

Restaurant Critical Path

From Concept to Opening Day

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INTRODUCTION

Before the first decision

Most restaurant books begin with a story: a grandmother's kitchen, a meal that changed everything, a moment of clarity in a market somewhere warm. The story is usually true, and the feeling behind it is real. But a story is not a plan, and a feeling is not a process. Somewhere between the first inspiring chapter and the reality of fitting out a commercial kitchen, negotiating a lease, and paying a team every month, a gap opens. This book is written to close it.

What follows is not a celebration of the restaurant trade, though there is much in it worth celebrating, and it is not a warning, though there is much worth knowing. It is a method: a complete guide to taking a restaurant from its first idea to its first paying guests and through its first ninety days of trading, with enough explanation along the way to understand not only what to do, but why it matters and what happens when it is done late or badly.

It was written from the experience of many openings, to give an operator what we would have wanted at the start of our own: a complete map of the work, from the first idea to the first months of trading, that respects the intelligence of the reader, tells the truth about the hard parts, and always moves towards what has to be done next.

Who This Book Is For

This book is for anyone preparing to open a restaurant. Some readers will be doing it for the first time, with no experience of an opening to draw on. Some will have opened before and want a complete method instead of the one improvised under pressure last time. Others have worked in restaurants for years and are now building one of their own, and are discovering that knowing how a restaurant runs is not the same as knowing how to build one from nothing.

What these readers share is the intention to open a restaurant and the wish to do it well. The work is the same whatever the background: the same decisions, the same dependencies, and the same mistakes that cost the most money and the most time. This book maps all of them.

How the Book Is Built

The book follows the life of an opening, from the idea to the end of the first quarter of trading. It is divided into a chapter on the concept, five phases of work, and a chapter on the first ninety days.

Building Your Concept

Everything starts here. Before any money is spent, the idea is turned into a written concept: who the restaurant is for, what it offers, how it feels, what it costs the guest,

and why a guest would choose it. The chapter is a method, not a list of tasks, and the concept document it produces is the reference for every decision that follows.

The five phases

The opening itself is divided into five phases. Each one is defined by the work it contains and by the point at which it ends — a condition that must be true before the next phase can start on solid ground.

Phase 1 — Decide & Prepare. From the concept on paper to a business plan and the first professionals of the project. It ends when the business plan has been written and checked by the accountant, and the accountant, the attorney, the insurance and real estate brokers, and the graphic designer are appointed.

Phase 2 — Find & Secure. From the first site brief to the signed contracts. It ends when the lease and the construction contract are signed, and the budget has been rebuilt on real prices.

Phase 3 — Build. From the signed contracts to the finished works. It ends when the works are finished and the equipment is installed.

Phase 4 — Set Up. From the finished works to the handover of the building. It ends when the building has been taken over, every member of the team has a contract, and the menu has been approved in writing.

Phase 5 — Final Preparation. From the team's first day to the opening. It ends with the training and the soft opening completed, and the opening date confirmed.

First 90 Days

The opening ends on opening day; the work of running a restaurant begins the morning after. The last chapter covers the period that most opening guides leave out: the first figures, the adjustments, the team after the excitement has gone, the first reviews, and the decisions that close the opening period and set the next quarter.

Inside each phase

Every phase is built in the same way, so that a reader always knows where to find what they need.

The introduction explains what the phase is for, what it depends on, and when it ends.

Key Moments describe the milestones of the phase, the points at which the project changes.

Who Is Involved lists every person and professional who works in the phase, and what each one does in it.

The categories group the tasks by area of work — Concept, Finance & Funding, Legal, Permits & Insurance, Site & Lease, Design & Construction, Equipment & Purchasing, Technology, People, Food & Beverage, Operations, Marketing & PR — each opened by

a short explanation of how its work flows. Every task names who is responsible for it and who verifies it.

What Might Go Wrong describes the mistakes that are easy to make in the phase, and what they cost.

The Deep Dives go deeper into the subjects we consider most important in the phase, and set out, step by step, the method to follow.

The Phase Checklist lists, one line for each task, what must be done before the phase can be considered closed.

The Working Files list the templates of the toolkit that belong to the phase.

The Deep Dives

A Deep Dive goes further than the task it supports. The Deep Dive on the lease, for example, explains how a lease is built, which clauses to push back on, and what never to accept. Each one ends with something concrete — a decision taken, a document built, a figure calculated — and each one can be read on its own.

If a Deep Dive shows that a piece of work needs knowledge or experience the operator does not have, that is the right conclusion, not a failure. The answer is to engage a professional who has it, and the Deep Dive explains what to ask them.

The Toolkit

Many of the methods in the book have a companion file in the downloadable toolkit: spreadsheets for the budget, the cash flow model, the break-even point, the staff cost, the recipe costing, the par levels, and the cash reconciliation, and documents such as the job descriptions, the Standards of Service, and the construction contract. Each template carries the number of its phase — T1.1 belongs to Phase 1 — and is named in the Deep Dive it supports and in the list at the end of its phase. The book teaches the method; the template is where the reader applies it. Neither depends on the other, and the book can be read and used without a single download.

At the end of the book

After the last chapter, a short Closing Note looks beyond the first ninety days. Appendix A gives a short profile of each professional and consultant of the opening: what they do, when to appoint them, the work they carry out for the opening, what to ask before appointing them, and what to agree in writing. Appendix B then gathers every task of the book by category, so that everything concerning one area — Design & Construction, People, Marketing & PR — can be seen in one place, whatever the phase it belongs to. The Template Index lists every file of the toolkit, with what each one does. The Glossary defines every term that a first-time operator may not know.

What This Book Is Not

It is not a book about passion. There are enough of those. Passion is a necessary

condition for opening a restaurant, but not a sufficient one, and it is not something a book can give or take away. What a book can give is a method.

It is not a collection of case studies. Case studies explain what happened to someone else; this book is concerned with what has to happen next in our own project.

It is not a substitute for professional advice. An attorney reviews the lease, an accountant reviews the financial model, a licensing specialist handles the liquor licence. The book explains what those professionals need, what to ask them, and how to recognise advice that is not good enough. It does not replace them.

It is not a workbook. It is a book, written to be read. The toolkit exists for those who want it, and the operator manages the opening with whatever tools they already use — a spreadsheet, a shared folder, a whiteboard. What the book provides is the knowledge that makes those tools useful: the reasoning, the dependencies, and the practical detail that separate a prepared opening from an improvised one.

And it does not promise a successful restaurant. It promises that the restaurant will not fail for reasons that could have been foreseen.

A Note on Time

The phases are stages of work, not dates. Some openings move quickly through the early phases and slowly through the build; others wait months for a site and then move fast. What matters is not how long a phase takes, but that it is substantially complete before the next one begins: that the lease is not signed before the architect has assessed the space, and that no equipment is ordered before the lease is signed.

Inside each phase, the tasks are grouped by area of work, not listed in order. Many of them run in parallel, and the right order depends on the project — the site, the market, the people. The introduction of each phase explains the dependencies that cannot be broken, and the end of each phase states what must be true before moving on.

Openings rarely go exactly to plan. Planning permission arrives late, a contractor falls behind, a key hire changes their mind. The value of the structure is not that it will match the experience exactly, but that it gives a reference against which to measure the difference: when something slips, we know what it affects further on, and what accepting the delay will cost. A restaurant that opens well is not one that had no problems. It is one whose problems were found before the first guest arrived.

The Critical Path

In project management, the critical path is the chain of pieces of work that depend on one another and together decide the earliest date on which a project can finish. Every task on that chain that slips moves the end date with it. Every task off the chain has some margin: it can start later or take longer without delaying anything else.

A restaurant opening has a critical path too, and it runs through all five phases. Most of the tasks in this book can be moved, combined, or done in a different order to suit the project. The links below cannot. When one of them is late, the opening is late, whatever

happens elsewhere.

The concept is written before any money is spent, and the business plan is checked before anyone is paid for a site, a design, or a building.

The architect assesses a site before we commit to it, and the design and the contractor's price exist before the lease is signed. The lease and the construction contract are the last signatures of the search, not the first.

No order for equipment, furniture, or works is placed before the lease is signed.

The insurance is active before anyone works on the premises.

The equipment and the furniture are ordered early enough to arrive when the works need them, because the last trades cannot finish around a missing counter or a late cold room.

The technology is chosen before the walls are closed, so that every cable is inside them.

The applications with the longest lead times — the liquor licence above all — are submitted as soon as the site allows it.

The General Manager and the Executive Chef are hired while the works are still running, early enough for them to plan the team, the menu, and the systems before the building is finished.

The building is tested, inspected, and taken over before the team works in it, and the kitchen is commissioned before the menu is tasted in it.

The menu is costed before it is approved, and approved before the POS is programmed, the menus are printed, and the team is trained on it.

The HACCP system is in force before the first delivery of food, and the POS knows the menu before the first day of training.

The training comes before the mock services, the mock services before the soft opening, and the opening date is confirmed, after the training has been reviewed, before the reservations open.

The slowest links — the site, the lease, the permits and licences, the construction, the long-lead equipment, the key hires and their notice periods — are the ones to start first and to watch every week. When one of them slips, do not hope to recover the time further on: work out what it moves, and decide at once whether to accept the delay, add resources, or change the scope.

The toolkit includes a planner, in the form used in project management, that lays out every task of the book with its dependencies, so that the critical path of each opening can be built on its own dates.

A Note on Roles

The book uses the same cast of people throughout: the operator, the General Manager, the Executive Chef, the heads of department, the accountant, the attorney, the architect, and the other professionals and consultants of the opening, each of them described in Appendix A. In larger openings there may be further internal roles — a

finance manager, a human resources manager, a purchasing manager — who take on tasks that this book gives to the General Manager or the Executive Chef. In a small independent opening, one person may carry responsibilities that a larger structure would split between several.

The book is written around the tasks, not around the organisation chart. Read the responsibilities assigned to each person and ask, for each one: in our opening, who owns this? The answer will differ from one reader to another. What matters is that every task has a named owner.

Before You Begin: Are We Ready?

Before the concept, before the first professional is appointed, there is a question about the person who is about to open the restaurant. Opening is among the most demanding things a person can choose to do in business — financially, operationally, and personally — and the start of the project is the cheapest moment to discover a gap that could have been filled in advance.

The questions below cover five areas: the money, the people, the operations, our personal circumstances, and the concept. This is not a test, and there is no score to reach. Read each statement and answer honestly whether it is true today.

The money

Opening a restaurant usually costs more than expected and takes longer than expected to make a profit, and in between there is a period in which more cash goes out than comes in. The question is not whether there is enough money to open, but whether there is enough to keep going until the restaurant pays for itself.

- I know what it will cost to open this restaurant, from real quotes and not from an approximation.
- I have a contingency on top of the budget, not hidden inside it.
- I know how much money the restaurant needs to cover its fixed costs — the rent, the payroll, the utilities — until it reaches its break-even point.
- I can cover my personal expenses for a long period without taking anything from the restaurant.
- If things go worse than expected, I know what the second plan is: more capital, a line of credit, an investor ready to step in.
- I have spoken to an accountant who works with restaurants, not only to a general accountant.

The people

A restaurant depends on people more than almost any other business, and the staff cost is one of its largest. The difficulty is not only the cost, but the complexity: opening a restaurant means becoming the employer of people with their own expectations, problems, timetables, and reasons for being there. The ability to hire well, train, correct, and when necessary let people go decides whether the business survives.

- I have hired and managed staff in a professional setting — employees with contracts, not friends or family.
- I know how to run an interview that produces useful information, not just a pleasant conversation.
- I have let someone go, and I know how to handle that conversation professionally, legally, and without being knocked off balance by it.
- I can give negative feedback directly and constructively, without avoiding the conversation and without overreacting.
- I know the employment rules that apply to restaurant staff where I will open: working hours, overtime, holidays, employer contributions.
- I have a clear answer to the question: why would a good person choose to work here rather than somewhere else?

The operations

Every service is a piece of logistics: the ingredients arrive, are stored, prepared, and served at the right moment, to the right guest, at the right temperature. When the machine works it is invisible; when it breaks, the guest sees it at once — in the food, in the wait, in the faces of the team.

- I have spent real time inside a working restaurant, not as a guest, but watching the kitchen and the floor from the inside.
- I can read a restaurant profit and loss account and understand its key lines: food cost, beverage cost, staff cost, operating profit.
- I know how many covers my service model can serve in one service, and how many people it needs to serve them.
- I know what happens when a supplier does not deliver, a machine breaks down, or several people call in sick on the same day.
- I know what the food safety law requires where I will open, and what HACCP means.
- I know who will run the restaurant day to day when I am not there, and that person either exists already or is part of the hiring plan.

Our personal circumstances

This is the section nobody wants to complete. It is not about skills but about character and circumstances. Opening a restaurant is physically and emotionally demanding in ways that most people underestimate — not because it is a secret, but because it is hard to imagine before living it.

- I am prepared for very long weeks during the opening and the first period of trading, including evenings, weekends, and public holidays.

The people closest to me understand what is about to change in my life, and have agreed to it knowing what it means, not only with vague encouragement.

- I can manage stress without taking it out on the team or on the people I live with.
- When things go wrong, I know where to find support, both practical and personal.

- I have decided, concretely, the results and the moment at which I would close the restaurant if it did not work.
- My reason for opening is not only “I have always dreamed of having a restaurant”, but something more specific — an idea, a guest, a format, a product — that I have tested in some form.

The concept

A successful restaurant is more than good food and good service. It is a clear idea of whom it serves, why that guest should come here rather than elsewhere, and how the experience is delivered in the same way every time. That clarity drives every decision that follows: the menu, the location, the team, the price, the communication.

- I can describe my restaurant in two sentences without using words such as “authentic”, “quality”, or “welcoming”.
- I know exactly who my guest is: not “everyone who loves good food”, but a specific person with specific habits, a specific budget, and a specific reason to go out.
- I have recently eaten, as a paying guest, in many restaurants comparable to mine in the market where I will open.
- I know why a guest would choose my restaurant over what already exists in the same street.
- My concept can be built with the money I have — not in its ideal version, but in the version I can actually open.
- I have tested at least part of the concept: a dinner, a pop-up, an event, honest feedback from people who have no interest in telling me it is a good idea.
- If every question has been answered honestly and the weak areas are clear, we are ready to start: not in the sense that everything is solved, but in the sense that we know where we are exposed and have a plan for each point.

How to Use This Book

Read *Building Your Concept* first, and write the concept before anything else. Then read each phase before its work begins, not when a problem arises. The chapters are preparation, not reference: a chapter read in advance gives time to act; a chapter read in the middle of a crisis explains what we needed to know a few weeks earlier.

Read each *Deep Dive* before the task it supports, and open its template when the method is clear. Use the Phase Checklist to close each phase: its items are not targets to aim for, but the minimum that must be true for the next phase to begin on solid ground. An item that is not done does not disappear; it becomes the first problem of the next phase. When the project is under way and something has to be found quickly, Appendix A shows what to expect from each professional, Appendix B shows every task by area of work, and the Glossary explains every term.

Before We Begin

The failure rate of new restaurants is real, the margin for error is narrow, and the hours are not what most people expect. None of this is written to discourage. It is written because the operators who open well — who build something that trades at a profit and that they are proud of — are almost always the ones who started with a clear picture of what they were taking on: not the optimistic version, not the fearful one, but the accurate one.

The work that follows does not require perfection. It requires attention, discipline, and the willingness to do the unglamorous work — the paperwork, the meetings with lawyers, accountants, and licensing officers, the debrief after the mock service that shows the kitchen is not ready — before the first guest walks through the door. Everything before that moment is preparation; everything after it is operations. This book covers both.

BUILDING YOUR CONCEPT

From a raw idea to a fully defined restaurant concept

Introduction

A restaurant begins as an idea, and an idea is not yet something anyone can work from. It cannot tell the architect what kind of room to design, the accountant what revenue to project, or the chef what kind of kitchen they will run. The space between the idea and a written concept is where many of the most expensive mistakes of an opening are made — not because the idea was wrong, but because it was never translated into precise decisions before the money started to move.

This chapter makes that translation. It starts from the first impulse and works it, step by step, into a documented concept: a specific and coherent description of the restaurant and the guest it serves, of what it offers and how it feels, and of the reason a guest would pick it over every other place available. That document becomes the reference against which every later decision is tested, and the brief from which every professional starts their work.

The work comes before everything else in this book, not alongside it. The financial projections need a price level and a service format to be credible. The search for a site needs a guest and a number of covers. The kitchen needs a food philosophy before anyone can choose its equipment. None of these decisions can be made well on an idea; all of them can be made on a concept that is already written.

What a Concept Is

A restaurant concept is the complete answer to one question: what is this place? It covers the food, the style of service, the atmosphere, the price, the guest it is designed for, and the reason that guest should choose it over the alternatives. It is not a type of cuisine, a mood, or a mission statement. It is the sum of all these decisions, made deliberately and in order, so that together they create one coherent experience.

The reason to write it down carefully before anything else is practical. Every significant choice of the opening — the location, the budget of the fit-out, the structure of the menu, the profile of the team, the tone of the marketing — should be tested against the concept: does this choice serve it, or contradict it? Without a written concept there is nothing to test against, and decisions pile up according to personal preference, outside pressure, or convenience. The result is a restaurant that feels inconsistent, not because any single choice was bad, but because the choices were never measured against the same standard.

The concept is also a briefing tool. The architect, the interior designer, the chef, the General Manager, and any lender or investor need to understand what is being built before they can help to build it well. A concept that is specific and coherent produces

better work from every one of them. A vague one produces a misunderstanding that comes to the surface at the worst possible moment: during the fit-out, during recruitment, or in the first week of service.

What a concept is not

A mission statement. A mission describes a purpose; a concept describes an experience. A mood or an aesthetic. The look of the restaurant follows from the concept; it does not define it.

A cuisine category. “An Italian restaurant” is a category. The concept is the particular Italian restaurant that exists in this place, for this guest, at this price.

A fixed document. The concept changes as decisions are made and as reality imposes its limits. The aim is not a perfect document, but a living reference that keeps every decision aligned.

The Origin

Every restaurant starts with an impulse: a meal remembered, a gap noticed, a place visited abroad that suggested a different way of doing things, a personal story worth telling through food. The first task is to capture that impulse precisely enough that it can be examined, tested, and built on.

The danger at this stage is deciding too early. A chef who wants to cook the food of her grandmother’s village has an impulse, and that impulse could become many different restaurants depending on the place, the guest, the price, and the format. The impulse is the raw material; the concept is what disciplined thinking makes of it.

The three questions that test an idea

Before developing an idea any further, we test it against three questions.

Is there a guest for it? Not “would some people eat this”, but “can we name a group of people whose current options do not serve them the way this restaurant would?” An idea without a guest is an aesthetic project, not a restaurant.

Can it work commercially at the place and price we have in mind? A concept built on rare seasonal produce, sold at a mid-market price in a high-rent street, cannot. The concept has to stand up to the numbers from the beginning.

Can we sustain it? A concept that depends entirely on the founder being in the kitchen every night, on the founder’s personal charm, or on a supply that cannot be guaranteed is fragile. Test whether it survives the founder having a bad week.

The origin statement

Before any other part of the concept, write one short paragraph on where the idea comes from: not the restaurant as it will be run, but the impulse that started it. This paragraph is the emotional anchor of the concept, and everyone involved in the project should be able to read it, from the lender to the interior designer.

The test of a good origin statement is that a reader can guess the general direction of

the restaurant before seeing anything else. If the same paragraph could describe many different restaurants, it is not yet specific enough.

The Guest

The definition of the guest is the most consequential decision of the whole concept. It sets the price, the style of service, the kind of location, the marketing channels, and the look of the restaurant. A concept developed without a precise guest is developed for nobody in particular, and it produces a restaurant that appeals to nobody in particular.

The occasion

The definition starts from the occasion: the specific moment in the guest's week or year that brings them to this restaurant. The same person goes to different restaurants for different occasions, and a business lunch on a Tuesday, a celebration on a Saturday, and a family meal on a Sunday call for completely different concepts. We choose the main occasion the restaurant is designed for, and design everything else to serve it.

Regular and habitual. The guest comes every week or more often. The restaurant needs variety on the menu, consistency, and booking and arrival without friction.

The spend is usually moderate.

Business. The guest is on someone else's time, and often on someone else's budget. The restaurant needs efficiency, discretion, and a format that respects a working day.

Destination. The guest travels specifically to find the restaurant. It needs a clear reason to make the journey: an offer found nowhere else, a particular chef, a unique format.

Casual and spontaneous. The guest walks in without planning. The restaurant needs to be visible, welcoming, and able to work without a reservation.

Special occasion. The guest comes for a birthday, an anniversary, a promotion. The restaurant needs a sense of occasion, attentive service, and a format that supports a celebration. The spend is usually high.

The spending decision

Knowing how the guest decides what to spend is more useful than knowing their income. Some guests make a simple judgement of value: is it worth it or not? Others compare consciously with the alternatives. Others leave the decision to the occasion: it is a celebration, so the price comes second. The concept is designed for the way its main guest decides, not for the price the operator would like to charge. A high price imposed on a guest whose occasion is casual and habitual produces a restaurant they visit once and do not come back to.

The guest as a person

Describe the main guest along four dimensions. Where they live or work, and how far they will travel. Their age, their household, and their income, used as an indication of behaviour, not as an assumption about taste. How often they eat out, for which occasions, and where they go today — the named places that are their current alternatives, and

what those places give them and fail to give them. And what they value, what irritates them, and what they feel when they find the right place.

Then write one paragraph that describes the guest as a single, specific person rather than a category: where they live, what they do, where they eat now, what they are looking for and not finding, and what would bring them back every week.

Some concepts also have a secondary guest: a different group that the restaurant can serve without spoiling the experience of the first — the office workers at lunch in a restaurant designed for dinner, for example. If there is one, describe it in the same way, and write down how the restaurant serves it without diluting what it offers its main guest.

Who the restaurant is not for

Saying clearly who the concept is not designed for is as useful as saying who it is for. A restaurant built for a long evening is not for the guest who wants a quick lunch; a late, lively room is not for families with young children. Writing it down prevents the design and service decisions that try to please everyone, and end up satisfying nobody.

The Guest Experience

Once the guest is defined, describe what they experience, in order, from their point of view: not what the team does, but what the guest sees, hears, and feels. This description is the first brief for the architect, because every moment of the visit needs a space that supports it, and the first brief for the General Manager, who will turn it into service and training.

Arrival. How the guest arrives — on foot, by car, by taxi — what they see from the street, and what the entrance tells them before they open the door.

Reception. Who greets them and how, whether they wait and where, where the coats go, and what they see, hear, and smell in the first moment inside.

The table. The atmosphere at the table: the light, the noise, the distance from the next table, what they notice about the room around them.

Ordering. How choosing feels: formal or relaxed, quick or unhurried, guided or left to the guest.

The meal. The pace of the dishes, the way they are presented, how present the team is during the meal, and what the guest notices about the food and the drink.

The bill and the departure. Who brings the meal to its end, how the bill arrives, and the last impression the guest takes home.

▲ *Describe the experience in the guest's words, not in operational language. "The bill arrives without being asked for" is a brief; "the server brings the bill after dessert" is a procedure, and procedures come later.*

PHASE 1

DECIDE & PREPARE

From the concept on paper to a business plan and a team of professionals

Before this phase begins, the concept is already written: what the restaurant is, who it is for, its price level, and why a guest would choose it. The concept does not answer two questions that every operator must answer before spending serious money. First: is there enough money to open this restaurant and keep it running until it pays for itself? Second: if the restaurant fails, can we survive the loss? Until both answers are written down and checked, we should not pay for anything else — not a site, not a designer, not a contractor. Any money we spend on them goes into a project that may still turn out to be impossible.

The phase works on two fronts at the same time. The first is the numbers. We calculate the cost of opening: the building work, the equipment, the professional fees, and the costs that start before the first guest arrives, such as rent and salaries. We work out in which month each of those payments falls due. We estimate the running costs of the restaurant once it is open — food, staff, rent, utilities — and the sales it needs every week to cover them. The second front is the professionals. The accountant comes first, because every figure depends on knowing how much restaurants really cost in our market. The attorney follows, to set up the company. Then come the ones the next phase cannot start without: a commercial real estate broker to search for the site, an insurance broker, and a graphic designer.

This is the phase in which a mistake costs least to correct. If the numbers show that the concept cannot work, we can still change it, because nothing has been signed. The phase ends when two things are done: the business plan is written and checked by the accountant, and all these professionals are appointed, so the search for a site can begin.

Key Moments in Phase 1

The first conversation with a lender rarely goes the way we rehearsed it. We expect questions about the concept. Instead, the lender asks about our personal finances, our experience, and what happens if the first year goes badly. Treat the meeting as research, not as a pitch. During the meeting, write down every document the lender mentions and every figure they ask for. Then write the business plan so that it answers those questions.

When the accountant reviews our projections for the first time, they usually lower the expected sales. It feels like a vote against the project. It is the opposite: if a figure convinces the accountant, it will convince a lender. Ask the accountant to explain

each change in writing. Then correct the assumption that produced the figure — the number of covers, the table turns, or the average spend — instead of simply typing in a new total.

The personal exposure exercise (Deep Dive 1.1) ends with one figure: the most money we could lose if the restaurant fails. Show that figure to the people we live with before any lender or investor sees it, and show them the worst case next to it. If the household decides together to go ahead, that decision holds up through the hard months much better than a decision taken alone and explained afterwards.

Halfway through the phase, lenders start asking who is on the team, and we feel pressure to appoint the first credible candidate for every role. Put a date in the calendar for each appointment, meet at least two candidates for each role before that date, and appoint on the day.

Who Is Involved in Phase 1

Operator

Takes the one real decision of this phase: whether to go ahead with the restaurant, at what size, and with how much personal money at risk.

Accountant

The first professional appointed. Checks every figure against what restaurants really cost and earn in this market, and builds the cash flow model with us.

Attorney

Sets up the company together with the accountant, and checks the business plan for legal problems. The attorney will advise us until opening day and after, so how quickly they respond matters as much as what they charge.

Lenders and Investors

Not appointed, and not yet asked for money. In this phase we talk to them only to learn what they finance, what they need to see from us, and how long their process takes.

Insurance Broker

Appointed now, to list every insurance policy the restaurant will need before we have a site to insure.

Commercial Real Estate Broker

Appointed now, so that the broker can start searching for a site on our behalf as soon as the next phase begins.

Graphic Designer

Appointed now, so that the logo, colours, and typefaces are ready before the architect and the interior designer start their work.

Pages 31–35 are not included in this preview.

Shortlist and appoint the commercial real estate broker.

Responsible: Operator • Verified by: Accountant

Find two or three candidates through other operators and commercial landlords and confirm their experience with restaurant leases. A general commercial broker shows us every property that is available; a hospitality specialist shows us only those that could work as a restaurant. At appointment, confirm in writing that the broker acts for us, who pays the broker and how, and what happens to the fee if we find a site through another route.

Marketing & PR

Appointing the designer of the brand

The visual identity — logo, colours, typefaces — is the first part of the restaurant that people see, on a hoarding, a website, or a social media post, long before the restaurant opens. It also affects the building more than most operators expect: it guides the colours and materials chosen by the interior designer, the positions the architect must leave for signs, and the façade design the landlord will be asked to approve.

That is why we appoint the graphic designer now, with the other professionals, and not when the opening campaign begins. The designer works from the concept document and starts early enough for the identity to guide the design of the restaurant instead of being added at the end.

Shortlist and appoint the graphic designer.

Responsible: Operator

Shortlist two or three designers who have worked for restaurants and can show complete identities — applied to menus, signs, uniforms, and digital channels — not just logos. At appointment, confirm scope and fee in writing, and confirm that the restaurant will own the final identity and receive every source file.

What Might Go Wrong in Phase 1

—Asking the accountant to make the numbers work. An accountant who wants the project to be funded may, without meaning to, start making the plan look better than it is, and the money is borrowed against sales the restaurant will never reach.

—Spending on visible things before the decision is taken. A logo, a website domain, a deposit on equipment seen at a trade fair: each one feels like progress, but each one commits money to a project that has not yet passed its own financial test. In this phase, the only thing we pay for is advice.

—Keeping the working capital reserve in the same bank account as the construction budget. When construction costs more than planned, the extra money is taken from whatever cash is available, and by opening day the reserve has disappeared, just when

the first months of trading need it.

- Choosing the type of company only to pay less tax in the first year. The structure that saves the most tax at the start may be the one that makes it hardest later to bring in a partner, open a second restaurant, or sell.

- Letting one chain of recommendations build the whole team. The broker recommends the attorney, the attorney recommends the accountant, the accountant recommends the contractor. Each may be competent, but each owes something to the others, and none of them will point out the mistakes of the person who recommended them.

- Keeping two business plans. With an optimistic version for the bank and a more cautious one for ourselves, the bank lends money for a restaurant we are not actually building, and every later difference between plan and reality is measured against the wrong figures.