrangement of furnishings, seating and tables, equipment)
 - **Service product** (Food presentation, serving size, menu design, and food varieties, table decoration, tableware)
 - **Social factors** (employee appearance, number of employees, gender of employees, and dress or physical appearance of other customers)
9. From these elements, I would like to go through each element in detail.

FACILITY AESTHETIC

10. How did you choose the material in decorating the restaurant?
11. How the colour chosen and its combination did reflect the themed or helps in boosting the effect of the theme?
12. Do you think that choosing the expensive furnishing material will make the environment more outstanding?

AMBIANCE

13. Who is responsible in creating the ambiance, you as the owner or the interior designer hired?

14. How do you set the right temperature in this restaurant? (own comfort or according to customers feedback, as there might be different temperature acceptance in human)
15. Do you think lighting plays an important role in your restaurant?
16. Do you set the lighting scale on your own or you refer to someone expert, like say the lighting engineer?
17. How do you think lighting give impact to the overall environment, the food presentation and the psychology of the customer?
18. How do you set the music played? The level, the music/song chosen. Who is responsible on the audio in your restaurant?
19. Do customer ever comment on the music /song played?
20. Do you accept songs request from the customers?
21. Do you feel that the music does entertain the customer personally or it is just an element in creating the themed and comfort the customer?
22. Do you take the advantage of the scent of food in influencing the customer?
23. Or do you use any other artificial scent to give the comfort to the customer and environment?

LAYOUT

24. How do you arrange the seating and furnishing to give the best of environment in your restaurant?
25. Do you refer to the architect or interior designer in arranging them?
26. Do you occasionally change the floor plan?
27. Does the types of seating material affect how long the customers dine in?
28. Do you opt for group seating or individual/couple seating in creating the environment?

SERVICE PRODUCT

29. Does the menu reflect the themed?
30. Does the food presentation reflect the theme?
31. Is the table decoration is according to the theme as well?

SOCIAL FACTORS

32. How many employees do you have in the house?
33. Do they wear any uniform that match with the themed?
34. Do you think that the gender of the employee is an issue for the customer? Maybe the customers are more comfort when male or female waiters serve them?
35. From all these elements, which element do you think that contribute the most in creating the themed environment as what you imagine in the first place?
36. Which of these elements give huge impact to the customers?

Appendix 4 Focus Group Guide

FOCUS GROUP SESSION GUIDE

Step 1: Introduction

Introduce myself: Name, currently a student in RHUL, in the period of data collection.

Appreciation: Thanks everyone for being there, say everyone's name so that others can know, they can have their meal before/after session.

Briefing on the research: give title of research, a brief on the research topic, aims and overall, participation is voluntary and can withdraw at any time, data will be kept confidential, the analysis will appear in theses and academic journal, and contact details myself and supervisor if anything. Distribute the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form. Ask them to sign and hand it back to me.

Step 2: Brief the method of group discussion

State clearly that the reason we gather is to share the experience and information of them going to any themed restaurant in Malaysia. This is an informal discussion so everyone is free to speak, add in or argue any issue related. They can agree or disagree on anything others say and they can interrupt at any time. As a moderator, I will start the discussion by asking a question and others may respond.

Step 3: Start the session

I will explain a bit on what is a themed restaurant in my research context, the types and examples. I will show the pictures of themed restaurants so they can have an idea about it and might remember their experience with these types of restaurants.

Q1:	Can everyone/anyone share their experience with themed restaurants? Perhaps you can tell the name of the restaurant, what theme it's applied, when do you go there....
	What about others? Do you have experience going there?
Q2:	How do you know about these restaurants? From friends' recommendation, advertisement, facebook...

Q3:	Why do you go to these restaurants and with whom do you normally go? How many are they?
Q4:	Do you take picture when you visit the restaurant? The ambiance and the food... Do you share the experience and the pictures with others? Or is it just for personal collection only?
Q5:	What is the main thing that makes you remember themed restaurant?

Step 4: End the session and thanks the participant

I would like to thanks all of you for spending some time for this focus group session. You experience and information helps me a lot in analysing this trend in Malaysia. Please help yourself with the food and drinks and allow me to give these souvenirs as a token of appreciation to all of you.

Appendix 5 The Composition of Focus Group Participant

FOCUS GROUP COMPOSITION

Below are the composition of the focus group's participants, showing the details such as the date of the session, coding of group and the participants' general profile.

DATE OF SESSION	DETAILS	PARTICIPANTS
30/05/2014	Profile: Hospitality Person	HO 01 HO 02 HO 03 HO 04 HO 05
	Code: FG001-HO-EQ	
	Participants are the people working in hospitality industry, particularly hotel in Klang Valley. They are currently servicing in various hotel departments namely sales and marketing, finance, food and beverage, and security. They are ranging in 30-50 years old.	
11/06/2014	Profile: Food Hunter	FH 06 FH 07 FH 08 FH 09 FH 10
	Code: FG002-FH-SD	
	Participants in this group are the food enthusiasts who eager to try out new food and restaurants as well as has a lot of experiences visiting theme restaurants. They are in the range of 25-35 years old.	
06/06/2014	Profile: Student Group 1	SD 11 SD 12 SD 13 SD 14 SD 15
	Code: FG003-SD-PA	
	Participants in Student Group 1, 2 and 3 are all students, final year in Bachelor in Hotel Management, has background knowledge and practical in food and beverage industry and visits to theme restaurants. They are in the range of age 22-25 years old.	
14/06/2014	Profile: Student Group 2	SD 16 SD 17 SD 18 SD 19
	Code: FG004-SD-PA	
	- Same as above –	

DATE OF SESSION	DETAILS	PARTICIPANTS
		SD 20
14/06/2014	Profile: Student Group 3	SD 21 SD 22 SD 23 SD 24 SD 25
	Code: FG005-SD-PA	
	- Same as above –	
26/06/2014	Profile: Food Blogger	FB 26 FB 27 FB 28 FB 29
	Code: FG006-FB-PJ	
	Participants are either do have blog or active in social media. They keep updating their activity and thoughts and uploading photographs. They are in the age of 25-30 years old.	
01/07/2014	Profile: Professional Group 1	PR 30 PR 31 PR 32 PR 33 PR 34
	Code: FG007-PR-DG	
	Participants in Professional Group 1 and 2 are the academicians, major in hospitality field particularly hotel, tourism, food service and culinary arts. They have background education in hospitality and been teaching in the same field for at least 3 years. Their education level at Bachelor, Master or hold PhD. They are aged between 25 to 40 years old.	
01/07/2014	Profile: Professional Group 2	PR 35 PR 36 PR 37 PR 38 PR 39
	Code: FG008-PR-DG	
	- Same as above –	

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