

Welcoming Environments Don't Have to Cost a Lot

Focus On Nature, Creativity and Lighting



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As travel begins to recover, hoteliers should ask themselves, what can we do to make our guests not only feel safe but also be happy they are staying with us?

Over the near term at least, it is unlikely many hotels can afford to undertake significant capital expenditures for major physical changes. Does this mean they should rely solely on attracting and pleasing guests with helpful, friendly masked staff behind clear panels, employing touchless technology, and the aroma of fragrant hand sanitizers? Or is it possible, with imagination and minimal expense, to create a destination that not only feels safe but also pleases the eye and contributes to the guest's sense of joy and well-being? Moreover, what should it look like given our shared pandemic-related fears and insecurities?

Embrace the Outdoors

Certainly, top of the list should be leveraging nature for the sense of wellness and serenity it inspires. The hospitality interior design community is paying close attention to evoking wellness through the creation of “biophilic” environments. Biophilic design, to quote Wikipedia, “is a



concept used within the building industry to increase occupant connectivity to the natural environment using direct nature, indirect nature, and space and place conditions.” The truth is, for those of us who have designed hotels for a while, this not a new idea — it is just a new descriptor. After all, weren’t the Hanging Gardens of Babylon biophilic?

Resorts, by definition, are in places guests have come to see and experience. It is likely management is, or should be, offering programs for guests to engage with a property’s surroundings. Therefore, it should be relatively simple for a creative interior designer with modest means at hand to enhance the guest’s visual and psychological connection to all that a resort has to offer.



For properties with the luxury of scenic grounds or views, adapting outdoor areas to the highest and best use for not only lounging, but dining, fitness, social gatherings, work and more can often be accomplished with minor tweaks or simple re-arrangements. As we’ve seen throughout our industry, the ubiquitous addition of outdoor heating and battery-powered lighting has expanded the usability of outdoor areas to both cooler seasons and evenings.



Creativity, Imagination Required

At present, the greater challenge for management and, by extension, their chosen interior designer, is how to impart a similar sense of visual joy in an urban or suburban hotel that does not have the benefit of outdoor grounds and natural views nor the substantial funds required to make significant physical changes to the built environment.

Given these limitations, imagination and creativity is called for — there are no universal solutions or “one size fits all” approaches. Each property must be studied on its own. Questions to be asked can include: How can we introduce a sense of nature? How much natural light is available? Do the interiors feel “bright and natural?” Are the furnishings suitably and aesthetically placed? How can these characteristics be imparted using and possibly re-arranging existing furnishings and conditions at hand? What modest additions can be made to enhance the spaces?

The current trend for packaged and in-room food service certainly calls for a pleasant place in rooms for guests to be able to dine in comfort and hopefully enjoy their meal. Up until the start of the pandemic, most full-service urban guest rooms, as they became smaller, were trending away from offering large work surfaces and/or tables. Desks have gotten smaller and pull up



chairs have become ergonomic. A laptop doesn't need much surface space to be functional, dining is different — particularly if there is double occupancy. Again, creativity required.

Lighting Matters

Another key element to the overall appearance of spaces and one that is frequently ignored is lighting. For the good of our planet, we must use energy wisely. However, the “color” of today’s energy efficient lamping has a very significant impact on not only the hotel’s appearance but even the perceived colors of existing interior finishes. As a property ages, light bulbs burn out and are often replaced with whatever is at hand. The result is frequently a collection of mismatched bulbs in the same room or area, some “cool” some “warm,” which negatively affects the appearance of every space the guest sees.

Each space in the property should be evaluated on its own, at various times of the day, to ensure everything is being done within the limitations of what exists to nurture and enhance the guest’s sense of well-being and connection to nature. As our guests begin to emerge from their cocoons, it is incumbent on hotels and resorts to not only make guests feel welcome but to be truly delighted they chose to stay with you.

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