

Why Hotels Are Leaving Design Continuity Behind



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Good Interior Design: More Than Just a Couple of Plants



In a competitive market, design differentiation is helping hotels explore their brand while creating spaces that offer guests an experience.

Modern hotels are now lifestyle destinations where guests do more than just spend the night. [Hotel](#) lobbies are taking on added importance, serving as spaces for social encounters and business meetings, while guests rooms provide a “home away from home.”

Hotels are beginning to explore the opportunities to reflect a venue's location, culture or history; colours of a seaside resort might be represented in a room's fabrics and visual art, or an original floor or wall might bring character to a historic hotel.

The directors of Collingwood's AJAR: Andrew Boddington, Josep Vallhonrat and Richard Fanale, who joined forces in 2012 to launch the niche [furniture](#) and design business, confirmed this trend.

Boddington is most impressed by the new boldness he and the AJAR team have observed recently in hotel design.

“From the large scale Hotel Hotel in Canberra to the intimate and textured **Drift House of Port Fairy**, both display a confidence in juxtaposing otherwise disparate materials, scales, textures and artefacts,” he said.

The team also offered four ways hotels are adopting considered design:

Boutique Branding

Years ago, Hyatt hotels all offered the same “feel” in every location. Design continuity reigned and guests were encouraged to stay at places which offered familiarity.

Today, while branding remains paramount, it is being complemented with a new guest requirement: the desire to experience the brand.

“A hotel's interior design should reflect the core values of the hotel's brand through colour palette, textures and even tone,” Boddington said.

He cited a Casa Camper hotel project in Barcelona which he said reflects the brand's quirky and modern profile through its unorthodox layout and distinctive interiors.

Casa Camper is considered a “design hotel,” a growing direction for many boutique hotels located in creative urban areas.

The hotel is located in Raval, Barcelona's creative area where bars, galleries and restaurants line the street. It is also housed within a 19th century gothic building but its guest rooms have taken a more abstract and modern brief.

Crisp white walls meet bold red ones, and pop coloured furniture and vivid artwork line the walls, while common areas feature an injection of greenery. The rooms are minimalist; space is valued and furniture is simple, yet statement pieces bring the entire design together.



Casa Camper Hotel follows a growing trend of “design hotels”

Image via Crystal Gentilello

Sofitel, known for exuding French elegance in all its destinations, launched Sofitel So in 2011. The new “designer boutique hotel label” has locations in trendy destinations. Sofitel adopted the likes of creative fashion designers Christian Lacroix, who designed the brand’s baroque-inspired Bangkok hotel, and Japanese fashion designer Kenzo Takada, who was behind Sofitel So Mauritius Bel Ombre.

Intelligent Design

Smart technology is not just for the business guest anymore. Whether they’re staying in a hotel for business or pleasure, most people require or enjoy connectivity when they’re away.

“Some like to stay in luxurious hotels, while others seek hotels that are fitting with the local culture; authentic, perhaps minimal and so on,” Fanale said. “People travelling for business, however, often want the opposite and prefer to stay in a hotel that is more like home.”

“Either way, the one thing both users have in common is the need for a work space where they can connect all their electronic devices easily.”

Intelligent design today goes beyond Wi-Fi connectivity. More and more hotels are investing in digital check-in, smartphone hotel room keys, remote controlled hotel room amenities and even digital interaction with guests through room technology or social media.

As part of a \$870 million development, The Star in Sydney upgraded the lighting in both of its hotels, including the casino, the facades and external public areas. One key component was the installation of Philips' Dynalite system which "communicates with the controllers in each room for the internal services, including door lock, air conditioning and audio-visual control."

According to Phillips, there are also motion detector sensors in each room so if no movement is detected for a certain period of times, the lights will automatically switch off, saving energy. Guests can also control the blinds, entertainment and temperature at the touch of a button.



Guests can digitally control in-room amenities

"People will always enjoy new experiences," Fanale said. "Whether it be at home or in a hotel – it stimulates the senses. If you design a space and fit it out with pieces that are functional, innovative and comfortable they will be satisfied."

Historic References

Inspired by location, architecture or previous owners, hotels are finding creative ways to reference their history, particularly through design.

"History is a fluid concept – what is modern today will be antiquated soon enough," Boddington said. "A designer can reference historical significance through materials, furniture selection, upholsteries and textures."

"Layering different elements from different eras can also create a way of acknowledging history, albeit with a strong contemporary focus. The challenge is providing the opportunity for guests to be able to connect with their room in a meaningful way, keeping in mind contemporary behaviors, and adapting to new requirements."

A great example is the recently opened Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam.

Located in a unique neighbourhood, the hotel is comprised of six historic townhouses dating back to the 17th and 18th century.

The Waldorf Astoria has held onto its brand elements but worked to blur contemporary interior design within the walls of a historical set of buildings.



Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam references its 17th century history

“The design approach was to create a classic timeless interior with strong reference to location, brand and the trading history of the city,” said Hilton Worldwide senior director of interior design Chris Webb.

“Carefully sourced finishes, design details, textures and products relate directly to the story of Amsterdam during its Golden Age. The six grand merchant’s houses that the elegant hotel comprises are a reflection of this period. Waldorf Astoria Amsterdam is one of the few properties in the city with views out on to a gracious canal and finely manicured private gardens, offering an inspirational environment and True Waldorf Service.”

Space Strategies

The last decade has seen the arrival of smaller hotel rooms and an industry where micro hotels are flourishing. Some hotels offer pods or small spaces where a bed to sleep in and private bathroom will suffice, provided they are located in incredibly good locations.

However, when it comes to their interiors, hotels with smaller rooms need to be a little more strategic when comes to furniture in order to maximise space. Here, the old age trick of using mirrors remains a key strategy.

“Mirrors are a fantastic tool – they expand the space and are also functional for the guest,” Boddington said. “Mirrors provide an almost magical opportunity to create layers in an otherwise finite environment.”

Transformer or modular furniture – furniture that serves multiple purposes – is also growing in popularity to fit these small spaces.

Pieces include desks that fold away or turn into chairs, or sliding partitions which can convert one room into two or three. The key here is flexibility and an easy way for guests to change and customise their spaces.

Resource Furniture, a North American supplier of Clei, one of the world's finest bed wall systems debuted Hotel Resource – a 240 square foot micro hotel suite – at Dwell on Design New York exhibition last week.

“The micro-suite is full of innovative pieces being unveiled for the first time, all working in harmony to demonstrate that smart design and maximized spaces are the way of the future for the hospitality industry,” Resource Furniture said.

At the heart of the micro-suite is The Tango Sofa which is a vertically opening queen size wall bed system that converts to a three, four or sectional sofa.

Luxury hotel chains and smaller boutique properties, are certainly seeing the benefits of adopting a bespoke hotel design.