

The Hotel Guest Room of the Future? By Stanley Turkel, MHS, ISHC

In the September 1912 issue of American Homes & Gardens, Harold D. Eberlein, writer and futurist, published predictions of the impact of air travel on American cities. Mr. Eberlein foresaw a proliferation of roof gardens atop large hotels to provide pleasing views. He also predicted that travelers could expect to find “clerks and bellboys posted on the top floor ready to attend to the immediate wants of tourists who have just arrived by airplane.” Aerial taxicabs “will circle like vultures over the hotel,” he added, “waiting for a doorman to signal one of them to alight and pick up a departing guest.”

Eberlein’s fanciful but inaccurate prediction of the future shows just how difficult it is to guess at the impact of technological innovations on hotel design and operations.

Wireless, high-speed Internet access, that ubiquitous service that has taken the hotel industry by storm, is being installed in hotel guest rooms as well as public spaces; in economy as well as luxury hotels. While the hotel industry is connecting with wireless technology in a big way, there are still certain basic shortcomings in the average hotel room which can be corrected without any requirement for technological breakthroughs.

What follows is a description of the shortcomings of a one-bedroom suite in a large convention hotel where I stayed recently while attending a convention. It is unfortunately true that these shortcomings are also present in many hotel rooms in the United States.

1. Failed the Turkel blindfold test – looks just like every other guest room in a Marriott, Hyatt, Westin, Sheraton or Hilton hotel. There was no distinctive design element to distinguish it from the competition.
2. The blackout draperies were inadequate to protect against the morning sunrise and allowed a “halo” to penetrate around the periphery.

3. There was no desk in the suite; only a round table in the center of the parlor with no lamp.
4. The two telephones were located respectively on the night table and on an end table next to the sofa. In either case, guests are forced to sit uncomfortably to make calls.
5. Even zero plus and credit card calls were charged a \$1.00 access charge.
6. A low quality clock-radio-alarm was located on the night table. Today's guests care about the quality of music available. They want an AM-FM stereo receiver with a DVD player, and remote high-quality speakers. Incidentally, the alarm clock was difficult to program.
7. The lighting in the suite was totally inadequate with too few lamps and low-wattage bulbs.
8. The bathroom amenities (shampoo, conditioner and lotion) had print so small that you needed a magnifying glass to read them.
9. There were no hand-holds in the bathtub/ shower and no curved shower curtain rod.
10. There was no filtered air and no filtered water.
11. There was no opportunity to skip daily linen changes.
12. There were inadequate fire warnings and directions to the nearest exit in the event of smoky corridors.

With hotel occupancies improving and renovation projects proliferating, why not look at your hotel rooms and bathrooms from the guest's viewpoint.

Note to hotel owners: By all means install HSIA and large-sized plasma TV's but then make the following improvements:

In Guest Rooms

1. Better lighting at writing table, at bedside, in closet, at TV set, at room entry.
2. Master electrical switch at bedside to control all room lights.
3. TV and radio operation instructions that are easy to read, clear in direction, simple to operate and well lit.

4. Blackout drapes and/or shades that actually keep light out.
5. Provide an alarm clock that is easy to program and read.
6. Lamp switches at the base of the lamp where they can be easily seen and reached.
7. Make sure that all descriptive printed materials are well written, clearly printed, and large enough to read easily.
8. Provide a refrigerator and a microwave oven.

In Bathrooms

1. Install well-placed and secure handholds and grab bars in bathtub/ shower area and a curved shower rod.
2. Eliminate hot water surges and provide scald-proof hot water.
3. Install night lights which won't disturb sleeping but will provide safe night trips to bathroom.
4. Provide a UL-approved hair dryer with a wall-hung bracket.
5. Provide bathroom amenities (shampoo, lotion, etc.) in containers, which are easy to identify (with large print) and which have raised surfaces on the cap for easy turning when hands are wet.

In Corridors And Elevators

1. Make certain that corridors are well illuminated, especially over guest room doors to expedite the use of electronic door lock cards.
2. Provide easy to read, well-designed directional signs.
3. Elevators should have clear and well-lit floor buttons with "Door Open" buttons easily located.
4. Elevator door bumpers should retract readily when touched.

Security And Safety Considerations

1. Voice activated fire emergency alert systems.
2. Smoke detectors and sprinklers
3. Medical service availability with provision for emergency illness.
4. Well-lit parking areas with shuttle to and from the front of the hotel.
5. Uniformed security guards on duty at critical times.

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