

Restaurant Acoustics Guide

Addressing reflections and reverberation in hospitality spaces.

Customer resource • factual guide • Vancouver / BC commercial project context

Key takeaway: Most restaurant acoustic problems come from hard reflective surfaces, high occupancy, music, service noise, and long reverberation. The goal is not silence; it is comfortable energy with clear table conversation.

Why restaurants get loud

Hard finishes	Glass, concrete, tile, exposed structure, hard ceilings, and sparse walls reflect sound and extend reverberation.
Occupancy	More guests create more speech and more movement. As the room gets louder, people often talk louder to be understood.
Layered sources	Kitchen activity, bar equipment, chairs, dishware, HVAC, music, and crowds all add to the sound environment.

Design goals

Table conversation	Reduce reflections so guests can speak at normal levels across the table.
Brand atmosphere	Maintain liveliness without creating fatigue. A quiet fine-dining room, a café, and a bar should not use the same acoustic target.
Staff comfort	Lowering reverberant buildup can reduce fatigue and improve order-taking, service communication, and guest experience.

Treatment strategies

Ceilings	Acoustic ceilings, clouds, baffles, or suspended features often provide the largest available treatment area.
Walls	Use durable panels or absorptive finishes on upper wall areas, feature walls, corridors, and zones with parallel reflective surfaces.
Furniture and finishes	Upholstery, banquettes, drapery, rugs, and acoustic backing can help, but cleanability, fire performance, and maintenance must be checked.
Zoning	Bars, private dining rooms, queues, washroom corridors, and open kitchens may need different treatment amounts and durability details.

Implementation checklist

1	Measure or estimate RT before finalizing treatment quantity.
2	Coordinate treatments with lighting, sprinklers, speakers, signage, artwork, and cleaning access.
3	Use commercial-grade materials with appropriate fire, VOC, impact, stain, and maintenance data.
4	Avoid relying on thin decorative foam or purely visual treatments without acoustic test data.
5	Verify performance after opening if the issue depends on occupancy, music, or operational sound levels.

Use note: This guide is intended for customer education and early coordination. It is not a code ruling, engineered specification, or substitute for field measurements where a numeric performance target is required.