

# Eclectic Experience in the Boutique Hotel Market

For the boutique hotel, the inroads into new markets are oftentimes difficult. This is to say nothing of the challenges faced in maintaining relevant market presence and market share in a quick-turn and ever-evolving contemporary world. Like any niche-based industry, a blind attempt to keep pace with the current trends and tastes of the boutique hotel guest by jumping on every novel design trend can ruin even the best-planned and managed boutique hotel, yet without making the attempt the hotel quickly becomes outdated, outmoded, and even stale. How, then, can hotel properties stay relevant and energized without capitally intensive pursuits of fleeting trends?

## ■ Eclectic Experience.

For the boutique hospitality market, significant gains can be made by conceiving the boutique hotel as an *eclectic experience* – a melding of ideas that treats the hotel as backdrop and the local culture as feature. This approach acknowledges that the boutique hotel guest is interested in more than a place to hang their hat for the night and places the guest in direct contact with those things that cannot be designed,

transplanted, or replicated anywhere else. Connections to the surrounding city fabric are emphasized, locals and local influences are invited in, and the guest is invited to explore the surrounding environment. A lasting bond with the guest can then be created not through a lasting *impression* of the boutique hotel, but through an evolving memory of the hotel, one tied to people and culture.

■ **Fresh and Relevant.** This is the crux of the boutique hotel: How to remain fresh and relevant? (And thus keep beds occupied.) Too often design tends toward the false goal of trendiness, lured by the hot sparks of the moment. Instead, the savvy owner and designer regard a project in a similar way as a set designer might: Physical spaces are regarded as backgrounds, furniture as props, and the people as the source of the true drama. Spaces – both indoor and outdoor – are proportioned and laid out to facilitate adaptability and flexibility as any specific event necessitates or as time and tastes evolve. Furniture and fixtures can be arranged in the space as needs change and functions demand. Small-scale items (stools, ottomans, etc.) are staged for guests and staff to



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spontaneously re-arrange. The fixed architecture is a stage on which the drama of chance encounters, social interaction, and familial living takes place.

## ■ Temporal Resiliency.

Thinking of the boutique hotel in these terms sets the stage for a timeless design, one that exhibits a temporal flexibility in addition to a physical flexibility. Like the best cities, the best boutique hotels adapt and evolve to their

changing times. By planning for flexibility and adaptation, reliance on fixed features (whose design inevitably grows old) is reduced and connections and relationships are emphasized. Recognition of these *connections and relationships* – between hotel and city, indoor and outdoor, guest and staff, architecture and culture – allows the owner, designer, and builder to focus on what will make *that specific project* successful, and not a design predisposition or formula. Formulas may work well for a commodity-driven hotel market, but inevitably spell trouble for the boutique hotel, which is so dependent on word of mouth advertising and repeat business, both from travelers and locals.

■ **Culture Core.** Customers are craving unique experiences that are authentic, warm and personal. This necessitates reaching out to the local community in the design and operations of the boutique hotel to truly capture the spirit of the locality. While being a responsible member of a community through volunteer efforts and outreach is not a new concept to the hospitality industry, we advocate an approach that considers the local community as a vital part *of the hotel design itself.* The

notion of the hotel lobby as a community living room is also not necessarily a radical new concept, but some hoteliers are pushing the idea further through efforts to invite the community to inhabit and utilize the property as part of their daily lives. The result is truly active spaces full of opportunities for chance encounters and cultural cross-pollination.

## ■ All the World's a Stage.

We believe that architecture exists as the backdrop for the human drama. At the end of the day even the more lavishly appointed and “luxurious” buildings and spaces are hollow if they don't foster the social interaction we crave. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the hospitality industry where adaptations toward more flexible, eclectic, and community oriented spaces is becoming the norm. Stylistic trends are also turning and changing more rapidly than ever before, making resiliency and adaptability critical to maintaining the bottom line. Focusing capital dollars on design that places an emphasis on intangible concepts such as culture and social experiences is hard to quantify, but critical to success.

## HOTEL JEROME

Aspen, Colorado  
Adaptation and Renovation



Rowland+Broughton  
Architecture and Urban Design

Interior Designer – TAL Studio

The historic landmark Hotel Jerome in Aspen, Colorado was recently renovated becoming the community living room once again. The remodel scope consisted of 134,000 square feet including Public Spaces, 94 Guest Rooms, Restaurant and Bar, Spa, Grand Ballroom and Meeting Spaces.

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