

**FUTURE HOTEL TRENDS: HOW CAN WE HELP
OUR HOTEL CLIENTS STAY AHEAD OF AN
INCREASINGLY COMPETITIVE MARKET?**

The hotel sector is an ever-evolving response to cultural, technological and lifestyle changes. With a seemingly endless number of luxury lifestyle hotels offering unique and personalised guest experiences, how do developers, operators and design teams constantly stay ahead of the competition whilst making sure the bottom line adds up?

Are we in danger of over complicating both the delivery process and the end result in the pursuit of responding to millennial developments in technology?

A roundtable discussion chaired by Buro Four's Nicholas Black brought together some of London's leading figures in hotels to explore the role and importance of technology, design, architecture, branding, briefing, guest and staff experience and the local community, as well as the new breed of members clubs that are blurring the lines between business, travel and leisure.

"By their nature trends are just that", said Nicholas Black of Buro Four. "Where should we really be spending time and investment in order to achieve results that will truly stand the test of time?"

TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

Questions were asked over the adaptability of new technology and the ways in which it can enhance or diminish the guest experience.

Michael Branson of Crown London Aspinalls said emphasis should be placed on how seamless the use of any technology is for guests.

"Our clients want very state-of-the-art facilities but they also want the comforts of home," he said.

"The construction we're going through at the moment is all about future-proofing so whatever we put in now has to be able to keep up with any developments in technology. When people walk into the building the Wi-Fi has to work, and if it doesn't work that's a complete disaster. If pen and paper is the quickest way then so be it our clients don't want to be kept waiting."

Neale Smith of Foundry Lighting agreed that becoming too focussed on making a building technologically advanced can lead to problems, saying he would guide clients away from installing anything unnecessarily complex.

"If you create an app that guests can download onto their phone for their lights but they don't understand how to work it they will just go and use the switch anyway," he said.

James Clarke of Crosstree Real Estate Partners agreed. "There is no point adopting technology if it doesn't add to or enhance the customer experience. It may worsen experience and even earn potentially poor reviews."

“ We place great emphasis on millennials wanting to operate from iPhones and can neglect to build in points of human interaction that can enhance guest experience for all generations. We like to call it “The Mum and Dad test”.

There are clearly benefits to the use of technology with Andrew Horder from EQ Group highlighting the value of having the ability to walk straight to your room without waiting to check in.

Black highlighted the importance of using technology alongside human interaction to create the ultimate guest experience.

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BACK TO FRONT

Is guest experience built in the Front of House or Back of House?

Black asked why we are typically spending 30% of the budget on Front of House when there are huge advantages of investing more in Back of House.

ROUNDTABLE GUESTS

Chair: Nicholas Black
Buro Four, Director of Hotels

Russell Doughty
Buro Four, Director

Aukett Swanke
Nicholas de Klerk

Core Five
Enson Tu

Crown London Aspinalls
Michael Branson

Crosstree Real Estate Partners
James Clarke

Dexter Moren Associates
Zoe Tallon

EPR Architects
Mark Bruce

EQ Group
Andrew Horder

Foundry Lighting
Neale Smith

Hoare Lea
Andrew Peggram

Tricon Foodservice Consultants
Paul Greenwood

As in all sectors, workforce is key. The treatment guests receive from staff was identified as being crucial to encouraging positive reviews and repeat visits. It was therefore argued that this should be a primary consideration at the design stage, to give the best opportunity for a hotel to maintain its reputation into the future once initial excitement over its aesthetic impact has worn off.

“We are expecting a serious skills shortage in the UK hospitality industry over the next few years. If you want to recruit and retain the best staff, you need to give them the best space to work in,” said Tricon Foodservice Consultants’ Paul Greenwood.

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Branson agreed, saying he doesn’t think the staff experience is considered enough.

“You can’t just leave the staff behind because you can have the greatest venue in the world but if the food comes late it kills it, so we put a lot of time into the staff engagement process,” he said.

Enson Tu from Core Five added, “Emphasis needs to be placed on spending the budget where it adds value. Budget spent on Front of House can potentially be reduced and adjusted to suit but shouldn’t be to the detriment of the product and brand, and as such we need to strike the right balance between Front of House and Back of House.”

In order to address the balance between investment in Front and Back of House whilst ensuring Front of House can be flexible to accommodate future trends, Black explored the concept of multifunctional, flexible spaces in Front of House.

‘ON TREND’ TODAY, FUTURE PROOFED FOR TOMORROW

Adaptability is key.

Black commented, “Crown Aspinalls London are actually at the forefront of everything we are discussing in terms of flexible multi-use spaces, morphing room usage for sports, gambling, restaurants and lounges as is needed.

“There is a massive opportunity to build in flexibility throughout hotels which allows space to be adapted for anything such as pop ups, exhibitions, events, entertainment and the local community. This creates an ever changing environment, enabling the hotel to easily accommodate future trends and maintain that buzz.”

“The options to lease furniture and lighting and install flexible and movable bluetooth services make seemingly major changes also very simple.”

Andrew Peggram of Hoare Lea agreed, “The future is having the right platforms in place that allow for future proofing so additions can be made at a later date and therefore adopt future trends without incurring costs and down time to retrofit.”

INSTAGRAMMABLE BUT AUTHENTIC MOMENTS

The power of social media to influence customers both to visit briefly or book a long stay was also explored, including the quest to capture that “Instagrammable moment”.

Zoe Tallon from Dexter Moren Associates said the importance of the moments which guests choose to capture goes beyond the marketing potential of their Instagram feed.

“It’s about creating experiences and allowing customers to memorise that moment and give them a reason to come back for that,” she said.

The importance is ensuring that authentic experiences aren’t substituted for a social media image.

THE DRAW OF TIMELESS ARCHITECTURE

The panel discussed how the significance of the existing building set to house a hotel has shifted in recent years, becoming a primary consideration at the start of a new project.

Speaking about the recent launch of Soho House’s The Ned, Mark Bruce of EPR Architects commented, “Ten years ago the discussion might have been ‘we’re going to design a hotel in Manchester and it will be a Crowne Plaza, so it will be the Crowne Plaza Manchester.

“Today, with more flexibility within hotel brands, projects such as The Ned can be driven not purely by brand standards or location, but by the existing architecture and the uniqueness of, in the case of The Ned, a listed bank building. The Soho House brand managed to fit the historic building very well, and even benefitted from the quirks and history of the bank to make a truly one-off hotel”.

“When it came to foreseeing trends, the development team combined their knowledge to carve out world-class food and beverage facilities and exclusive members areas. However, one trend that perhaps wasn’t identified at the outset was the demand for the use of the fifth floor boardrooms and event spaces as private dining rooms. That’s what the customers and local market have driven and that’s providing a large amount of revenue”.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The panel agreed that the increased community integration is driving a more relaxed attitude towards the use of space. Andrew Horder of EQ Group said flexibility is becoming one of the most highly sought-after features in the design process.

“One of the patterns we are seeing more is definitely that the local community is invited in more and more,” he added.

The panel discussed the balance to be struck between attracting customers from the local community visiting hotels to use facilities, taking into account the differing

amounts of revenue generated from a short visit compared to a hotel guest.

Using Four Seasons at Ten Trinity Square as an example, Nicholas de Klerk from Aukett Swanke said that while the hotel is adjacent to a world heritage site, it does not benefit from as much foot traffic that a City centre or West End location might. Creating a destination hotel with a design concept which draws on the building's unique heritage and first class facilities such as the three Michelin-starred La Dame de Pic restaurant, helps to address this challenge.

MOVING FORWARD

Summing up, Doughty noted that the emphasis is now placed on forward planning for a quality but adaptable guest experience.

"The lines are becoming more and more blurred and we need to design for that but we also need be careful what we wish for, because we know we want the local community in but we need to question what we want them there to do," he said.

Enson Tu commented that more time should be spent working on the brief at the early stages in order to ensure the whole team is focused on future-proofing, with minimum impact on cost.

"I think defining the brief at the start of a project is very important and it's not often that we spend enough time looking at the brief. It's about the team looking at it together and bouncing ideas off each other and coming to a conclusion as to what the dream is."

Doughty agreed, adding, "I think there is also something about a willingness to accept that we don't always know what we want now and being able to tolerate taking that decision later doesn't mean being out of control, it means being confident that we can make that decision at the latest responsible moment. There are many ways in which we can do this through adopting favourable procurement, contract and programme routes"

Black agreed, "The Design needs to be embedded with future-proofing and flexibility - both back and front of house - from the outset, in order to be able to respond to future trends," he said.

"But I think we have also agreed that with reasonable pricing, good food and drink, decent wi-fi, staff with a smile and good service, you can stay at the top of your game and ahead of most trends."

For now, at least, those who are willing and able to hold fire on certain key decisions - and keep a cool head doing it - are likely to be the winners when it comes to longevity.



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