

THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF DESIGN IN HOSPITALITY

Presented by

Skift.

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ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is the largest industry intelligence platform providing media, insights, and marketing to key sectors of travel. Skift deciphers and defines trends for global CEOs and CMOs across travel, dining, and wellness sectors through a combination of news, research, conferences, and marketing services.

ABOUT SKIFTX

SkiftX is Skift's in-house content studio. SkiftX produced this report in partnership with Accor Group.

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Sofitel Kunming, China
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Live Limitless

Hospitality—can it be reimagined? To us, it's an art that knows no bounds—it sparks infinite inspired moments, whether you want to Live, Work, or Play. To unlock life lived limitless, we've created a holistic lifestyle ecosystem, and the innovative solutions to power it all. Because the future belongs to those who design it, and we're here to bring you there—first.

IN THE NETWORK

Almost

4,800 **704,000**

Hotels Rooms

IN THE PIPELINE

Over

1,100 **198,000**

Hotels Rooms

RAFFLES \ ORIENT EXPRESS \ BANYAN TREE \ DELANO \ SOFITEL LEGEND \ FAIRMONT \ SLS \ SO \ SOFITEL \ THE HOUSE OF ORIGINALS
RIXOS \ ONEFINESTAY \ MANTIS \ MGALLERY \ 21C \ ART SERIES \ MONDRIAN \ PULLMAN \ SWISSÔTEL \ ANGSANA
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INTRODUCTION: DEFINING DESIGN'S PLACE IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY



Grand Mercure Auckland, New Zealand, design by Space Studio

If the word “design” gives you tunnel vision toward visual elements and built spaces, prepare to expand your perspective. In today’s world, design is so much more than an aesthetic discipline. This is particularly true in the hospitality industry, where design strategies impact the guest experience, both online and offline, throughout the entire travel journey. Design influences the way consumers understand and perceive brands across physical and digital touchpoints. It impacts the way they experience and evaluate their journey and the way they feel – not only about the hotel brands they interact with, but about themselves as people.

Today, successful design requires a holistic approach. Design thinking is what guides travelers from their couches to far-flung destinations and keeps them coming back for more, from booking and checking into a hotel, to eating, drinking, and exploring a new destination and then heading home. And taking this bird’s eye view of design’s influence on hospitality makes it clear to see how every element of design can coincide and contribute to the bigger picture.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR DESIGN IN HOSPITALITY?

There has been a fair amount of industry discussion about how the leading travel and hospitality brands are thinking about design today. But how should the industry evolve to be prepared for future shifts? Where is consumer demand heading? Why does design matter at all, and why should it matter for travel and hospitality?

To transform design within hospitality, it's important to look to other industries. In this report, we interview designers and design leaders about the principles, strategies, and trends paving the way for services, experiences, spaces, and beyond. We'll investigate the ways these separate spheres of design are more interconnected than they seem and learn about the ways different design categories can collaborate and coexist to create an experience that's so much greater than the sum of its parts.

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Good design has a far deeper meaning than just making things look good. It can reflect culture, history, and tell stories. ... Design is far beyond just the look and feel, and in the end, design has a huge influence on the human experience of a space.

— Kingsley Amose,
Global Chief Design and Technical Services Officer,
Accor



WHO WE SPOKE TO



Kingsley Amose
Global Chief Design and Technical Services Officer, Accor



Joe Faust
President, Dakota Development (a Division of SBE Entertainment Group)



Maud Bailly
Chief Digital Officer, Accor



Krista Hansen
Executive Creative Director, GMR Marketing



Gaurav Bhushan
Global Chief Development Officer, Accor



Oliver Haslegrave
Founder and Director, Home Studios



Chris Cahill
Deputy CEO Hotel Operations and CEO Accor Luxury Brands



Melissa Holm
Creative Director, Steelcase Event Experiences



Manuel Donayre
Vice President of Creative and Marketing, Mirrored Media



Tobias Kruse
Regional Business Design Director, Fjord



Justin Lefkovitch
Founder and CEO, Mirrored Media



Jessica Reznick
President, We're Magnetic



Amy Morris
Co-Founder, The MP Shift



Michele Robinson
Head of Learning Design, e180



Amir Nahai
CEO, Global Food and Beverage and Lifestyle, Accor



Aga Szóstek
Author of Seed Cards, Strategic Designer



Damien Perrot
Global Senior Vice President Design, Accor



Steven Taylor
Chief Marketing Officer, Accor



Anna Polonsky
Co-Founder, The MP Shift



Jérémie Trigano
Co-Founder, Mama Shelter

DEFINITIONS

Spatial Design

Designing for spaces is a well-documented discipline that infuses a venue with character and soul through architecture and interiors; furniture and objects; colors, sound, and lighting. Spatial design draws customers in and makes them comfortable by practically using a space and creating experiences informed by taste, style, and energetic flow.

Digital Design

Digital design combines visual design skills with technology tools to generate the experience consumers have online through their phones, tablets, and computers. But digital design doesn't just live in the tech world – digital experiences can help shape the physical experience, from influencing a guest's emotional response to impacting concrete spaces.

Service Design

The very concept of service design is rooted in the needs of the consumer. Service designers create seamless, intuitive interactions around the operations that are most common to a business offering. Their work supports both employees and end customers by easing physical and digital journeys and meeting needs from a human-centric perspective.

Experience Design

Experience design brings products and services to life in environments that satisfy all the senses. Experience designers give brands character by building full-scale, interactive worlds that can range from live events to immersive art installations. At its core, experience design is about creating powerful moments that can tap into our shared humanity.



INTERVIEW

WHY HOSPITALITY LEADS THE FUTURE OF DESIGN

DAMIEN PERROT, GLOBAL SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT DESIGN, ACCOR



Since Damien Perrot joined Accor more than 20 years ago, he has learned, shaped, and revolutionized the way the company approaches and innovates around design. He started his career with the company as an information technology project manager and now serves as global senior vice president design, with a number of leadership roles in between. Perrot is intimately familiar with every element of the design strategies Accor has put into place. In fact, he built many of them himself.

Today, Perrot works hand-in-hand with Accor's marketing department and other teams to develop, deploy, and oversee group design strategies for the hospitality projects taking place throughout Accor's 35-plus hotel brands. He believes that the hospitality industry is at the frontline of design's future, and that

it is up to hotels and hospitality brands to take risks, innovate, and evolve their approaches to design in order to push the industry – and the world – even further.

SkiftX: Are there core principles that the global Accor portfolio follows? Or is design individualized to each brand?

Damien Perrot: It's both. The first thing that all of our brands have in common is our ambition to create hotels not only for travelers, but also for the locals who live in the areas around our properties. The second key element is the role emotion plays. If we want people to remember their journeys in one of our hotels, we need to make sure that they're going to feel something. They need to live an experience and be surprised. These two things are the common pulse for all our brands. Beyond this, each brand has its own criteria and DNA.

For example, Ibis used to be a "hotel appreciated by everyone." Now, our goal is to create something that will be loved by some of our guests – we're no longer trying to please everyone. We now offer different concepts within the Ibis brand so that people can find particulars to love that are relevant to them. Another example is The Junction, a co-working concept we created for one of our premium brands, Pullman. The space is ideal for business, leisure, and special meetings, and offers rotating food and beverages for both sit-in and take away. We placed the bar at the center of the space to animate the lobby's atmosphere and provide interaction between guests and employees and between guests themselves.

How does Accor design hotels that are not just for travelers but for locals as well?

The first thing is architectural: We need to make sure there's continuity between inside and outside. In a traditional hotel, you have an entrance and one or two doormen, but you don't really feel welcome. We're trying to break that pattern so that people walking down the street feel invited to stop what they're doing and come inside. We're opening the facade of the hotel and bringing the inside hotel experience outside to make both travelers and locals feel welcome.

In terms of interior design, we want to serve the needs of people living nearby as well. For example, we have areas in our lobbies that are more relaxed and quieter and some that are busier and more social, so you'll enjoy being there no matter what your mood or who you're with. A guest might get some work done, enjoy drinks with friends, or have a business meeting. The goal is to create something that people can't find somewhere else.

It sounds like design has a bigger purpose for Accor than just looking aesthetically pleasing.

Aesthetics are only 20 percent of the job for a good designer. The rest is the ability to envision how people will live today and tomorrow. The best designers analyze and think about people's likes, motivations, dreams, and needs before drawing anything. After that, design enables our teams (like food and beverage, reception, and booking) to meet those customer expectations, and also to support a brand's performance and its ability to achieve its goals.

What role does creativity play in Accor's design strategy?

For Accor, creativity has no borders. We work with designers from all over the world to realize different visions on one project. If you ask a designer based in

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Aesthetics are only 20 percent of the job for a good designer. The rest is the ability to envision how people will live today and tomorrow.

Moscow to design a property in Paris, there's a good chance he's going to bring something new to the table. Also, if you always work with hotel designers or the same designers, it's very difficult to create something new, unique, and surprising.

For example, to create JO&JOE we worked with a designer who had never designed a hotel before. Or to build Ibis's new design philosophy, we worked with one designer in Brazil, one in Austria, and one in Thailand, who developed three different concepts starting from the same brief with the same brand DNA.

Accor supported the Paris Agreement on climate change and has an internal sustainability program called Planet 21. How does design fit into Accor's sustainability efforts?

Sustainable design is a must today, not just because of our own commitment to the planet but also because our clients and partners expect it. Sustainability also means performance for today and tomorrow – when you design a hotel, it has to last for 10 years or more – so it is completely integrated in every step of our global design strategy.

We are also proactive about ensuring that the companies and designers we work with comply with our sustainability standards from conception to production.

In that way, we work together to make progress, such as with our circular economy principles: reduce, reuse, and recycle. From the beginning of a concept's creation, we analyze building materials, installation, and removal strategies, plans for renovation and reuse, and opportunities to source local solutions.

What general design principles guide Accor's approach to hospitality?

We integrate design innovation at the earliest stages of the process. That's how we created our concept for our Flying Nest mobile hospitality solution. These self-sufficient rooms are located in mobile shipping containers and finished with eco-friendly wood, all designed by Ora-ito. When I meet guests who have stayed at Flying Nest, they're usually more excited

about the amazing experience they had versus the room itself. And we didn't set out to design a mobile room – we set out to design an experience. When someone tells us that they "lived something extraordinary," we met our goal.

Design is one of the most important elements of hospitality because it literally touches every aspect of the journey: the architecture, interior design, organization of spaces, programming, entertainment, objects, artworks, staging. This is why hospitality is the best industry to challenge all aspects of design and imagine new trends. To me, the emphasis on evolution is even more important than innovation. If we are continuously evolving, we will always be ahead. To do that, we need to dare. Maybe we'll be wrong, but either way, at least we're trying new things.

Flying Nest by Accor, design by Ora-ito



EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE: THE ROI OF DESIGN



Mercure Brighton Seafront Hotel, United Kingdom, design by Helen Hooper

There's no denying that good design requires real investment. Implementing a holistic design strategy that can address every corner of a hospitality brand demands the devotion of time, financial resources, and highly-trained human capital. How can owners, managers, and business leaders analyze whether their investments are paying off? What are the best ways to develop metrics and track the design's effectiveness from a business perspective? We asked a brain trust of designers and design executives the seemingly simple question:

HOW DO YOU DETERMINE THE ROI OF DESIGN?

Jessica Reznick, President, We Are Magnetic: ROI is very dependent on setting the correct goal at the start. For example, there's a project we're currently working on that has an ultimate goal of foot traffic, but there are also a lot of other things stakeholders are asking for, too. We have to design to achieve the specific goal while quieting the noise from everything else.

It's great if a million people share a photo of your brand online, but if that had nothing to do with your goal, then you didn't solve anything. You have to set your analytics to the business problem and then design appropriately.

Aga Szóstek, Author of Seed Cards, Strategic

Designer: I strongly believe that money is a result of action, but it's not the main goal in itself. The primary goal for experience design or service design or anything that's customer-centric should be to create positive word of mouth. If this is achieved, the more people come, the more they buy, and the more income that creates. If your project doesn't change how customers are talking about you, you've made a bad investment.

Oliver Haslegrave, Founder and Director, Home

Studios: If a space gets an award, builds a devoted

neighborhood following, or leads to opening other venues, those aren't numbers per se. But all of those things have to do with people responding to the full product and everything coming together – and design is only a part of that. I think ROI is out of design's purview.

Krista Hansen, Executive Creative Director, GMR

Marketing: ROI is a tricky evaluation point because it means different things to different brands. Once we define a goal, we can implement the right tools to make sure that gets measured. Even more importantly, we can measure it in real time so we can make real change happen actively. What are we learning on day one that we can implement on day two? Our ability to adapt and shape the way a consumer views us is important. It's critical that we define those metrics out of the gate and use the right technology to get us there quickly.



MGallery by Sofitel, Elements of Byron, Australia, interior design by Rowena Cornwell from Coop Creative

DESIGNING FOR BUSINESS IMPACT

In many ways, a good design strategy is the key to unlocking business success. When design leaves the realm of the purely visual to become a holistic, big-picture approach, it doesn't just power better guest experiences, it drives businesses' bottom lines. Or, to put it another way, better design experiences for your guests contribute to better business results for your brand.

Designing with your business's health and long-term success front of mind can help build revenue and financial gains, fuel sustainable business growth in the long term, and inspire the kinds of awards and acclaim from both critics and consumers that put your brand on the map. Here's what our experts had to say about designing for business impact.

Jeffrey Sharpe, Global Lead and Principal Director, FrogSpaces: Today's challenge is to develop physical spaces that can recognize users and respond to their needs, whether it's with a purchase, setting room temperature and ambiance, scheduling a meeting room, or booking a massage. We are developing spaces that are a fluid extension of one's digital life — our clients and their customers expect their spaces to know them as well as their apps do. By designing

spaces that measure effectiveness and are easily reconfigurable, we maximize our client's investment and contribute to the space's sustainability.

Jeremie Trigano, Co-Founder, Mama Shelter: The main differentiator for us is not design, because you can always find a great designer. Where we make the difference is with the food and staff and with the human contact you have at Mama Shelter. Design is important, but today, everybody is going that route. You need to be different in ways other than just design.

Melissa Holm, Creative Director, Steelcase Event Experiences: Work doesn't stop in this day and age. When people travel to attend corporate events, they need to focus on the information they're getting, but they also need to attend to their daily job back home. We need to provide spaces that allow people to get that job done without having to go back up to their hotel room just to take a call. It seems like a no-brainer, but power is a very necessary thing. Airports have addressed it, but a lot of convention centers and hotel venues have not. We are asked continually to load up our environments with power because it's such a huge demand. That need is ever-increasing.

Mercure Brighton Seafront Hotel, United Kingdom, design by Helen Hooper



INTERVIEW

WHY LIFESTYLE HOTELS NEED A SOUL

JOE FAUST, PRESIDENT OF DAKOTA DEVELOPMENT



Joe Faust is the president of Dakota Development, the real estate-focused division of SBE Entertainment Group. Dakota Development is the team behind the SLS Hotels in Beverly Hills and in South Beach, the SLS Las Vegas Hotel & Casino, and The Redbury in New York. Before joining Dakota and SBE, Faust worked at the Hyatt Hotels Corporation for more than 15 years, oversaw more than \$1 billion in projects, and developed and renovated over 40 hotels in the United States and the Caribbean.

In his role as president, Faust oversees Dakota's integrated development and design team to guide the real estate process from start to finish for all SBE's properties. For Faust, succeeding in lifestyle hotels requires one thing: a focus on food and beverage. Design comes into play not only to bring restaurants and bars to life as an active and exciting component of a guest's hotel stay, but also to deliver bottom line business success.

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There's so much more that goes into the design and programming of a hotel to make it more than a glorified dormitory — and profitability for owners works hand in hand with that. Design can drive revenue.

SkiftX: How do you define “lifestyle hotel?”

Joe Faust: A lifestyle hotel is a property that has a soul. It's not just a cool-looking space, it's everything that a guest sees, feels, and touches when he or she enters that environment. You can design a cool hotel that doesn't have any soul. For us, the soul of a hotel comes through F&B. We've been able to establish ourselves by integrating those brands into the overall hotel experience. We're really a food- and beverage-driven company that happens to do hotels.

How does thinking about the guest experience factor into your design process?

We start thinking about the guest experience when we master plan and program buildings. From the time I get any drawings, when we create architectural backgrounds, we start to look at how we can finesse these spaces to be different. I immediately start to think of that guest arrival experience. What is the guest experience from the time they get out of their car until they open that front door?

What are they seeing? What are they feeling? It's that initial first impression that people get — that one chance to wow them, right then and there.

Is there a guest archetype you imagine walking through a hotel's doors?

It depends on where you are and what you're projecting for the property. SLS South Beach is on the beach, and it's a historic landmark building, so you embrace some of the challenges that you get in that architecture. I don't want to build a hotel that feels cookie-cutter. I want to create an experience so that when I walk into SLS South Beach, I understand that I'm on the beach in Miami, and I'm experiencing everything that goes with that. But it needs to be done with a little bit of a twist and offer something that you don't see in the other hotels there.

Are these spaces designed with locals in mind, in addition to hotel guests?

Yes, this is the case in everything we do. Food and beverage can set the tone for a hotel. We welcome people from the community to come to our hotel to eat, drink, and become a part of the hotel that way. That makes the hotel feel different because we have so many people who aren't even staying there coming to meet and hang out.

What are future trends or untapped opportunities for hospitality?

Other areas of the world haven't even begun to embrace some of what we're doing in North America. Many regions are still trying to do hospitality the traditional way, which gets back to owners who have made a lot of money operating old-school hotels. We're trying to convince them that the world has changed and how hotels work has changed. Doing a three-meal restaurant in your \$250 room hotel just doesn't work anymore.



Mondrian Park Avenue, USA, design by Philippe Starck

Owners used to hope they didn't lose money on food and beverage, but now food and beverage is what makes the difference. When we come in and say, "Hey, you can generate \$15 million a year if you do this in restaurants," that's a whole new revenue stream that owners have never even thought about. We can integrate food and beverage to be a much more vital component of the revenue stream.

What's your guiding design philosophy?

I started in the hospitality business 30 years ago, and it's really interesting to look back. We live in a more global world than we did 15 or 20 years ago. Consumers have changed and their thought processes have changed. How I think and how my 28-year-old son thinks are completely different. Younger generations are much more exposed to the world and have a much greater understanding of it. What they want is different than what I wanted when I was 28 years old.

We need to think about the value of design in hospitality, rather than approaching it as a necessary evil. Sometimes owners think, "You know what, I want to own a hotel. It's 150 keys, and it's got a restaurant and a bar. I'm going to hire a designer." But there's so much more that goes into the design and programming of a hotel to make it more than a glorified dormitory — and profitability for owners works hand in hand with that. Design can drive revenue.

INTERVIEW

EMBRACING THE IMPERFECTIONS OF A SPACE

ANNA POLONSKY AND AMY MORRIS,
CO-FOUNDERS OF THE MP SHIFT



Credit: Ruby Rose

Anna Polonsky and Amy Morris are co-founders of The MP Shift, a concept, design, and branding studio specializing in lifestyle and hospitality projects. The MP Shift is known for its design work on Lyle's in London, Echo in Paris, Golda in Brooklyn, and De Maria in Manhattan, for which the firm won the 2018 James Beard Award for Outstanding Restaurant Design. As a 360-degree agency, The MP Shift tackles design from all directions – interiors, graphics, visual identities, marketing, and strategy – to craft a cohesive, holistic vision that will guide the entirety of a project with design at the helm. We talked to Polonsky and Morris about shifting restaurateurs' priorities, focusing on flow, and daring to think differently.

SkiftX: What are the first things you look to determine when you're tackling a new project?

Polonsky and Morris: We want to bring our clients' visions to life instead of having a signature style, so it's really important to get to know the brand. If you don't have a strong foundation, you're going to be subjected to trends and the way the wind is blowing. If you don't set the creative direction around the brand, you never know where you're going to end up.

Everytime we see a space, we want to understand the flow. We want it to be inviting, so you can move through the space and see several spots where you want to sit, and come back again and again. We wish that restaurateurs would worry less about the X thousand dollars you stand to earn or lose per seat. If your restaurant's not full, you're going to lose a lot more money. Think about the flow, lose a couple of seats, and make it a place people want to be at every day.

What would you say are the top things that make for successful space design?

We think some designers want every inch to have a point of view, but sometimes it's better to be true to the space and try not to overdesign. Instead of covering up imperfections in a space, we let them be the unique differentiators. For example, when we took the wine shelves off the white subway tile walls at De Maria, the walls cracked. So we went to Home Depot and we filled in the cracks with one- by one-inch white tiles.

We thought, "This is what an artist would do if this happened in their own studio." Not a lot of owners would let us do that – they would think we were out of our minds. But the owner gave us a lot of freedom, and it's now the one thing that everyone asks us to do in their space. It's almost as if we planned it. That's where honoring the space brings out interesting characteristics and personality that make the space unique.

How do you determine success in designing for spaces?

If a place has good design, it has a welcoming vibe. If it's buzzing and alive and people keep coming back, it's not just the food. I think you've hit a home run with the design when you see people in the space several times a day, making it their local spot.

What are the most important principles in designing for multi-functional spaces that can host many different vibes throughout a day?

That's something we think about no matter what we design. We think it's very important to visit the spaces you're designing. You have to move your mind and imagine you're those people. We love seeing how people work in our own office. For example, I often see our staff sitting paired off, looking at things together on the sofa. What does that mean for a conference room? Have you ever seen a conference room where it's all sofas and low tables? Why is it that when you come together as a team, a conference room is a long table with chairs?

We think our team would do a lot better in a room with sofas and chairs and low tables. It creates more of a collaborative environment. We have to try to think against the norms. When Roman and Williams designed the lobby at the Ace Hotel, instead of saying, "The hotel lobby is only a place where guests come and go," they said, "Let's make the hotel lobby a part of this city." How do we have locals spend their time here? That was a brilliant way to think. We know that's something we would do. How do you think about a conference room differently?



Three Owls Market

INTERVIEW

WHY GOOD DESIGN AND GOOD BUSINESS GO HAND IN HAND

TOBIAS KRUSE, REGIONAL BUSINESS DESIGN DIRECTOR OF FJORD



Tobias Kruse's user-centric service design strategies are front and center in his role as regional business design director at Fjord. Serving clients including Unilever, Save the Children, Maersk Oil, and parent company Accenture, Fjord offers future-focused business models ranging from design-led strategy to service design and product creation. In his work across Africa, Europe, and Latin America, Kruse balances blue-sky visions of the future with practical strategies informed by his training in design thinking.

Kruse is clear that the more consumers' needs change, the more the role of companies will change. And with that new authoritative role comes a certain responsibility for companies — and service designers — to address the state of society at large. Good design

and good business go hand in hand, according to Kruse, particularly when designers and business leaders do a better job of listening to the needs of humans living in the world today.

SkiftX: How does the world of service design play out in the travel industry?

Tobias Kruse: Service design is difficult to explain to clients. It's about creating a holistic perspective of an experience. It's about the subtle dots that you connect in a customer experience to make a big difference. At Fjord, we start with our understanding of the customer and then we take a collaborative, co-creative approach to design. With the advent of autonomous technology, the travel experience is about to change dramatically. Do hotels become mobility providers? Do automotive companies become hospitality providers? The new mobility ecosystem has the potential to disrupt industries completely.

What role does service design play in connecting those two sectors?

Companies need to look at travel and mobility from a customer perspective instead of a pure technology perspective. We need to overcome industry barriers. And while we always start with the customer, you also have to keep the business in mind. When we talk to airlines, for example, they are looking at providing end-to-end services. Does it make sense for an airline to tap into getting people to and from the airport as well? Those are important business implications to consider.

Ultimately, travelers don't care *how* they get from A to B. They don't care about the end of your operating zone, they just need to get where they're going.

How is service design changing in today's hospitality world?

Service design is becoming a more mature business. A few years back, it still was a niche. It's becoming more mainstream, and many more companies are doing it, so clients' understanding of service design has also grown. Clients are also better educated about the value of customer-centricity. The challenge is to make that happen across large organizations. It's one thing to understand it, but making it happen and tying into KPIs is a challenge a lot of our clients face.

How do you gauge the success of good service design?

Ultimately, good design is also good for business. We need to move the needle to prove the business impact of design, so one example would be tapping into new growth areas for clients. Or we could be saving costs through an optimized customer experience. But what's really interesting to me is societal value. This is something that is relatively new, because the role of companies is shifting.

Edelman did a study that shows that 75 percent of employees are looking to companies to solve big questions that you would normally expect governments to solve. So there's this shift of companies becoming an authority. I see and expect a bigger focus

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People are becoming much more conscious about their screen time and are more likely to seek out a physical experience... Hospitality is a good place to provide these experiences, taking the backlash against digital into account.

on the societal value that companies provide. I think design can play a crucial role in that because it starts with the human perspective. What can and should companies do to provide societal value?

What do you see as an emerging trend in service design?

One of the things we're analyzing is a concept we call Silence Is Gold – the continued backlash against technology and digital. People are becoming much more conscious about their screen time, and they are more likely to seek out a physical experience like reading a book. Lots of people are going back to paper. That feels counterintuitive because everything is going digital, but it has to do with well-being, mindfulness, and peace of mind. Hospitality is a good place to provide these experiences, taking the backlash against digital into account.

EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE: REDESIGNING THE HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE

As the vanguard of design's future, the hospitality industry boldly challenges the boundaries of what was once thought possible. Hospitality leaders use design practices to inform their guests' journeys and improve the overall health of their businesses, but that doesn't mean they get it right all the time. As new ground is broken with innovative and experimental design principles, new opportunities emerge to bank on the power and promise of the future of design.

Naturally, many of the designers and design leaders interviewed for this report spend considerable time traveling, both for business and for pleasure. Here are some of their gripes, hopes, and dreams for the future of hospitality, drawing on their experiences both as designers and as guests.

IF YOU COULD REDESIGN ANY PART OF THE HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Amy Morris, Co-Founder, The MP Shift: With Uber, you get in a car, they pick you up, they drop you off, and at the end of that ride you don't stop to pay. Maybe there's a way to prepay for a meal so at the end of your dinner when you want to go, you go. You're not waiting for the check and wondering if they forgot about you. When you walk in, you're anticipating the meal, you're taking in the environment. There's this wonder and excitement. How do you make the end of the meal seamless and exciting?

Oliver Haslegrave, Founder and Director, Home Studios: If you call down with a request, and you say, "I forgot my toothbrush, do you have one you could send up?" And they say, "No, I'm sorry, we don't do that," it's very different than if they send one up to you, send somebody out to get one for you, or if they say, "We don't do that, but we can tell you where to find one."



The expectation is not that they're going to have every answer, but it's frustrating when they don't help you find the answer. I don't think the answer should ever be that they can't or don't do something. There should always be a lead to help you get there.

Jessica Reznick, President, We Are Magnetic: I want my individual experience to feel right for me. In the past, I've gotten into a city late at night after working an entire business day and then taking a long plane ride. I just want to go to sleep, and someone says, "It's after midnight. We didn't think you were coming." Something as simple as asking upon booking when and how I plan to arrive makes it feel like they're looking out for me. It's about understanding how our lives are changing, forming relationships, anticipating guests needs, and making them feel like it's a two-way conversation.

Justin Lefkovich, Founder and CEO, Mirrored Media: I can tell when I have been thought of as a guest. Everyone wants to feel like they are important and are having a unique experience that is crafted to them. Even if it's not, even if every single person is getting that same experience, as long as they feel like it's for them, they feel like they are getting that value. When Delta tweets at me to ask how my flight was, that makes me feel special. Even if they tweeted at every single person that's flying that day, it doesn't bother me as long as I also got it. Those little things go a long way.

Melissa Holm, Creative Director, Steelcase Event Experiences: We live in a world where time is our biggest commodity. Unfortunately, sometimes when you're traveling for fun, you're still trying to work, because the lines are blurred between life and work now. Or sometimes you're traveling with co-workers and you need to have a meeting or do a presentation, and it's inappropriate to go to somebody's hotel room, but there is really no other space. Investing in communal spaces like hotel lobbies, pre-function areas, or small meeting rooms would address some of those work travel needs.

Krista Hansen, Executive Creative Director, GMR Marketing: I would redesign the first 10 or 15 minutes of entry into a hotel space. Everything you experience and learn while checking in impacts your stay. I stayed at a hotel that had it right: When I checked in, I was met by two individuals who welcomed me. One whisked my bags away, and the second walked me to the desk and stayed with me while I checked in. Then he gave me a tour and pointed out the hotel amenities he thought would be most valuable for me. Hotels usually throw that information on their website and in the room guide without taking the time to understand what a consumer is actually interested in. Being able to curate and respond to the needs of each traveler is really important.

MGallery by Sofitel, Hôtel de la Coupole Sapa, Vietnam, design by Bill Bensley



DESIGNING FOR HUMAN EMOTION



Raffles Makati, Philippines, design by Bent Severin International

We've seen how good design strategies make for good business practices, but how does design impact the most crucial element of our humanity: our emotions? Design can do more than paint a pretty picture for a guest, and it's certainly about more than picking the right color palette for a room. Done well, good design leverages the most basic of its functions to make real emotional connections with the people who experience it.

And beyond the perspective of the individual – which is surely an important aspect to address – good design has the power to shift our collective humanity within the circumstances of our time. How can design impact society or change the trajectory of our shared human experience? Here's what our experts had to say about designing for human emotion.

Manuel Donayre, Vice President of Creative and Marketing, Mirrored Media: If a beautiful space doesn't mean something to us, if it's not an experience that has some connective tissue for us emotionally, then it doesn't carry through. It's the difference between a world-renowned composer who touches the heart and soul of the people and one who just goes through the motions. How can we turn brand values into powerful long-lasting moments?

Jessica Reznick, President, We're Magnetic: A lot of people use technology for the sake of technology, which can be dangerous. It's important that tech always be grounded in a story. It needs to be relevant to a brand or an experience rather than something that just looks cool.

As AI takes over, there's going to be more of a need to find emotional connection points, and experience design can make sure we maintain those physical roots. Email and phones are great, but there's very little that can substitute for the physical experience of sitting down face to face with someone.

Jeremie Trigano, Co-Founder, Mama Shelter: Our staff's attitude is to be "bienveillant," which means treating clients with goodness and care. Non-five-star hotels lack that friendliness and warmth, and even in five-star hotels, sometimes you feel like it's superficial or fake, and they're wearing these awful uniforms so the staff isn't comfortable. Our staff dresses however they wish under the Mama apron, so they feel comfortable, which breaks that barrier.

In terms of emotion, the most important thing is authenticity and friendliness. But that's not a design issue, it's a human issue.

Krista Hansen, Executive Creative Director, GMR Marketing: Emotion is the number one thing we try to learn about our audience, and it's our job to make sure that emotion is present in all aspects of what we design, from the totality of the experience to the physicality of the space. The notion of subconscious/conscious design is critical, because you can have an incredibly visual, cool experience, but if it doesn't feel good, no one is going to pay attention. So the "feel" part has to be there. You need to understand the emotional state of your guest and design to keep that positive vibe alive.

SO/ Sofitel Auckland, New Zealand, design by WORLD



INTERVIEW

UNCOVERING THE NARRATIVE OF A SPACE

OLIVER HASLEGRAVE, FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, HOME STUDIOS



Oliver Haslegrave is the founder and creative director of Home Studios, a creative studio for buildings and interiors based in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. As Haslegrave and his team have designed for hotels, hospitality projects, and residential spaces around the world, they've become known for injecting surprise into the familiar and layering innovation over the tried, tested, and true. Home Studios is the design force behind such award-winning restaurants as Gwen in Los Angeles; Alameda, Cherry Izakaya, and Tørst in Brooklyn; and The Spaniard in Manhattan.

SkiftX: What do you see as an emerging trend in designing for spaces?

Oliver Haslegrave: I hope diversity of influence becomes a trend. In the past, it was harder because you had to work with the materials and resources you already had, but now information is much more readily available. Interesting things happen when you combine different perspectives and see what happens. It's more opaque in design than in a restaurant, because it's hard to know what the influences were. There's no menu, so to speak, no explanation by the staff as to intent.

We worked on a project in Los Angeles called Bibò, where our two main influences were the Memphis Movement and the Vienna Secession. They aren't analogous, but we thought there was some pretty interesting overlap. I don't know if that would be apparent if you went there, or happened to like the space. In design, after everything is combined into a result, it's harder to tell what the influences were.

How do you work with clients to anchor those unexpected concepts within their vision?

We try to spend a day with the client visiting the places they have in mind as touchstones or inspiration for every project we work on. We keep it pretty informal and react to the places we visit with them. It's about enjoying the experience, talking, and seeing what comes up. It's a chance to start drilling down into

what gets them excited, and ideas start coming out of that. You can really get a good understanding of the vision and build those reference points in a full day.

How do you then connect those reference points out to surprising twists and new ideas?

I previously studied film, and part of the reason I was attracted to it is that it combines many creative pursuits under one umbrella. Music, lighting, cinematography, photography, construction, editing, writing, directing, and acting. It's a comprehensive way to watch different disciplines interact. A lot of these go into designing an interior as well, and it's all glued together by the narrative.

Interiors are not as stylized or directed as films, and an interior is this breathing thing that changes night after night, year after year, whereas a film is the same every time you watch it. But we still always talk about the narrative. Why are we making these decisions? What are our pillars? What is the story? What is the history of the operator, the building, the neighborhood, the country, the state?

All these elements give you details about how to create this world.

In addition to narrative, what other design principles are most important for you?

Attention to detail. You're creating an energy that you hope people will be attracted to, and one way to do that is to tell an interesting story. To make that story even more compelling, you pay attention to the details of every interaction a person can have — with a door handle, the bar, the table, their chair, the lighting, the sound. We come back to the narrative and the details as context for the decisions we make instead of relying on generic tropes.

Take the bistro: It's not that you don't want to work in that tradition, you just want to try to breathe something new into it. You want a space to reflect everyone's experience to the degree that you can. So we work in these traditions, or with the proportions and materials that have stood the test of time for a reason, but we also try to breathe new ideas and life into them, to have an interior reflect a new way of experiencing, in this case, going out.

Five Leaves LA, Credit: Home Studio



INTERVIEW

EXPERIENCE DESIGN AND ITS IMPACT ON MEMORY

AGA SZÓSTEK, STRATEGIC EXPERIENCE DESIGNER AND
AUTHOR OF SEED CARDS



Aga Szóstek is an accomplished User Experience designer based in Warsaw, Poland. Her clients include Google, Philips, IKEA, and Samsung, as well as banks, national parks, and governmental organizations. Szóstek is the creator of Seed Cards, a deck of prompts geared towards inspiring service and experience designers to refocus their efforts through the lens of the consumer and dream up new ways to help customers fall in love with their brands. In her transition from service design to experience design and through her focus on UX in technology, Szóstek has developed a keen sense of the power of design to help us do business better and touch our emotions.

SkiftX: What criteria do you consider when you're looking at taking on a new project?

Aga Szóstek: One of the criteria is whether the project truly brings something good to the world. Is it just a project to help other people make money? Or, is it something that actually creates some value? It might

sound idealistic, but I think design has the power to change the world. There's a quote I love from Melvin Kranzberg, a professor who helped establish the study of the history of technology and its impact on society: "Technology is neither good or bad; nor is it neutral." I think the same is true for design. Design can be used to create great things or bad things, or it can convince people to do something they shouldn't. I'm not saying design shouldn't be there to help companies make money and do good business, but there are different ways to accomplish that.

What are the differences between service design and experience design?

To me, service design always starts with investigating users' needs. We seek to understand people's pain points and expectations, and try to solve those problems. Experience design is tricky for designers because you cannot design an experience, you can design *for* an experience. Experiences are subjective; they depend on your mood, how you feel, who you are with, etc. So in experience design, you need to start with a vision. What defined memory do you want people to walk away with at the end of the experience?

What are the top elements that make good service design?

Psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman and behavioral scientist Jason Riis talk about the two parts of the self: the experiencing self and the remembering self.

The experiencing self lives through the experience and introspectively evaluates it, moment by moment. The remembering self is our internal library of memories that defines how we see our lives. Memories color how we perceive life, so you feel better if you have a lot of positive memories and you feel worse if you have a lot of negative memories.

Designers often focus on the beginning of the experience, but because guests focus on the ending, it's more important to design for catharsis at the end than to design for an awesome opening. We all have expectations, or this idealized version of how the world can be, so we imagine the possibilities of an experience before reality hits. It's important to understand expectations so you can plan to positively impact that memory at the end of the experience.

What design principles are most important for the travel and hospitality industries?

Hospitality is a pioneer in experience design – it's all about offering people an experience. Service design helps people save time by making interactions smooth, convenient, and easy to do. But experience design focuses on helping people spend time well, and that's what hospitality is all about. Take Airbnb offering experiences, for example. Designing for time

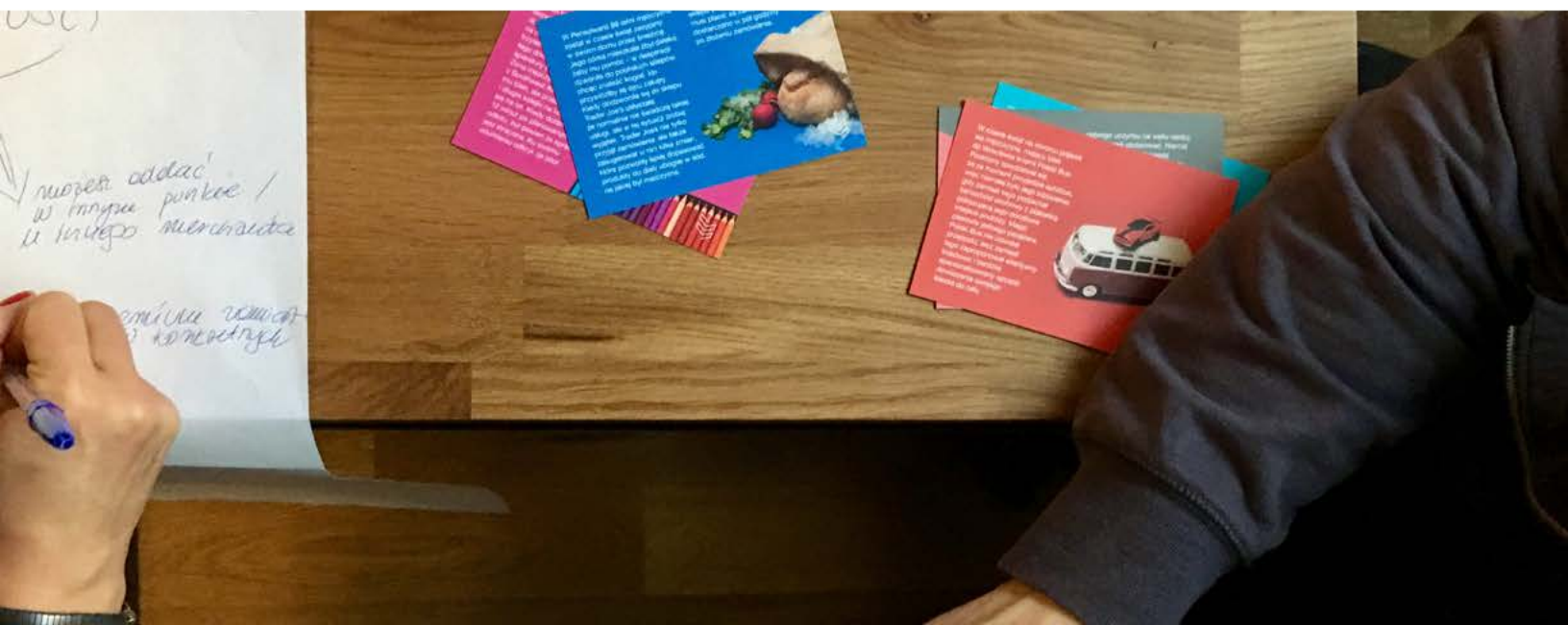
well-spent is already being addressed in hospitality. But what about investing time? You can help people spend time well and have beautiful memories, but you can also make people feel that the experience was worthwhile.

What are some examples of how hospitality brands can help guests invest their time?

A startup called Authenticitys does it well. All the experiences they offer are based on social impact. You can visit the Barcelona shore with an NGO that teaches you about the city's impact on the sea before leading a beach clean up. Or you can talk to an entrepreneur who immigrated to Europe from Africa and learn about how he started his business and what life is like for him. It's about a higher sensitivity to what's going on in the world, rather than just traveling for a nice time.

Many years ago, I was volunteering in Madagascar with an NGO called Blue Ventures. We were investigating the vitality of the coral reef, so we spent six weeks in an amazing, remote place, diving and working on the reef. We combined diving with doing something for the environment. This is a really promising area for travel companies because it brings a combination of experience design and a commitment to positive impact into the hospitality industry.

A creative workshop run with the inspiration from Seed Cards



INTERVIEW

DESIGNING FOR MOMENTS OF SHARED HUMANITY

MICHÈLE ROBINSON, HEAD OF LEARNING DESIGN AT E180



Michèle Robinson is the head of learning design at e180, the company behind Braindates, the knowledge sharing meetings that have taken the conference and convention world by storm. What is learning experience design? “That’s a good question,” Robinson said. Many learning designers are developing the workshops and labs you might find at a high-tech conference like C2. Robinson’s responsibilities at e180 focus more on growing Braindates as a widely accessible, crowd-sourced knowledge market that supports the course of the entire learning journey with real human connections.

SkiftX: How would you describe what a Braindate is to someone who’s never experienced one?

Michèle Robinson: A Braindate is a crowdsourced knowledge sharing meeting. It’s a time for people to connect with each other and to build the fabric of their community. There are such amazing communities that have limited access to education, or just limited access to each other, that could benefit

from knowledge sharing experiences. People are working in silos on similar problems, like in social justice spaces or in tech. What would happen if these people could build on each other’s projects and experiences rather than working in solitude?

What learning experience design trends could hospitality brands learn from?

There are a lot of mindfulness apps out there calling out mental health issues. We’re connecting with the human side of things again, going back to the roots of what it means to be alive. One of the reasons Braindates works so well is because it meets that need. You’re meeting someone in person and you’re building something together. We never want to lose sight of how valuable it is to feel human, and to feel human with other people. But we’re trying to get to that point as quickly as possible, and that’s where things get tricky. How do you warm up for an experience like that?

We know what icebreakers are getting at — “turn to the person next to you and look them in the eye for three minutes” — but we’re still uncomfortable. What’s a better way to get there? For us it’s about play, getting people to forget what others might think by focusing on a simple game. Laughter works because that’s something everybody can share. We all have such different stories, expectations, backgrounds, and degrees of privilege. Everything can be different from person to person, but the ability to play is something we all have in common. We all want that joy and that childlike feeling.

What general design principles inform your process around learning experiences?

I've learned that no matter how much time you spend empathizing with the people you're designing something for, there is still no perfect experience that can meet everybody's needs. The only perfect experience you can build is one that allows for flexibility and interpretation, allowing people to choose for themselves the meaning they want to get out of it. If people are seeking that type of personal meaning and development, it resonates even more in today's world to give them that choice.

Not everybody understands the exact same thing from a movie, but everybody pulls from the same experience. Or think of poetry: It's impossible to fully understand what was intended by the poet, and if the poet wanted the same meaning to come through every time it would be a button in an app instead of a poem. If you want an experience to really resonate in a personal dimension, it can't be prescriptive from

beginning to end because there's no way to know what every person's interpretation is going to be. For each person to connect deeply, you have to allow personal interpretation to come into play.

Why do you think live learning experiences are so important for people today?

What I was interested in when I was studying theater was that real, in-person, human connection. You're paying to sit in a room where there's a real person being vulnerable and generous in front of you. I remember saying, "One day, people are going to pay to see a human being do something in front of them." At the rate technology is changing today, human connection is going to become very important again. Yes, you can get wild moments from a technological experience. But nothing can compare to connecting with a physical human being standing in front of you. My hope is that there's a return to helping people engage with each other.

e180's Braindates



CASE STUDY AND EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE: HOW ACCOR INTEGRATES DESIGN INTO EVERY ASPECT OF ITS BUSINESS



SO/ Berlin Das Stue, Germany, design by LVG Arquitectura and Patricia Urquiola

Accor's unique design approach inspires the company's mindset that hotels don't exist just to serve their guests, but must cater to the full picture of people's complex, 24/7 lives. In this way, the executive leaders at Accor understand that for travelers in the modern world, serving up a bed and a continental breakfast just doesn't cut it anymore. Consumers today demand hospitality experiences that are personalized, immersive, and more design-forward than ever before.

That's why Accor incorporates design into every aspect of its business. As the core principle guiding all of Accor's brands, Augmented Hospitality allows the company to expand its business offering by growing its understanding of the consumer. From its three

pillars of hospitality – Live, Work, Play – Accor seeks to serve both that modern picture of a hotel guest and the locals and neighbors who live in the surrounding communities around its hotels.

The concept of Augmented Hospitality is also a key driver behind Accor's belief that the role of design in the industry is ripe for reevaluation. The traditional thought that hotels are only places where weary travelers can rest their heads is outdated; from it emerges the revolutionary idea of hotels as central hubs from which the spokes of all kinds of life can emerge, working together to spin society forward into the future. We talked to some of Accor's executive leaders about how Augmented Hospitality and design are poised to usher in what's next for the industry.

INTERVIEW

KINGSLEY AMOSE, GLOBAL CHIEF DESIGN AND TECHNICAL SERVICES OFFICER



SkiftX: What does design mean to Accor, and how has that meaning changed over the years?

Kingsley Amose: Design is the core of producing great products for all our brands. There has also been a massive evolution in Accor on how we approach design. Our approach to design used to be practical and safe. For example, not too long ago, Ibis's design was meant to be functional, easy to maintain, and comfortable. But now, through our massive evolution, Ibis's brand is meant to have a personality and passion. The atmosphere has a residential, contemporary, and at-home feel. Going from the functional approach we started with to a modern, emotional approach has been a big change.

What core design principles does the larger brand follow, and how does that interact with design strategies for individual brands?

It all starts with the target market, and the brand sets the design story. The Fairmont, for example, is targeting a luxury segment and a particular age

group that define the personality of the brand. We then tend to the experience we want to provide for that target market and use design to match the market segment for that brand. Take Novotel, which was another another functional brand. Today, the Novotel approach is designing a modern, universal social hub. We approach design for luxury brands and midscale brands differently. Design for luxury brands is more bespoke, while design for midscale brands has common DNA combined with regional elements.

How does the locality of a hotel factor into Accor's overall design approach?

Location and local relevance are key in our design approach. We look specifically at the space. When we opened the Sofitel Darling Harbour in Sydney, we had to make sure the spaces and facilities were right to satisfy the market segment – the fitness center and spa, the food and beverage offerings, and the lobby and room sizes. We asked what the Sydney market demands, because while room size in the Chinese market is 45 square meters [484 square feet], people in Sydney are happy with 32 square meters [344 square feet].

Our second step was to form what we call a "Cultural Link" between Sydney and France, which is the personality of the Sofitel brand. We linked the Sydney way of life to the Parisian lifestyle in a French rotisserie and grill, a lobby bar that focused on French mixology and wines, and another wine bar that focused on connecting Australian wines to the French culture. We put it all together with imagery of the Sydney Harbour informing the atmosphere of the restaurants and bars, the lobby, and the guestrooms.

How does history come into play while taking into account the locality of a hotel?

One example is the Raffles Singapore property. The building's status as a national monument was taken into account of the locality due to its rich historical heritage. It is currently under a major restoration to breathe new life into the building. We are also currently developing an exclusive Raffles Resort in Singapore. While starting the project, we imagined that Sir Stamford Raffles, the founder of modern Singapore, had a granddaughter who grew up in Singapore before visiting nearby Southeast Asian cities. We questioned how Singapore has evolved from its traditions – a blend of Chinese, Indian, and Malay cultures – into a contemporary modern city that still has roots with these cultures.

We wanted to take that essence and reflect it in the landscape and the architecture. We wouldn't want to replicate the traditional Singaporean style or simply have an ultra-modern approach, so we took a contemporary interpretation of the Singaporean past, which lies in between. When guests step into Raffles, they will experience that story from their

arrival. From the first sip of their drink to the guest room, to the hallways and spa, careful consideration has been taken to ensure that we retain the ambience and what is unique to Raffles Singapore. Using design to link history to the modern guest experience helps create a storyline with deep meaning.

How does design influence brand loyalty?

The brands create a vision and a dream, and design converts that dream to a reality you can touch and feel. Brands' aspirations are achieved through design. For example, our 25hours Hotels brand aspires to tell people stories. What does design bring? It captures those stories, and it fills the space to give guests an experience. Design is loyal to the brand, and the brand depends on design to express itself.

It's a challenge to stand out in a crowded marketplace and to make sure the consumer recognizes our brand ethos. From a customer point of view, we design towards people. Design produces the atmosphere and sets the stage, but it's the guests who really make it happen by activating the design, and when they like the experience they remain loyal to the brand.

Bokan, Novotel London Canary Wharf, London, United Kingdom, design by Mystery



INTERVIEW

I MAUD BAILLY, CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

**SkiftX:** How does digital design fit into the guest experience at Accor?

Maud Bailly: We definitely use digital to influence a guest's physical journey in the hotel. We're developing a fully digitized mobile check-in process, so instead of guests waiting in line, we can reach them in the hotel lobby in a proactive way. At the Ibis Cambridge Central Station, someone will welcome you with a cappuccino and a cookie to let you know if your room is, or isn't, ready. This digital solution impacts physical design, because the welcome desk has completely disappeared. This is the case in nearly 300 of our hotels.

How is Accor's approach to digital design evolving, and how do you expect it to look in the future?

The way people book and create a travel experience is going to change dramatically. We'll move away from reactive booking. Instead of the guest saying, "I'm tired, I would like to go to a five-star hotel spa," we'll start by saying to the guest: "I know that you had a busy day. Your data from your connected watch shows you haven't slept enough. Here's an offer for a five-star spa with a deep-tissue massage." Instead of answering the hotel requests made via the internet, staff will make personalized offers based on available, opted-in data.

Is there a danger of being too dependent on tech? How do you find that right balance?

Digital and tech are always a means to an end. I'm looking at smart hotels and connected hotels, and I'm following global trends, but I'm not going to replace people in our hotels with robots. The importance Accor places on our staff and guests is what differentiates Accor in the hospitality industry. We own the direct relationship with the guest, so we use digital and tech to develop tools that better support and empower those guest relationships as a high-level asset.

I have never considered digital a constraint but rather an opportunity to promote responsible personalization. People want more and more personalization, and we're going to provide that. We're good at it.

At the same time, we have to respect our guests' priorities. My bet is that our guests will choose more responsible companies that are leveraging artificial intelligence and data to better personalize their experiences and, at the same time, protect their privacy.

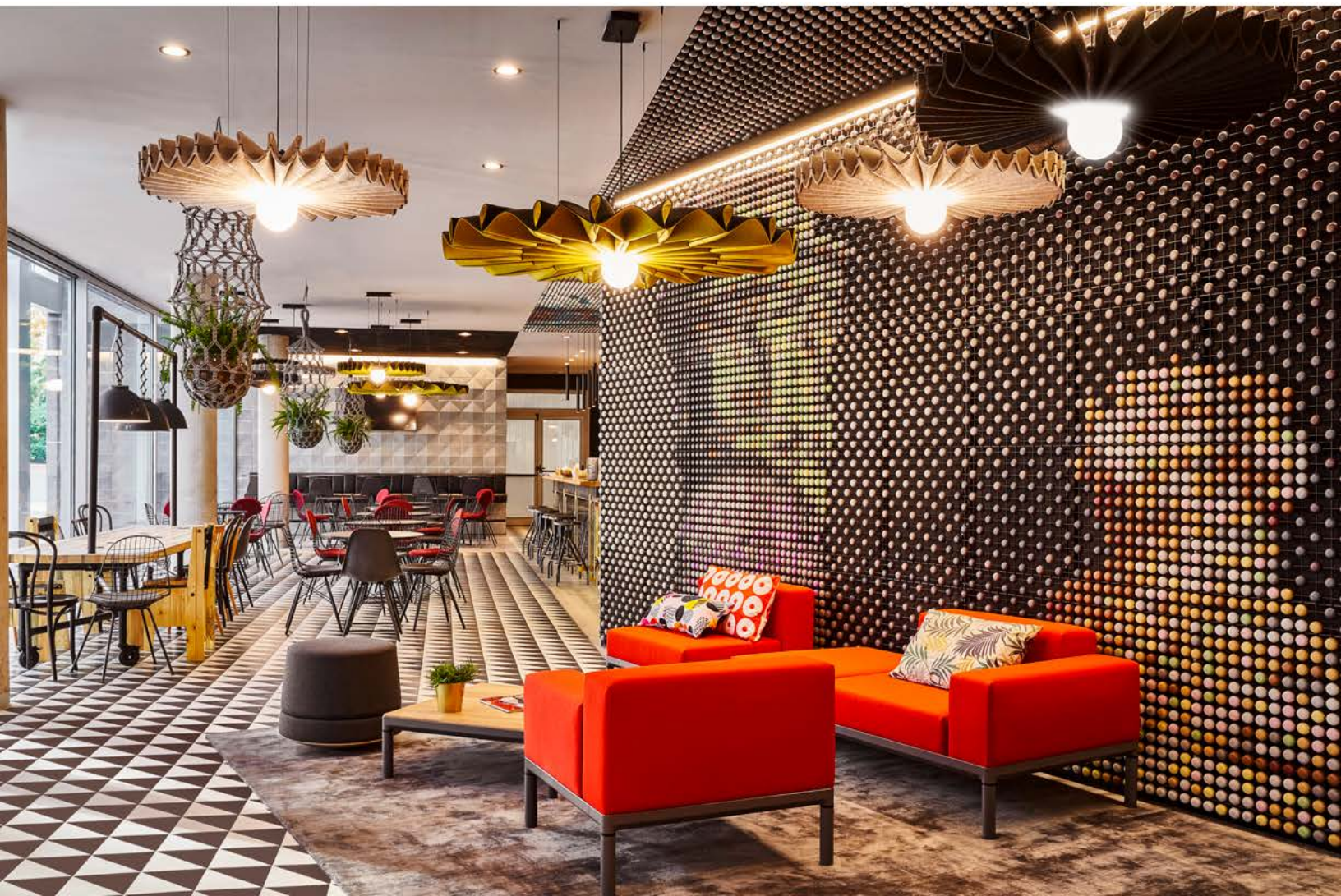
When done well, digital design is invisible. Knowing this, what do you think makes for successful digital design?

Successful digital design is about simplicity, clarity, and fluidity. It's about killing silos and the traditional hierarchical way of working. It's also about co-design, alignment, speed, and metrics. So yes, digital design may often be invisible, but when you look

at the concrete impact – on conversion rate, speed index, number of users, the popularity of the mobile application, or chatbot comprehension rate – digital design has concrete results.

People often believe that digital design is super complicated, but digital design is really about very basic, simple elements. What is the main characteristic of Google's homepage? It's mostly empty. That means it's downloaded faster than anything. The digital era is about acceleration, because people want everything immediately. A good digital interface has to be intuitive, easy to use, clear, and fast. Leonardo da Vinci used to say that simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. But sometimes it's very difficult to implement simplicity in our complex industry.

Ibis Agora, Barcelona, Spain, design by Innocad



INTERVIEW

I GAURAV BHUSHAN, GLOBAL CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



SkiftX: What does Accor's position as a lifestyle platform, rather than strictly as a hotel brand, mean for the company's approach to design?

Bhushan: Having a unique design approach for each brand is consistent with Accor's promise to the customer. It's critical in lifestyle hotels as it's an integral part of delivering a different and personalized experience to the guest. In recent years, our design approach has become more curated, daring, and bold. This is the right direction, in my mind, since experimentation and pushing the boundaries are key when developing lifestyle hotels.

How does each brand's unique look and feel come together under the Accor umbrella?

We are developing 10 different lifestyle brands today, and we bring them together under one umbrella through a single digital distribution and loyalty platform: Accor Live Limitless, or ALL. When it launches in the fourth quarter of 2019, ALL will be the single entry point for all customers to experience all of our different brands. It's the heart of building relationships with our customers.

How do the design and development teams work together at Accor?

We have an incredibly talented design and technical services team, and they work very closely with our brand teams and partners. The key is intimately understanding the DNA of each brand, what it stands for, the guest profile it's targeting, and the design elements required to bring it to life. Unifying all our teams around this common understanding isn't an easy exercise, but doing it successfully allows our worldwide teams to work together in perfect harmony.

In what parts of the hospitality experience is good design most important?

Design touches all elements of the guest experience. It's not just about looking good but also about being practical and functional, both from a guest perspective and a hotel staff perspective. It touches everyone who visits, works at, and interacts with the hotel.

Even on the business side, for example with mergers and acquisitions, design is a key part of a brand DNA. And in turn, brand DNA is a critical factor in determining growth potential and making mergers and acquisitions-related decisions.

What is one aspect of the hospitality experience you find lacking that could be fixed by design?

In an effort to look different, room design in the luxury and lifestyle space is getting too complex. People are forgetting the basic elements of ease of use and

functionality. If it takes you two minutes to understand how to switch off the lights at night, then no matter how good the room looks, it has failed in its objective to provide a good guest experience. Curation and high impact design are great, but they need to be balanced with practicality, both for the guest and the hotel staff servicing and maintaining the rooms. Simplicity is a key element of a good hotel experience.

Pullman Berlin Schweizerhof, Germany, design by Sundukovy Sisters



INTERVIEW

CHRIS CAHILL, DEPUTY CEO HOTEL OPERATIONS AND CEO ACCOR LUXURY BRANDS



SkiftX: How can design elevate a standard hospitality experience into a luxury experience?

Cahill: Design has been elevated in the overall hotel offering to the point where even at an economy or midscale hotel, people expect a heightened sense of design, feel, and style. The essence of design used to be very subtle. It has to be a little bit more expressive today, even in luxury, so the customer really feels it upon arrival.

How do you approach design when thinking about luxury experiences?

We have a dedicated team for each of our luxury brands that determines which elements of each brand resonate most with the customer. They take brand perception in the eye of the consumer and then use design to translate that perception. It all starts with the brand elements, and we track what the customer finds most relevant about the brand through design.

How do you approach designing a wellness experience specifically?

The reality is that wellness has become ubiquitous, so each of our brands carve out the elements of wellness that they want to focus on. For example, Swissôtel has its signature Vitality Room that's a serene, stylish guest room. Fairmont is focused on spas and bringing out wellness in everything from menus to ambiance. Wellness is not easy to address because everybody's interpretation of it is different. You can't be all things to all people, so you have to go back to what people expect from the brand and build that into your design.

The Swissôtel Vitality Room is gaining traction, but the question is, how big will the demand be? The customer says they really like it and they really want it. But when we ask if they will pay an additional premium for it, the answer is usually no. Finding the right elements of the product that the customer appreciates and that they're willing to pay a premium for is part of exploring how highly people actually value wellness in their hospitality experiences.

What do you see as an emerging design trend for luxury or for wellness?

Design has been about form over function in all hotel applications for the last 20 years, and I don't think that's going to go away anytime soon. When it comes to wellness, there's a need to be much more sensitive to design. For a long time, spa products were based on bigger and better, and now it's more a matter of providing the right environment overall. There's much more sensitivity to how people are going to experience a space, and a lot more time spent ensuring that every square foot of space is going to be used effectively to that end.

INTERVIEW

AMIR NAHAI, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GLOBAL FOOD AND BEVERAGE AND LIFESTYLE



How can the design of a food and beverage experience distinguish one hotel from another?

Great design is at the top of the list of the things that people will remember about an experience. Until recently, people didn't spend as much time, attention, and money on design. There was a tendency to replicate brand elements regardless of whether the hotel is in Hong Kong or Paris. Today, you need to empower your teams to innovate, be creative, and to own what they're designing. People want to feel like they're in Hong Kong or Paris. We're trying to move away from standardized concepts and designs in food and beverage, unleashing creative forces and capturing that sense of place at the same time.

SkiftX: What defines good design for a food and beverage experience?

Amir Nahai: There are a lot more variables that you need to get right with food and beverage of course. The visual is important, so it's beautiful and it evokes a feeling, but that is only a starting point. Next, it needs to be extremely functional for the servers, bus boys, hosts and hostesses, and everyone else involved. Number three, it needs to be very comfortable for guests. Comfort is less important in a retail environment where you might pick something up and leave or spend only 15 to 20 minutes. A great restaurant or bar should be a place where you can sit for an hour or two, or even longer, and feel great about it.

How do you think about design through the lens of the consumer?

What distinguishes a great designer is his or her ability to think about the consumer. I see designers who think about themselves, who want to do something that's never been done before, or set out to mainly create a beautiful image in a portfolio, but they never put themselves in the consumer's shoes. It's second nature for great designers to think about the consumer experience first. When they suggest a chair or a table, they've thought about comfort. How comfortable will a guest be sitting there? Does the placement of that station work for everyone? It's essential that designers think first about answering those questions for the consumer.

What is the first thing you ask when designing a new project or opening a new location?

We work with owners to try to understand their vision. The one common facet among all my favorite restaurants and bars is that they were created as someone's dream. Someone loved that place and had a strong vision in mind. They put passion, blood, and sweat into it. That's what I try to get from my owners to understand – when we know what they want, we can help bring it to life. Very institutional owners don't think about it that way, and part of our job is to work with them to try to create that sense of passion – that it's going to be someone's dream.

What's an emerging trend in food and beverage design?

This is both a trend and a hope, and it's all about using high quality materials to be good to the planet. It's about undoing "planned obsolescence." When you've made the right investment in design and materials, you don't need to renovate as frequently because everything lasts longer. Using fewer materials was good for the environment in the past, but there was a tendency for building to be shortsighted. Today, people understand the impact of doing things cheaply and are willing to invest in the right designer, the right materials, and the right quality so that things last longer.

What has Accor done to get the most out of its social spaces through design?

Chill #02, a cafe in our Ibis Cambridge Central Station property, is a good example of using square meters that wouldn't have been productive for revenue generation or for the guest experience. We rethought a check-in space as a great cafe and bar. Right next door you have a pub, a cafe, and a sandwich place – really strong competition. But Chill #02 is always full. You would never have thought to go to an Ibis to hang out and have a coffee in the morning and a gin and tonic after work. That's a good example of using design to rethink a space and a brand.

How has the definition of good design in hospitality changed over the years?

We all spend a lot more time obsessing about the emotional impact, rather than just the functional impact. We are trying to create spaces that you'll remember, versus doing cookie cutter spaces where you just think about function. Design itself carries more weight today, and there's more willingness to spend on design because people realize the very tangible impact it can have. The difference between a really well-designed place and an average place is night and day. More owners today are realizing that, and they're willing to pay what it takes to get the design right.

Ibis Cambridge Central Station, United Kingdom, design by Konzept and Philip Watts



INTERVIEW

I STEVEN TAYLOR, CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER


SkiftX: What does Accor's lifestyle platform designation mean for its approach to design?

Steven Taylor: Now that Accor has transformed from a midscale/economy hotel operator to a travel and lifestyle platform, we approach hospitality as a series of interconnected moments that stretch across daily life, whether you want to live, work, or play. We approach design holistically and look to move away from single-use spaces towards more dynamic, blended living spaces that cater to travelers and locals alike.

How has this approach shifted in recent years?

Years ago, lifestyle brands and boutique hotels started a trend of creating vibrant spaces that targeted the local community. That has now gone mainstream — travelers don't want to stay in their rooms, they want to be part of a community and stay where the locals hang out. Hotel design has had to evolve dramatically

from formal, functional spaces designed to process travelers into much more dynamic living spaces welcoming locals as a priority.

How does the look and feel of each brand come together under one brand umbrella?

We are breaking away from the standardized hospitality codes of the past to design innovative spaces that surprise and delight across all our brands. The goal is for our properties to become blended living spaces that connect with consumers of all types, whether they're traveling or not. Our new positioning, "Live Limitless," reflects our ambition to be relevant across the daily lives of our consumers as well as our innovative, pioneering spirit. We incorporate that attitude into our design philosophy across all segments of the brand portfolio.

Examples of this include the relaunch of Ibis and the new design collection we launched in the first quarter of this year, the transformation of Pullman's public spaces, as well as the launch of our new co-working brand Wojo.

How do the design and marketing teams work together at Accor?

They have an incredibly close day-to-day relationship. Essentially, we are one team working towards the same brand vision and customer experience. Consumer expectations and needs have evolved dramatically over the last 10 years, and as we seek to ensure our brands remain relevant to consumers, our design teams have been absolutely critical in transforming the brand experience to meet the needs of a modern day consumer.

The recent relaunch of Ibis is a great example of this collaboration. We were able to relaunch the brand in a holistic manner by coordinating a new collection of designs with other key initiatives, such as the launch of the Ibis music program and a new global brand campaign.

How does design play a role in driving customer loyalty?

In this social media-fueled world, customer experience is the most powerful form of marketing we have. Customers are looking for surprising, stimulating experiences and Instagrammable environments, and design helps us create engaging spaces that encourage customers to share and amplify the brand. The role of hotels has evolved in the last decade to no longer focus solely on the traveler but to become social hubs integrated within the local community. Design plays a pivotal role in transforming that hotel experience and ensuring that all types of customers – travelers and locals alike – feel welcome and come back time and time again.

In what parts of the hospitality experience is good design most important?

The public spaces in a hotel have always been an incredibly important aspect of the hospitality experience. All the consumer research shows that those first few moments of arrival are the most important elements in determining a positive impression and increasing customer satisfaction. As the role of hotel public spaces has evolved over the last decade, that importance has been amplified even further. Consumers expect much more than just a functional space where they can check in – they're demanding stimulating, multi-use spaces. That has increased the emphasis on public space design even further.

What is one aspect of the hospitality experience that's been lacking that could be fixed by good design?

I think the check-in experience is primed for a deep transformation, with technology empowering a seamless and stimulating arrival experience. Brands like Ibis are removing check-in desks and breaking down the boundaries between employees and guests to provide a more welcoming arrival experience, for example. The removal of check-in desks has allowed us to completely rethink the use of the public spaces of our hotels.

Pullman Vung Tau, Vietnam, design by YANG & Associates Group



CONCLUSION



Jo&Joe Paris Gentilly, France, design by Lee Penson

Design touches every aspect of our lives, so the idea that it impacts every corner of the hospitality industry should come as no surprise. For so many years, design has been an afterthought. Designers were hired to beautify spaces or dress up experiences once they've already been planned, built, and deployed. But today, they transform, adapt, and renew spaces and experiences that are visionary, contemporary, and retro all at once, drawing inspiration from the past and opening the doors to the future.

We now know better than to treat design like a last-minute top coat on a finished project. Instead, design must become an integral part of how hospitality brands do business, how they interact with consumers, and how they leave our mark on the world.

Of course, the great importance of design isn't unique to the hospitality industry. Leading players in virtually every industry today use design to combine technological innovation with an eye on customer experience to elevate their product or service. And as others innovate, the impact of the forward momentum of design thinking radiates outward.

But as an industry, hospitality is fundamentally dedicated to human experiences. As hotels and travel brands embrace their new role as social hubs where modern life can unfold, they won't just be innovating around new technologies for artistic guest rooms and racing to build the most beautiful lobbies in new, untapped markets. Because design isn't just about aesthetics. It's about doing better business to build a better society.

ABOUT SKIFT

Skift is the largest intelligence platform in travel, providing media, insights, marketing to key sectors of the industry. Through daily news, research, podcasts, and Skift Global Forum conferences, Skift deciphers and defines the trends that matter to the marketers, strategists, and technologists shaping the industry.

SkiftX is Skift's in-house content marketing studio, working collaboratively with partners like Adobe, Airbnb, Hyatt, Lyft, Mastercard, and many more on custom projects to engage the world's largest audience of travel influencers and decision makers.

Visit skiftx.com to learn more or email skiftx@skift.com

The Skift logo is rendered in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter 'i' in 'Skift' has a distinct dot, and the period at the end of the word is slightly larger than the others.

ABOUT ACCOR GROUP

Accor is a world-leading Augmented Hospitality group offering unique and meaningful experiences in almost 4,800 hotels, resorts, and residences across 100 countries. With an unrivaled portfolio of brands from luxury to economy, Accor has been providing hospitality savoir faire for more than 50 years.

Beyond accommodations, Accor enables new ways to live, work, and play with food and beverage, nightlife, well-being, and co-working brands. To drive business performance, Accor's portfolio of business accelerators amplifies hospitality distribution, operations, and experiences. Guests have access to one of the world's most attractive hotel loyalty programs.

Accor is deeply committed to sustainable value creation and plays an active role in giving back to the planet and community. Planet 21 – Acting Here endeavours to act for “positive hospitality,” while Accor Solidarity, the endowment fund, empowers disadvantaged people through professional training and access to employment.

The Accor logo features a stylized, golden-brown letter 'A' above the word 'ACCOR' in a matching golden-brown, sans-serif font. The 'A' is composed of two overlapping shapes that resemble flames or leaves.