

# THE INN

## SEVEN RADICAL NEW TRENDS IN HOTEL DESIGN

Hoteliers and hotel design experts are questioning some ancient tenets of the hotel industry. For starters, they're asking: Do guests really need a bathtub?

By Jay W. Schneider, *Senior Editor*

**T**he typical hotel business guest has a laptop, a BlackBerry, a cell phone, an iPod, and a disdain for boring hotels designed for the way people traveled 40 years ago. They expect hotels to reflect the way they live now—and, even better, the way they aspire to live—and are gravitating toward hospitality brands that emphasize design, convenience, and flexibility.

These 21<sup>st</sup>-century travelers are changing the way Building Teams approach hotel projects, with fresh thinking reflected in new multipurpose lobbies, to wider—but sometimes smaller—guest rooms, to guest bathrooms minus the bathtub. Attitudes are changing with regard to energy management, self-serve check-in kiosks, and select-service brands, and all these changes are being reflected in new design concepts.

From interviews with hoteliers and hotel design experts, *Building Design & Construction* uncovered seven trends that are having the greatest influence on the next generation of hotels.

### 1 Lobbies are going multipurpose.

Comfortable, casual, and usable lobbies—marketed as great rooms or gathering rooms—are replacing formal, underutilized lobbies.

“Building costs are so expensive that people want to utilize the lobby space in different ways so they can be as efficient as possible,” says

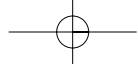
Andrew Strasser, principal of Chicago-based Oxford Lodging.

There is no longer a separate bar, separate sitting area, separate check-in space, separate anything. Instead, hotels are turning the large lobby into a series of small, open living rooms to draw guests out of their rooms and encourage them to ... well, hang out.

“It’s a whole different mentality for hospitality,” says Nunzio De Santis, AIA, director of hospitality for Dallas-based architect HKS. “These spaces have to be more social, flexible, and designed so they are no longer dead lobbies but social environments and work environments where guests can relax or conduct business.”

The small living room zones are defined by higher ceilings, fireplaces, more columns, and furniture arrangements that offer zones for either social interaction or solitude. The cocktail bar and lounge are extensions of the whole space. There are informal meeting spaces with work tables, and wireless Internet availability is becoming de rigeur. These informal meeting spaces are of particular importance because it’s socially more comfortable for business travelers to meet in the lobby than in a guest room, notes Roger G. Hill II, CEO of Gettys, a Chicago-based architecture firm.

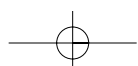
People are more inclined to spend time in the



# THING

When the Hilton Hartford in Connecticut was remodeled, the architecture firm Geltys transformed its basic lobby into an area named Element 315—a multipurpose space that serves as a living room and grab & go café by day and a hip cocktail lounge by night.

*Photo: Jeff Millies © Hedrich Blessing*



## HOSPITALITY FACILITIES



A. For guests not traveling with their own computers, the Hyatt Place lobby features a computer zone.

B. More flex space; the lounge offers additional seating, tables, and work space.

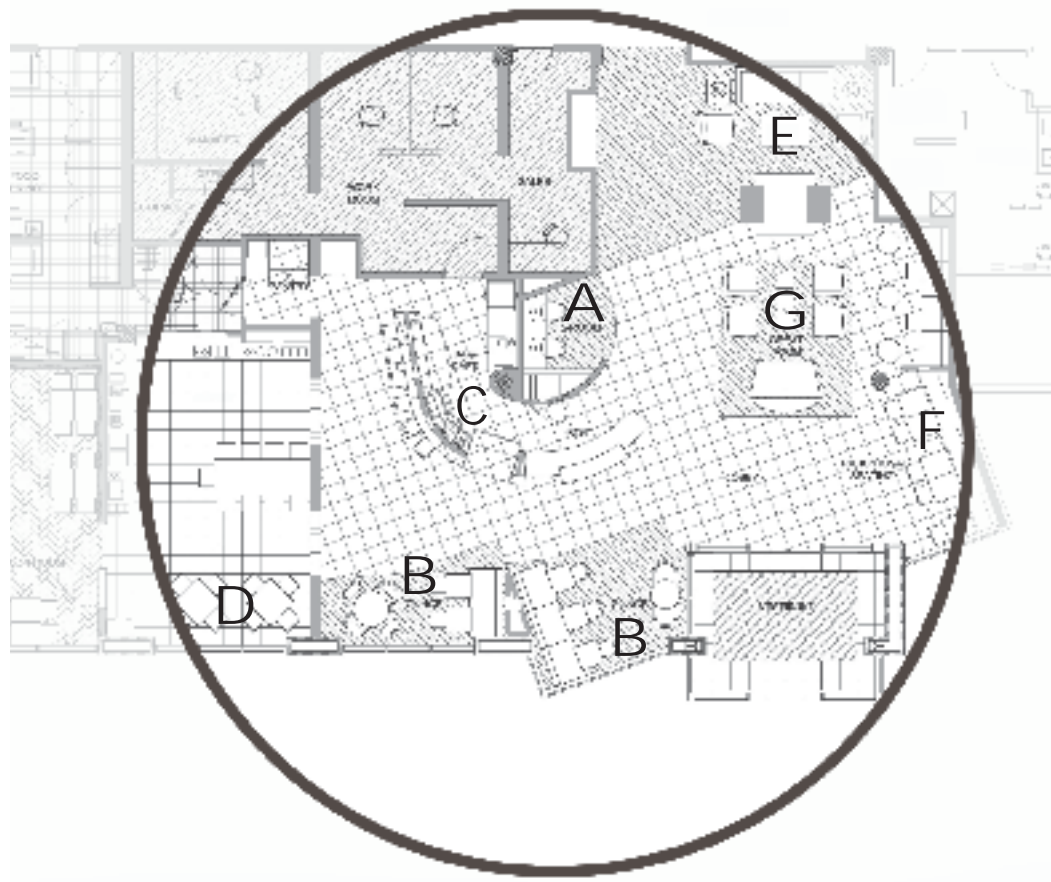
C. The bar/café is an integral part of the lobby; the kidney-shaped countertop also serves as the front desk.

D. A casual breakfast buffet is set up in the dining space, which opens directly to the bar/café, and the lounge.

E. One of the lobby's several separate seating zones. Here in the "Den" guests can hang out, have a drink, sit by the fire, and watch the game on TV. A lowered ceiling makes the space feel more private.

F. Multipurpose tables can be used for business, eating, or other projects.

G. Guests can be more social in the great room; comfortable chairs, a sofa, and an intimate banquette surround the double-sided fireplace.





lobby when food and beverages are available, so Strasser advocates introducing more food and beverage opportunities, including grab & go retail options, which turn the lobby into a revenue generator.

## 2 Guest rooms are changing shape.

Guest rooms are getting wider, squarer, and more functional. The traditional rectangular hotel room measured 13x29 net feet; now rooms are expanding to 16 or 17 feet wide but are getting shallower. The double-queen-bed guest room in Starwood's new "aloft" brand, for example, measures 18 feet, 6 inches by 17 feet, 6 inches, while Hyatt's new Hyatt Place king-bed guest room is slightly larger at 18 feet x 18 feet, 4 inches.

Squared-off rooms have slightly less square footage—averaging around 350 sf vs. the more typical 375-425 sf—but they better utilize their space and feel larger. They also allow for larger bathrooms. Expansive glazing and higher ceilings—nine feet versus the standard eight—also add to the sense of space.

The resized rooms are influenced by Asian and European hotels, says Hill: "They have done a good job of coming up with beautiful rooms that function with less space and don't make you



Renderings and floor plan courtesy of HKS

feel like a second-class citizen."

A little furniture rearranging, such as removing the armoire and installing flat-screen TVs, can also earn square footage gains.

"Flat-screen TVs aren't inexpensive, but if someone is building a 200,000-sf hotel and they remove the armoire from the guest room, they can get another 5-10% yield of guest rooms out of that same square footage. That's real value," says Hill. "You'll be paying more for those flat-

## HOSPITALITY FACILITIES

A. The casework unit dividing the **aloft** guest room from the bathroom looks like custom furniture. The unit features integral nightstands and reading lights, closet space, and translucent storage cubbies keeping stored items visible so they aren't left behind. Linen and other bathroom items are stored on the opposite side.

B. A mobile tray turns the guest bed into another workspace; the tray can also be moved to the seating area or closer to the desk for extra space.

C. Definitely more nice than naughty, a translucent glass panel opens the shower to the guest room. Light filters into the bathroom but frosted glass reveals little more than shadows and silhouettes.

D. A wall-mounted flat-screen TV looks cool and frees up space for a larger work area.



Courtesy of Starwood

screen TVs, but it's worth it if it adds more keys."

Guest rooms are also becoming more business-friendly because most people who travel with laptops still want to have the option of being able to work in their rooms, even when there's a nice new multipurpose lobby downstairs. Bigger desks and increased workspace are critical, as are extra outlets placed higher on the wall so guests don't have to crawl around on the floor looking for connections. Internet access—either hardwired or wi-fi—is the rule, not the exception. Additionally, Hill suggests giving guests a place to tack up items (such as presentation materials) so they don't have to drive tacks into the drywall.

### 3 Forget the tub, think 'super shower.'

There was a time when guests felt they were being cheated if their hotel room didn't have a bathtub. That time has passed. "A lot of hotels are coming online without bathtubs because people don't use them," says De Santis. "No one thinks they're clean enough to use, they're usually only five feet long, and they're about nine inches deep."

There is no upfront cost difference between installing a tub or not, says consultant John Nicolls, principal of Jackson, Wyo.-based The

John Nicolls Group, so hotels are dumping the tub and focusing on showers. A three-foot-by-five-foot shower—about the space a bathtub would occupy—is quite generous, but guests want more than elbow room if they're to fully embrace the shower-only option.

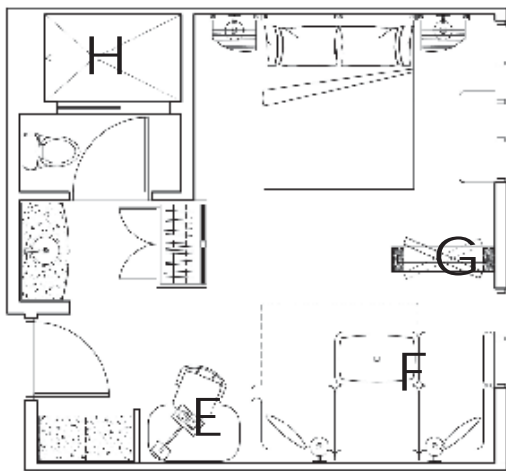
Upgrade the materials, suggests Stephen Perkins, AIA, principal with the Washington, D.C., architecture firm ForrestPerkins. He advocates finishing showers with full tile walls and floor; the material looks upscale and adds interest and color to the bathroom. Perkins says that grouts are getting more durable and easier to clean, making tile an option for more affordable hotel brands.

Glass is another finish option. In the new **aloft** guest rooms, the shower's back wall is a fixed, translucent glass panel. The panel opens the shower to the sleeping area, affords privacy, and filters natural light into the bathroom. And it looks cool.

Other shower upgrades: better lighting, such as cove lighting rather than one central beam of overhead light, and larger showerheads. In fact, multiple showerheads and body sprays pump up the shower power.

### 4 Manage the energy budget more closely.

Rising energy costs are forcing American hotels to finally adopt technology that requires guests to use hotel keys to activate their room's lights



E. **Hyatt Place** guest rooms have large work desks and flat-screen computer monitors for guests using laptops.

F. The "cozy corner" provides more seating than typically found in guest rooms. The sofa feature a pull-out bed.

G. A 42-inch flat-screen plasma television rotates so it can be viewed from the sitting area and the sleeping area.

H. A large stall shower replaces the bathtub.

## HOSPITALITY FACILITIES



The Doubletree Metropolitan Hotel in Manhattan, which opened in 1961 as the Summit, was designed by architect Morris Lapidus and reinterpreted by architects at Gettys. The hotel's mid-century modern aesthetic remains, but its layout is 21<sup>st</sup> century, with several "living rooms" for working, socializing, or relaxing with a cocktail from the lobby bar (not pictured). Notice the three self-serve check-in kiosks on the right. Photo: Jon Miller © Hedrich Blessing

and HVAC—something routinely done in foreign market hotels.

Nicolls says the technology hasn't yet been used stateside because it didn't make economical sense. With soaring energy costs and equipment becoming a lot less expensive, the time has come, he says.

Another energy-saver is the ability to monitor and control temperature in all the guest rooms from a central point; hotel staff can remotely raise or lower thermostat settings. Strasser envisions the next step being the ability to control lighting by remotely shutting off lights that guests leave burning throughout the day.

Perkins advocates more-efficient lighting outside the guest room, and suggests putting hallway lights on motion sensors. "There's no point to having all the corridor lighting brightly shining all night. You should maintain a low level of lighting for safety purposes, and when someone enters the space, the motion sensor would then turn the lights on full power," he says.

### 5 Consider check-in kiosks.

Self check-in/check-out kiosks will be a mainstay in hotels at all price points, according to Strasser, allowing guests to avoid the front desk and quickly get into or out of their rooms.

"It's interesting how these kiosks happened," Strasser says. "There were a few pioneers in the hotel industry in the late '90s who tried to introduce kiosks, but until it became widely accepted in airports, it didn't work for hotels. Now, the same people who fly will most likely be staying in a hotel and are comfortable using kiosks."

The front desk, however, will never completely disappear, even with lobbies becoming so much more than places to check in or out. Nicolls says older travelers almost always prefer to see a human being at the front desk, while younger travelers will almost always go to the kiosk first. No matter the traveler's age, there will always be a need for front desk staff should problems arise.

If people can check out their own groceries at the supermarket, they can use a kiosk in your next hotel project.

### 6 Shoot for 'experience design.'

"One of the big trends in hotel design right now is creating experiences," says Ron Swidler, SVP at Chicago-based Gettys. "You have to understand what people want in order to develop an experience around them."

One of the biggest experiences guests look for is access to the lifestyles they see reflected in Pottery Barn and Crate & Barrel catalogs.

"It's a casual, comfortable, clean-line elegance," says De Santis. "People want to buy it for their homes, and they'll feel comfortable with it in a hotel, too."

The trick is to avoid the sameness that's creeping into contemporary design, says Perkins, who uses wood, stone, ceramic, and fabric to add richness to guest areas. Those materials can be expensive, so Perkins seaches for alternatives. "The coatings industry has come up with new coatings and the ability to thinly slice materials and laminate them so you get tactile richness without the material depth, which controls costs," he says.

Swidler wants to see hotels take lifestyle experiences to a fully immersive level, and says the possibilities are endless when it comes to lifestyle brands.

"Imagine if Steve Jobs decided to throw his name behind a hotel brand. Do you know how amazing it would be to experience an Apple hotel?" asks Swidler. "I want to know why Nike isn't in the hotel business yet."

Envisioning a Nike hotel, Swidler sees guests having access to an athletic environment that, for example, allows them to end a long day of meetings by joining a pick-up game of basketball in the hotel's gymnasium.

"Imagine the effect on the building systems and the architecture and the whole identity of what you'd design if you were creating an Apple or a Nike hotel," says Swidler.

HOSPITALITY FACILITIES

**7 Look for the upscaling of lower-end brands.**

Budget-conscious business travelers are in for a big surprise: the select-service

market is getting a makeover. Two new brands—Global Hyatt Corporation's Hyatt Place and Starwood Hotels' aloft—are challenging the notion that inexpensive means uninteresting. The



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**Smart elevators smooth the ride**

The 47-story Marriott Marquis in New York's Times Square had angry guests who waited as long as 45 minutes for one of the hotel's 16 passenger elevators. Making matters worse, the elevators are grouped around a circular core so guests couldn't always see when an elevator eventually arrived.

Guests weren't the only ones suffering: housekeeping and other staff had similar complaints about waiting for the service elevators.

The building's design made it impossible to add additional elevators, so hotel management sought a way to better operate their existing elevator configuration. They teamed up with Schindler Elevator Corp., which modernized the system with its Miconic 10, an \$11 million retrofit that marked the first time the system was installed in a U.S. hotel.

The Miconic 10 system uses hallway keypads—there are no pushbuttons inside or outside the elevator cab—where guests type in their floor destination. The system calculates which elevator will take the guest to that particular floor the fastest and then directs the guest to that elevator.

Essentially, the system organizes passengers according to destination, reserves them a ride on a specific elevator, and cuts wait times and crowding. Schindler says that since the new system and cabs were installed earlier this year, overall passenger elevator traffic flow improved by 30%.



The Miconic 10 keypad resembles a telephone keypad (left). All-new elevator cabs (right) were part of the retrofit. Photos: Schindler Elevator Corporation

two brands are taking different approaches to the market. Hyatt Place is replacing Hyatt's newly acquired AmeriSuites brand and giving the hotels an extreme makeover, while aloft is a new brand in the Starwood portfolio.

Hyatt Place rooms feature walk-in showers, a rotating 42-inch plasma television that can be viewed from the bed or from the separate sitting area (which the company has branded the "cozy corner"), and an enlarged workstation with a computer monitor. Guests also will experience a multipurpose "gathering room" lobby.

The repositioning of the AmeriSuites hotels to Hyatt Place began in late 2005; the first of the re-branded hotels should open in late 2006 in Chicago, Atlanta, and Dallas.

The aloft brand, designed by New York-based Rockwell Group, will have a 3,500-sf multipurpose lobby, including the branded "Relax" social space and "Re:Fuel," a grab & go food station.

"With the aloft brand, instead of the typical mentality of how little can we give guests in this market, we wanted to pick



The aloft prototype features a "sloof" rooftop element—a multicolored metal structure integrated with graphics.

spots to do great things and if we couldn't do it great, we didn't do it," says John Hardy, president of Atlanta-based John Hardy Group, who served as aloft's development manager.

"We didn't want the same room everyone else has and figured out how to use the DNA from the W Hotel (Starwood's trendy upscale brand) to really differentiate the rooms."

Aloft's hip guest rooms will have a loft-like feel, with nine-foot-high ceilings and

oversized windows. The guest bed, which is situated in the middle of the room, abuts a multipurpose casework unit that offers storage and open shelving. The rooms have iPod connections

that play music through the speakers of the room's wall-mounted flat-screen TV. The bathrooms have free-standing showers, and there's a translucent glass panel opening the space to the bedroom. BDC

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