TRENDS ROOM DESIGN

Hotel room design
Trends and influences

"Developing the design of a hotel room can prove quite tricky, costly and a great challenge to any person involved in the process," Karim Asmar, a managing partner at HODEMA hospitality development

Hotel design is a balance between the driving forces of the actors involved. At the end of the development process, the end product - the room - will have combined the various agendas brought forth by the developer, the operator, and the designer, who all have wishes, constraints, and a vision of what the guest wants.

The room is also a mix of space, esthetics, technology, cost, and asset. Depending on the product being developed, one component may weigh in more than the other. For example, the restoration of an old building in Paris into a charming hotel will defer from the development of a luxury hotel on a pristine plot of land in Dubai. Likewise, the development of a high-tech business hotel will differ from a country side luxury hotel.

Guests staying at the **Rosewood Hotel** in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, will experience a number of high tech facilities such as chromo-therapeutic showers, seeing on TV monitor who's at the door and automatic TV volume change when answering the phone whereas the **Chedi Hotel** in Muscat, Oman, focuses mainly on esthetics to create a uniquely relaxing atmosphere and a stress-less haven.

In the last decade with the prevailing economic boom high-tech was a major and powerful component in the hotel rooms worldwide. Simply associating the two terms "high-tech" and "room" a myriad of gadgets from wireless technology, interactive TV and digital screens, to digital light dimmers, digital showers and digital door locks and so forth. To the extent that if it isn't digital there is no point to mention it with the in-room technology.

As the cost of technology decreases an expansion of high-tech is expected in hotel design. However, as digital technology is integrated in all aspects of the hotel it often creates confusion and conflicts with the very notion of a comfortable stay for the less techie guests.

Esthetics has also been a driving force. In the last decade we have seen the development of numerous reservation systems and labels focusing on design and referencing hotels based primarily on the esthetics of the design. For example, **Design Hotels** and **Tablet Hotels** are two labels promoting properties selected for their innovative design. While Ian Schrager, the American creator of the boutique hotel, through his association with Philip Stark, the French product designer, developed the very notion of design hotels with a central focus on the esthetics.

The guest of the 21st century has proven very sensitive to design but also to technology. The emergence of lifestyle brands is the result of this sensitivity. The **Starwood** lifestyle brand **W** combines ingenuously the esthetics and technology. Another illustration of this trend is the emergence of concept stores, integrated

Door technologies

- **Paper card** Similar to the plastic card but in a recyclable and less costly format
- **RFID (Radio Frequency Identification)** Offers greater security than conventional plastic card
- **Iris scan** Guest iris pattern is logged upon check in by using an autofocus camera and stored. Guests open the door by having their eye scanned
- **Fingerprint** Guest can use their index finger to open the door. A numerical code can be used for locking the door
- **Cell phone** Stores a digital radio code that unlocks the door

In room technologies

- **Smart wall** A camera-based 30-inch display in a table that recognizes touch, and gestures allowing interaction with virtual concierge, checks out, access to digital library and more
- **Room management system** A property management system at the level of the room allowing guest personalization, energy saving, and curtain control
- **Touch phone general room control** Use of the telephone as a remote control for the room, curtains, TV, and dimmers

Actors involved in the development process

The developer
The driving force in the development of the project. As a fund provider, the developer gets the final say. However, inexperienced investors are often confronted with costly loopholes in the design process and later on during the operation.

The operator
Has the closest contact with the guest, and is the most seasoned and experienced on how a property will age. Often comes to the table with a set of requirements and constraints.

The designer
The driving force in esthetics, the designer tries to answer the constraints as set by the operator and the developer. Also tries to imagine the lifestyle of the guest in the property and has a natural lenience towards design esthetics which can sometimes prove risky for the long-term operation.

The guest
The major concerned person and the least involved. However, the guest can prove a ruthless judge, jury and executioner.

The development consultant
A newly introduced actor on the development scene. Being the least anchored of the actors, acts as a moderator to find the balance between the other actors.

into the hotel, where the guest can buy articles available in the room.

Technology associated with financial means and innovation frenzy allowed operators and developers to explore different usages of technology in the room. With the possibility to personalize virtually everything in the room from the welcome, room set up, TV screen, radio station and so on, technology became a source of guest experience improvements. It also became a source of improved internal control by integrating more complex security codes and protocols.

Room technologies have been developing, exploring and tackling various issues related to the guest's stay, some making the stay more pleasant and more secure while others were adding to the 'wow' effect contributing an unforgettable guest experience by immerging them directly into a sci-fi futuristic environment.

The Mandarin Oriental Hotels have implemented wireless technologies allowing the room to "recognize" its guest and customize the atmosphere by adjusting the light, temperature, curtains and TV channel. **The Five Hotel** in Paris has reputedly small rooms; however, with the integration of chromoterapeutic lighting in the shower, a tinge of design and innovative lighting, the rooms were transformed into a cozy haven, upgrading a property that would have otherwise been rated as a 2-star hotel. The result being a higher REvPAr.

High tech and esthetics, which still constitute a differentiating factor for properties today, are becoming a must. With the recent financial crisis technology trends are being reviewed drastically. For one thing, the crisis acted as an electro-shock reminding consumers, travelers and developers of current environmental issues. On the other hand, the development is expected to shift further towards the budget hotels, and the fancy yet onerous aspect of all this high tech approach to the room development will have to be revised.

Undoubtedly, design for budget hotels is different. While in luxury we allow for more freedom in space, esthetics and technology, in budget hotels we speak of ergonomic design as functional use of space. Technology remains very basic, often limited to the set of plugs in the wall and the TV. Nevertheless, in the midst of the current crisis, the new customer profiled has different wishes.

Having their travel budget downgraded, has not reduced the needs, tastes and expectations of business travelers. Moreover, the massively integrated technology in higher class properties has set a standard expectation, to which budget and limited service properties have to adjust. The current context might offer just what is needed. The construction costs being lower, associated with a lower cost of high tech and auditioned to inventory surpluses, will facilitate the access of developers to techies' gizmos at a lower cost. Hence new budget properties should improve at integrating digital technologies.

As for the design, we have observed several trends and the furniture, fixtures and equipment (FF&E) market has integrated numerous designs. Retailers such as Ikea have democratized design and consumers have gained easy access to design objects at great value for money. Likewise, developers have access to lower cost design FF&E, which should facilitate the integration of esthetics in the rather dull budget hotel design. **Easy Hotels** innovated by introducing flashy color, soft lines and shapes into the room. The demand for the coming years being at the level of the budget hotels, higher differentiation will be needed, as the brand alone may not suffice. Budget hotels may witness similar trends as luxury hotels in design and esthetics.

Finally, one of the most important socio-economic trends is the sustainable and eco-friendly development. While developers have been announcing its integration, the hospitality industry is still lagging on that front. However, eco-friendly and sustainable development will become increasingly a criteria for selecting a hotel, whether at an individual basis but also at a corporate level. The next influencing component in design will be sustainability.

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Components of a hotel room design

Space
Guests would like more, designers love it, operators want it to be efficient, and owners fear its cost.

Esthetics
Guests have developed a taste for it, designers would love more, operators want to use it as an advantage, while developers often consider it a necessary damage.

Technology
Guests want it to improve their experience not complicate it. Designers would love more, operators want it used efficiently, and developers wonder how much is really necessary.

Cost
Guest wants the best value for money, designers fear budgets are too tight, operators want to optimize it, and developers aim to minimize it.

Asset
The property, land or building, that comes with a number of constraints, such as location, size, form and, sometimes, original design.