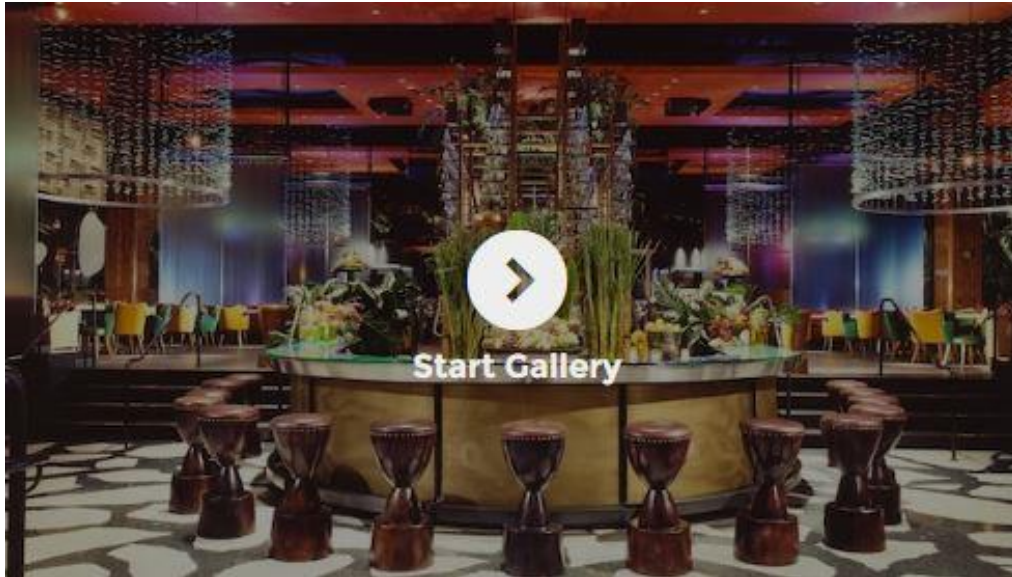


A Look at Some of the World's Most Iconic Bars

By [Darryn King](#) | June 19, 2017 | 9:00am

Photos via Jeffrey Beers International



What’s the correct angle for a back-of-bar mirror? Stools—with or without backs? And does it have to be so damn noisy all the time?

Architect Jeffrey Beers specializes in spaces that are conducive to good times. Mentored by legendary architect I.M. Pei, and with more than three decades of experience under his belt, his firm Jeffrey Beers International has become a go-to for exemplary social spaces—bars, restaurants, clubs and hotels—that are striking to behold and be in. Whether it’s the giant jellyfish tank of Moon Club, the neo-Ming dynasty vibe of Toy or [Jay-Z’s 40/40](#), which the *New York Times* described as like being inside “the interior of a watch” these are places you’ll want to hole up in ‘til last call.

With the recent completion of JBI’s latest project, the opulent revitalization of El San Juan Resort in Puerto Rico, we decided to quiz Beers on the specific challenges and pleasures of bar design.

Paste: Jeffrey, a very important question to start off with. Is there such a thing as an ideal height for a bar?

Jeffrey Beers: Absolutely! The correct height for a bar is 42” and it is in direct proportion to a standard bar stool. When the bar is too high I feel like a kid in a high chair and it doesn’t feel right.

***Paste:* Compared to designing other social spaces, what are a couple of the most important things to keep in mind when it comes to bar design?**

JB: Sight lines. The more exciting aspect of designing a bar is considering the scenery and how people can see and be seen, or strategically be tucked away. Having the main feature in the space, such as a wine cabinet display, ensures that everyone feels like they are included in the action. And, of course, comfortable seating. You want your guests to feel they are at home and stay for that “last” drink or indulge in a dessert. Whether it’s meticulously detailing the banquettes to ensure a perfect seat pitch, or reviewing each chair sample ahead of time, it’s that attention to detailing that helps create a flawless look and feel.

***Paste:* What about common mistakes or pitfalls in bar design?**

JB: Something as simple as preventing guests from comfortably hanging their bags and jackets by forgetting to place small hooks underneath the bar top. Plus, the bar’s face under the bar top should be made from a durable material. People’s shoes, bags and briefcases bang into it, causing cracks in a mirror finish or scuffs and tears in a leather finish.

***Paste:* Any favorite materials or types of finish for the bar itself?**

JB: Brass is the iconic metal for bars and I love it. However, it does demand a lot of upkeep and polishing as it easily discolors. It gets a rather funky if you let it go and it oxidizes. I love to sail and am therefore a fan of stainless steel. I gravitate to its resilience and its crisp, nautical feel. Also, it does not rust, ever, and is therefore very easy to maintain. If you pair it with wood, you have a very yacht club feel; otherwise it looks cool and modern against concrete and polished steel. For something different and sharp, I am currently working with stainless steel in black finish and I’m looking forward to seeing how the completed project will look.

In regards to stone finish, granite is the most common and safest because it’s very dense and resistant to stains like spilled red wine. Yet, personally I find it boring. I prefer to work with quartzite which looks more like marble. While I love marble, I shy away from using it for bars as it easily stains and demands a fair amount of upkeep.

***Paste:* You can never really tell much from Yelp reviews about the acoustic properties of a space. How much consideration goes into the aural qualities of the bar environment?**

JB: We consider acoustics—as much as we consider layout and materiality. How much is invested in the acoustics is determined by the clients and their needs. For example, less is invested in street-

leveled bars that are accustomed to high-turnover, and more is invested in an upscale restaurant where guests are seeking a level of quietness and seclusion.

***Paste:* JBI recently renovated El San Juan Resort in Puerto Rico. Actually, you worked on a number of bars right there in the lobby, right?**

JB: It was about bringing back the original elegance, opulence and energy to the resort. The intention was creating a place where you want to be both day and night.

***Paste:* Chico Lounge, El San Juan's live music space, definitely had a vibe well into the night.**

JB: The intention was a 1920's Art Deco feel, reminiscent of a time when dinner-and-theater was a popular form of entertainment. Low cocktail tables, layers of different textures, luxe metals and fabrics—a real warmth and richness to the overall space.

***Paste:* The bar lighting throughout is pretty magnificent too.**

JB: You really need to mix and layer architectural spots and decorative fixtures that are adjustable, dimmable for daytime versus evening settings. I personally favor bar lamps that are directly hardwired into the bar top. They give off a nice glow, and they create a warm, inviting atmosphere. You want to avoid bright spotlights and go for more intimate and dimmed lighting. Attention to lighting truly helps to create a memorable ambience.

***Paste:* Some of the bar stools at El San Juan have backs, some have no backs—what's your policy?**

JB: I have two schools of thought when it comes to bar stools! Personally, I prefer a backless bar stool—they are key component in a social gathering as they let you to sit either with your side or back to the bar, and allow for groups to be together and mingle comfortably in a circle formation. For bars in upscale hotels, lounges and restaurants, we use stools with backs. While they force you to face the bar, the back makes seating more comfortable, luxurious and can act as a rest for bags and totes.

***Paste:* Lastly, what's your feeling on mirrors?**

JB: Mirrors are fantastic. They are normally placed with the back bar display—the mirror goes on the back wall first and the shelves are installed on to it. We often take a strip of mirror and angle it 15-to-20 degrees in order to reflect the whole bar scene. It's an interesting trick to encourage people watching and make a more social atmosphere.



Jeffrey Beers



Ascent Lounge, New York City



Bar Lui, way back in 1985.



Chef Todd English's Blue Zoo, in the Dolphin Hotel in Disney World.



Bond, in the Langham Hotel in Boston.



Chef Daniel Boulud's db bistro and oyster bar in Singapore.



El San Juan's Gold Bar, in El San Juan Hotel, Puerto Rico.



Fontainebleu, Miami.



Gotham Market at the Ashland Hotel, New York.



Park Central Hotel, New York.