



RESTAURANT DESIGN



INNOVATIVE RESTAURANT GROUP

Roku mixes a hollywood aesthetic with traditional japanese materials like oil-rubbed teak and walnut.

The Allure of Japanese Interior Design in American Restaurants

HOW TRADITIONAL JAPANESE DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE COMPLEMENT THE MODERN AMERICAN RESTAURANT.

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Japanese interior design is steeped in centuries of tradition, but it's also uniquely diverse. To that end, these style elements can infuse a space with both striking drama and calming minimalism.

In the U.S., the key to incorporating Japanese design into a restaurant is building interiors that speak both to the tradition of this classic style and also to the modern American's dining sensibilities. This can mean updating the size of an intimate, calm space to fit the audience that comes with a large U.S. city; combining architectural elements of Japanese and American design; or commissioning artwork that incorporates creativity from both geographies.

We asked three minds behind the design of Japanese-American restaurants about their process of melding Western styles with the longtime tradition of Japanese design to create the perfect dining spaces.

Philip Cummins | Partner, Innovative Dining Group / West Hollywood, California

I'm not sure that Japanese design elements are a good choice for restaurants that do not center around Japanese cuisine. I like to design every restaurant to be a statement and work to establish what our guests will experience from a culinary perspective before they dine. Everything needs to work in unison to enhance the food experience.

There are two unique elements in one of Innovative Dining Group's Japanese concepts, ROKU, that draw from both Japanese and Western inspiration at the same time.

The first is a commissioned piece of street art reminiscent of a Japanese samurai movie poster. The artist Hans Haveron lives in Los Angeles. The piece is one of the focal points of the restaurant and was painted on glass and backlit. The second is my *Alice in Wonderland* interpretation of a bonsai tree. The 5–6-foot-tall bonsai trees were made by a movie-set design house in Hollywood and look like they came from a Disney movie.

I use a lot of oil-rubbed teak, walnut, and beautiful live edge wood flitches in our Japanese restaurants. It's Japanese but coastal at the same time, and I see a lot of similar design elements in both our restaurant and beachfront Malibu homes.

Ruba Younan | Principal, Architects Orange / Orange, California

The Architects Orange approach to the design of the ramen house IPPUDO's flagship location in San Francisco centered around remaining authentic to the star of the restaurant: amazing food. Every design element was intentional and inspired by IPPUDO's craft ramen and the Hakata region of Japan where the restaurant was founded.

The resulting design is not heavily influenced by American style or aesthetic but instead remains true to the food, story, and history of IPPUDO. The key design consideration in bringing IPPUDO to San Francisco was the translation of the intimate Japanese experience into a much larger restaurant space. The San Francisco restaurant is more than twice the size of IPPUDO restaurants in Japan, so our team worked to create subtle moments of discovery and intimacy via color, details, and lighting.

One of the most successful elements of the space transforms the very low ceiling at the entrance of the ground-level storefront into a design and storytelling asset. Utilizing contrasting materials, colors, textures, movement, and clean lines, patrons enter a curved-wall tunnel that guides them into the main dining room. There they are greeted by the open kitchen, which showcases the production of the ramen, dramatic lighting elements, and high ceilings. The experience is inspired by the idea of an arrival or rebirth, travelling from the commotion of the outside streetscape into IPPUDO's spirited and layered space.

Bon Yagi | Owner, Hi-Collar / New York

Hi-Collar is a Western-inspired Japanese café. A kissaten, or Japanese tea-drinking shop, by day, at night it transforms into a bar for the "high collars," [from the word, haikara, which means elite or Western-modern]. Since we transform from day to night, I say this represents yin-yang philosophy.

Hi-Collar's design and menus are inspired by the Taisho period in Japan, when the country started to discover Western culture and assimilated it into Japanese culture, thereby creating a unique Japanese-Western mash-up. This is embodied by Hi-Collar.

The resulting style is the Japanese jazz age with an exciting 1920s feel. My favorite elements in our space are both the beautiful stainless-steel bar counter and the penny-tiled floor, styled after the modern Taisho period, which lasted from 1912 to 1926.

Adding elements of Japanese design can be a good choice, even in restaurants that do not serve Japanese cuisine. Japanese culture is about harmony, and this principle can be seen throughout the architecture. Elements of Japanese design and architecture mingle and blend perfectly because the style is mostly inspired by nature.
