



Luxurious new bathrooms were part of the multi-million dollar extensive renovations at the Hilton Whistler Resort & Spa by SSDG.

HOTEL TRENDS – GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Designers are being challenged to create stylish, luxurious and sophisticated hotel environments that meet or exceed high guest expectations. BY CHERYL MAH

IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY are quintessential in the design industry and no other area allows for more creativity and diversity than hotel interior design.

Hotel design has undergone dramatic changes over the last decade, responding to the evolving expectations of guests. Demand for luxury, aesthetic sophistication and technological convenience is being reflected in modern hotel design.

Gerry Shinkewski, principal of Seeton Shinkewski Design Group (SSDG), says today's hotel design is a refreshing alternative to the cookie cutter hotels of 10 years ago.

"Hotels are now being designed with a sense of time and place," he says. "It's about creating intimate personal spaces - what hotels are about and where people want to be."

Guests are more design conscious today and astute with greater expectations, according to Sharon Bartolotto, principal of BBA Design Consultants.

"With every hotel you try to generate something that's in keeping with its environment — it challenges you to do something unique in that location," she says. "Every hotel that people stay at should be an experience...whether it's a five star or a two star. Everyone's looking for their own way to brand their facility."

The designer's goal is to help hotels create a distinctive and memorable experience to distinguish themselves in a highly competitive marketplace. Design and personalized services offered are becoming major factors in guests' lodging decisions. For example, the importance of health and wellness is being reflected in improved spas, exercise rooms and even cuisine.

"The opportunity to create an experience starts at the front door so the question is how do you give hotel guests the best experience that they can have... and that is being translated into the décor," says Shinkewski. "The moment you walk into the space...something has to grab the guest and become a conversation piece or lasting memory for them."

Hotel design is also unique in that it offers designers a diverse range of space types to work on from guest rooms and public spaces to retail and restaurants.

"In a hotel you get to be more creative with the spaces — all these different areas that have different functions. There's more opportunity to do custom design pieces and custom design lighting because of the scale and scope of the project," says Edith Wormsbecker, president of MCM Interiors, who has been doing hotel design for the past 20 years.

Another trend that designers are seeing is a crossover between disciplines of design — retail, residential and even office components — in hotels.

“We’re seeing a lot of borrowing from the retail sector where items can be easily changed out,” says Jennifer Kurtz, SSDG senior designer. “For example, the front desk might have a panel that is changed out seasonally. There might be an area rug within a guest room that again can be changed out to relate to the time of year to provide guests with difference experiences.”

Shinkewski notes hotels are also trying to attract local guests in to use their facilities and designers are meeting that need by creating inviting spaces (lobbies, bars, restaurants, and spas) for socializing, business and relaxation.

Technology has probably had the biggest impact on hotel design. High tech amenities are key and while designers have to accommodate the emergence of wireless technology in almost every space, it has also given them more flexibility.

“Technology is really changing the way we’re looking at things,” says Wormsbecker. “Everybody wants computer facilities right in the room. With new technology we can have flat screen TVs that disappear so we’re not constrained by the traditional space needed for a big TV armoire.”

Adds Julie Campbell, SSDG associate, “We’re seeing millwork changing to suit new technology like flat screen TVs and having power access for laptops and cell phones. We’re seeing more integration of all these features.”

Guest expectations are also pushing for changes in bathroom design. Bathrooms, traditionally an afterthought, are now making design statements. Many hotels are focusing on upgrading bathrooms: replacing bathtubs with stylish showers and using more high quality materials such as granite and marble.

“Bathrooms are one area that we’re seeing more money being spent per square foot than ever before,” says Shinkewski.

The layout of hotel rooms is changing too.

“Without the full size TV armoire and bathtubs, the suite size is smaller and that ultimately means more rooms and more revenue for the hotel,” says Kurtz.

Hotels require materials that will endure aesthetically as well as functionality. Advancements in materials and products are giving designers more choice.

“Durability, aesthetics and pricing are all important when you’re dealing with products,” says Wormsbecker.

Carpeting with contemporary patterns is being increasingly used while lighting is playing a big factor in changing designs.

“We have more options in lighting. We have new lighting techniques with LED technology that we can do things that we haven’t been able to do before,” says Wormsbecker. “We’re getting much wider variety of products and using more crossover products.”



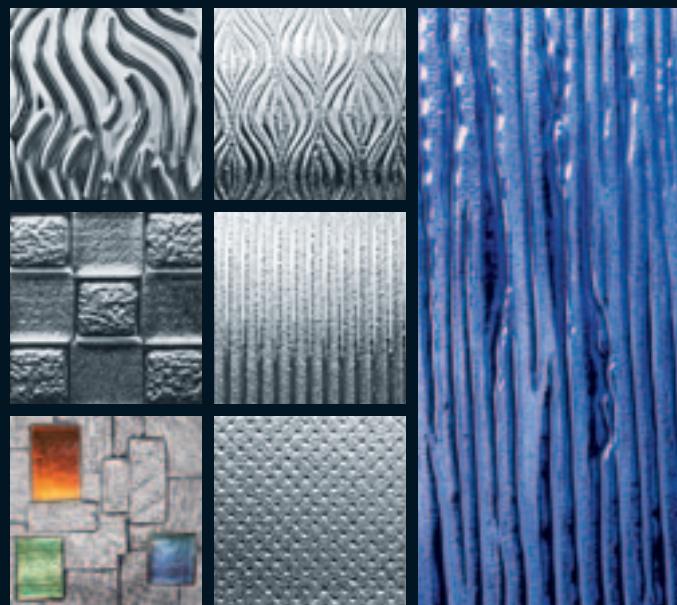
MCM Interiors won an IDIBC award of excellence earlier this year for the newly renovated guest rooms at Hyatt Regency Vancouver.

Lighting plays one of the most dramatic elements in a hotel. It sets the mood and accentuates the design. In guestrooms, lighting needs to be functional and aesthetically appealing.

Guests being able to personally control lighting in their suites to personalize the space is quite a trend, notes Campbell.

Adds Kurtz, “it’s important to have a good combination of indirect light and accent light on specific feature pieces. We also focus a lot on maximizing the natural light in the space with window treatments and room layouts.”

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SSDG's design at the Sundial Boutique Hotel, Whistler has transformed the spacious suites.

With some hotels enjoying record high occupancy levels this year and the 2010 Winter Olympics four years away, hotel renovations are expected to increase.

"Hotels are starting to think ahead to the Olympics particularly in our area and starting to prepare and budget for that," says Campbell.

A challenge with hotel renovation projects, though, is integrating new design concepts within existing space and infrastructure.

"Basically 9 out of 10 times we're dealing with renovated space so there's always going to be constraints where new elements

need to work within existing elements," says Campbell.

Hotels renovation should be done every seven years to keep the look fresh and current, notes Bartolotto.

"The challenge is sometimes things are done very piecemeal because of how far hoteliers can go to renovate it at any one time. That's a challenge — not to make the design look piecemeal and keep it fresh," says Bartolotto.

Condo hotels are also generating a lot of activity for designers. The number of hotels that sell some its units as condos have grown in recent years and expanded beyond traditional markets such as ski resorts to urban centres.

BBA Design is doing a lot of

condo hotels and resort hotels these days.

"For financing purposes developers are choosing to build condo hotels. The design takes on a more residential feel than strictly a hotel room," she says. "The quality of multi-family residential projects in Vancouver has set a real benchmark so hotels have to follow suit in terms of their bathrooms and kitchens."

Boutique hotels remain popular. The smaller, often independently owned and stylish boutiques are achieving better rack rates and occupancy rates which are pressuring major chains to rethink their designs, says Shinkewski.

Although sustainable design is a mandate for many design practices, hotels are one of the sectors where green principles have not made much headway.

"It's our job to educate the client about what are the possibilities," says Kurtz. "As the public becomes more aware, it will become a more important element for hoteliers to have sustainable initiatives in place and to market them."

Another factor that could influence more demand for sustainable design in hotels is manufacturers developing products geared towards hospitality that are environmentally friendly.

"Green design is starting to come up in hotel design. It's not big here as in some other areas," says Wormsbecker. "I haven't personally worked on a LEED hospitality project, but energy efficiency is definitely an area that impacts hotels." □□

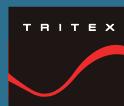


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