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THE LOBBY

The lobby is the first 'memory moment' of a hotel. It is the 'point of arrival', making the first and lasting impression. We all want that experience to be good, to stand apart from the competition. Operators have always gone to great lengths and more so now, to develop detailed brand identity requirements to meet and exceed guest expectations. We, as interior design consultants, are given the charge of creating that environment to contain, provide and enhance that experience in real space.

We avoid the term 'trends' per se as by definition, a trend implies a shelf life. Traditionally, the lobby in

the simplest sense was about the 'WOW' factor including reception, registration, a lounge area, circulation to vertical transportation and F&Bs. We are now seeing the integration of all of these elements – a more casual and seamless approach with blurred lines between zones where the bar is also a coffee shop or bakery bridging into the 3-meal restaurant. The lounge is broken up into varied zones, social and business focused on the entire lobby, allowing the individual business user to have discretion in a 'pod' slightly shielded from the hustle and bustle of the more social spaces, casual seating that allows for groups to gather, drink coffee and basically hang out. Flexibility is key, revenue is the goal.

Currently, we see a strong movement towards the hotel lobby at all levels from select service to 5-star, as a revenue generating destination, could be a stand-alone venue and exist with or without hotel rooms.

TECH TRENDS

Technological advances are the constantly changing factor, which affects design. This, of course, results in new and different design solutions. For instance, is there a need for a manned registration desk when optional self check-in on a tablet in the entrance lobby

or straight to room check-in is available? Everyone expects access to wi-fi in every area of the hotel. Room technology that 'remembers' you and sets the room to the settings of your prior visit and the complete removal of a 'business centre' with the expectation of integrated technology throughout the public spaces is expected. As all devices are getting smaller, table tops or traditional desks in the guest room can be addressed in a completely different way.

Long duration of projects presents difficulties such as maintaining original design integrity

CHALLENGES

The Indian market is unique. One of the greatest challenges we have faced is the long duration of many projects. This presents many difficulties, such as maintaining original design integrity and specifications throughout the life of the project. Consequently, this factor adds considerable time and effort in revisiting and re-documenting. Additionally, when a brand produces updated standards





and design directions, the design process and solutions can be significantly affected.

'MAKE IN INDIA'

DiLeonardo works across the globe and we put great emphasis on research about the region, location, history and culture of all hotels. It is critical to immerse the design team in these elements to produce sensitive responses. Owners often provide a strong direction, which we use to influence and develop design solutions. It is most important that the interior architecture reflects locally inspired elements through craftsmanship, materials, construction techniques and with vernacular references.

RENOVATION TO MEET CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

There is a big renovation market globally right now. Many properties missed out on the last '7 year' soft goods renovation due to the recession, so are overdue for total renovation. It is critical that older properties, which wish to compete effectively with the new brands, look carefully into their renovation. Soft goods will not be enough to endure another five to seven years, so a deeper investment is needed to upgrade technology and the guest experience. The arrival experience, the lobby, and of course, the rooms including bathrooms, must be given a total makeover to both keep up with and stand apart from the competition.

MIXED-USE CONSTRUCTION

We feel that hotels integrated into mixed-use are a successful model. This is financially favourable for the developer. Often, the presale of apartments funds the hotel fit out and the costs are spread across the entire development budget. The hotel and its facilities can draw foot traffic from the retail, F&B, and residential population and vice versa. A select service hotel in a mixed-use location can benefit from the facilities provided by third party offerings such as restaurants, gyms, wellness, spa and retail.

CLOSE TO THE HEART

All projects are close to my heart. I enjoy traveling, particularly to India and always have a strong desire to keep coming back. Currently, we are working again with MPG Hotels and Infrastructure Ventures. on the Taj Gateway Hotel in Kochi. It is a newly built one and our design scope included the ground floor public areas as well as the two-bay suite. We were given a clear and uncomplicated brief to meet operator and owner requirements and a refreshingly defined timeline.

Our team researched the location, primary guest profile and produced a fresh, crisp design response to the suite, lobby, bar and 3-meal restaurant. This was an extremely efficient process and we are excited to see it built.

