

Put that cookie-cutter away!

The Boutique & Lifestyle segment has emerged through a maze of big brands and frequent guest programs to become a prominent lodging category, highly sought after by consumers and investors alike. We recently met with **FRANCES KIRADJIAN**, Founder & Chair of the **BOUTIQUE & LIFESTYLE LODGING ASSOCIATION**, who answers some basic questions and then takes us on an extended tour of the segment.

With Lana Dubovik, Principal, Hospitality Atelier

The Hotel Yearbook: Fran, what exactly is a «boutique hotel»? Is there an officially sanctioned definition?

Fran Kiradjian: Since there are many definitions for boutique hotels these days, the Association will be leading the charge to sanction a definition. It will be created out of a vote from all the membership, made up of the boutique properties themselves and the brands that they belong to. The Association will lead research in this area as new studies are needed to better understand consumer behavior, especially because of the changes in the worldwide economy.

As a foundation, we are defining boutique hotels as intimate, unique, often luxurious and upscale hotel environments for a discerning clientele. They average around 100 rooms or less and can be charming, distinctive, quirky, cutting-edge, avant-garde, trendy, funky, classic and revel in an incredible attention to detail and high level of personal service. They may be independent or belong to a group or collection of properties such as the Rocco Forte Collection, NYLO Hotels, the AVIA Collection, Morgans Hotel Group, Personality Hotels, Joie de Vivre Hospitality, Kimpton Hotels, Charming Hotels, Small Leading Hotels of the World, Small Luxury Hotels, the Dorchester Collection, Firmdale Hotels, Pousadas, the Carino Collection, Elegant Hotels... just to name a few of the several hundred boutique & lifestyle brands around the world.

HYB: And how does that differ from a «lifestyle hotel»? What do they have in common?

FK: A lifestyle hotel may have many of the same attributes as boutique hotels, but they are also usually a bit larger, up to 250-300 rooms. Additionally, they combine innovation, authenticity and everyday living elements and activities, giving guests the opportunity to explore and find the experience they desire. They are defined as *hip* and *stylistic* with an *urban feel* and *design*. Both boutique & lifestyle properties will ebb and flow with design and services that are unique and that will blend in with their destinations.

HYB: Who owns such hotels? Is there a typical profile of an owner or investor group?

FK: Interestingly, there is no «typical» profile; that's what makes the sector so vibrant and exciting. Owners of these properties vary widely, although they all possess an inherent desire to create something unusual and different, independent of traditional large cookie cutter structures. They are outside-of-the-box thinkers and bring their passion – whatever it is – to their properties.

Their backgrounds and industries are quite eclectic. For example, you have owners from the entertainment world (Bono & U2 own properties in Ireland), fashion (Diesel Jeans owns the Pelican Hotel in Miami Beach and Bulgari is now in the hotel business), automotive (Ferrari designer Paolo Pininfarina designed The Keating in San Diego), as well as traditional hotel owners who decide to jump ship and try the independent route. They include families who pass property ownership down generation to generation. Some examples include HK Hotels, family owned and operated boutique properties in Manhattan, New York.

HYB: When did these kinds of hotels first arrive on the scene?

FK: In the US, the boutique movement was born in 1981 around the time that the likes of Mr. Ashkenazy and Bill Kimpton launched the first small stylish hotels, followed in 1984 by Ian Schrager's Morgan's Hotel Group. These properties broke the mold by offering a feeling of warmth, a sense of personality, and a commitment to authenticity for the discerning client who desired an emotional connection as well as unique decor.

HYB: Is it a phenomenon that has a particular geographic focus?

FK: For 2010, the answer is no. It is now a worldwide phenomenon. Boutiques were born in Europe where the independent owner thrived without the influx of new big

brands coming on the scene. Consider the centuries-old and unique buildings that have been converted into so-called boutiques but are often referred to by different names in each country, e.g. the Paradores in Spain or Pousadas in Portugal. The exciting aspect is that it is global, and that each region adds its own unique ingredients to the overall sector offering.

HYB: Is the sector doing well? What is it about such properties that is driving their growth?

FK: New properties are opening in epic proportions in this sector. Generally speaking, the sector is doing reasonably well for various reasons; one being that they are able to increase rates while big brands have had to lower them. Boutique/ lifestyle properties continue to outperform their traditional counterparts in the areas of RevPAR and occupancy.

In addition, since boutique customers are making their hotel selection not just on price, but on all the unique assets and offerings of the sector, the segment is less price sensitive. The current economic climate has created a buyer's market, and with many rooms to choose from, customers are being selective about their hotel choices. In today's economy,

consumers are looking for a vacation from their day-to-day life, and boutique hotels offer that experience without the time and expense of a long flight or leaving the country. Hotels that make the grade into this sector will have a higher perceived value from a consumer's viewpoint, due to the boutique/ lifestyle tag as it relates to the property type.

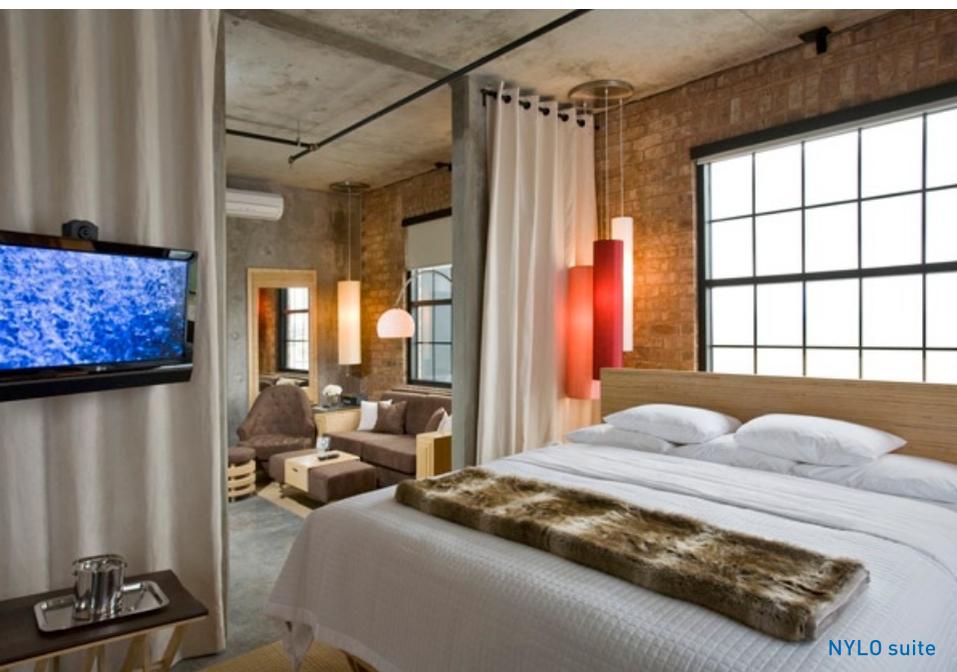
HYB: How has the recent recession affected these hotels? Have they been hit as hard as luxury properties?

FK: These properties have been able to move travelers from the big brand luxury hotels to their unique settings. The boutique & lifestyle sector offers better and more cost-effective options than the bigger chains. Executives who now have to steer clear of the well-known luxury brands and who do not want to be the headlines for tomorrow's news can enjoy as luxurious an experience – at a reduced rate – by choosing from the many boutique & lifestyle brands of today.

What's more, while the recession has affected everyone, independents can soften the financial blow a lot easier and find solutions quicker in many instances by maintaining relationships with smaller banks who are more adept in communicating and dealing directly with independent owners.

HYB: Some of the big chains are launching brands in this space. Are these also «boutique hotels» as you understand the term?

FK: Big brands are getting into this space. These brands remember that before the recession, customers have generally paid more for a unique experience in these cooler, hip hotels. Time will tell whether the big brands can succeed in the boutique territory. They are getting into the act with all kinds of attractive offers to entice the independent owner to ▶



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move over under their brand umbrella. Even Marriott recently created a new brand to attract the independent, called The Autograph Collection. Like the others, i.e. Choice with its Ascend Collection and Hilton's try at the boutique upscale sector, the tricky part will be convincing the consumer that these properties will deliver the experience they desire while under the wings of the big brand. Some, like IHG's Hotel Indigo, feel very much like a boutique when you visit the properties. Whether or not they are truly boutique hotels... the Association members from all over the globe will have to decide this – as will the consumer.

HYB: What are your expectations about their ability to compete in this segment in 2010 and beyond?

FK: I expect that they will make some inroads in the B2B space because of their ability to attract this audience through

marketing reach, program attributes and international capability. However, it will not be an easy task to move an independent property owner over and will probably take much more effort, and cost more money, in the long run.

I don't believe independents will go without careful consideration of what lengthy and complex contracts they need to sign in order to give up a portion of their independence, as well as consideration of the array of rules and regulations coming from the big brands, thereby inhibiting creativity. Also, consider that larger hotel brands attempting to enter the boutique & lifestyle market are caught up in a bigger picture of a national or worldwide image, and can miss the local flair.

Boutique brands have to understand they must come together, to ensure they put their stake in the ground to firmly claim the

Jose Andres, SLS Bazaar Bar



boutique & lifestyle sector as their own. As it relates to their ability to compete in the B2C arena, the big brands' strength in the area of marketing reach and marketing dollars will certainly be a force to be reckoned with.

HYB: In say five years, do you expect to see more chains operating boutique or lifestyle brands? If yes, who will probably be the big players? Will they be a threat to the established boutique hoteliers?

FK: I wish I had a crystal ball! I see the big traditional brands like Starwood remaining successful in this space as long as they consider loosening the demands on brand integrity and allowing the independent feel of each destination property to be unique. I do see all major brands getting into this space in some way. The global traveler is demanding a more distinctive and personal offering and thus, if they don't appeal to the majority, they'll lose share quickly. On both ends of the generational gap, boomers and Gen-Xers want an experience that delivers on their expectation of special and unique design and services. Regarding your last question, the established boutique hoteliers will continue to thrive. They will have the means to compete on price, distribution and marketing via the support of an association like the BLLA, and can remain true to their promise of that special and unique experience.

HYB: You recently established the BLLA. What are its goals?

FK: First and foremost, our goals are to unite the world's boutique & lifestyle brands as well as all independent properties onto one platform, like a shopping center or guidebook of sorts. What makes the BLLA different from other hospitality associations is its ability to provide a clear and distinct distribution channel and search engine to (and for) targeted consumers and to travel agents whose clients are requesting boutique & lifestyle properties only. The BLLA will give property owners and brands a platform to speak out and vote on issues affecting this unique hospitality sector. It will bring clarity to the industry while playing the role of advocate for the consumer, ensuring that properties deliver. The time

could not be better for the segment to join forces and work together to address any confusion and uncertainties about this hospitality sector.

HYB: What specifically does the BLLA do for the hotels in the segment?

FK: The BLLA provides innovative and new leisure and corporate distribution for its members, first and foremost. By organizing the selection process while providing consumers a vetted list of properties, ones that have been carefully selected based on their ability to fit within the boutique & lifestyle criteria, the property receives business from customers that are searching for a product type vs. just a price.

Additionally, the Association is producing a certification program to ensure properties live up to minimum criteria on design and service. The BLLA will also provides members guidance on industry suppliers and their offerings. As an example, we are currently working on a grid which will compare the costs and services of brands and groups. The Association itself will provide a voice and a platform for members to jointly raise worldwide awareness and in addition, members will receive education and networking opportunities.

HYB: Let's take a look specifically at 2010 now. What are your expectations for next year in this part of the hotel business?

FK: I expect to see a divergence of this hotel sector, where the opportunity becomes clearer for boutique & lifestyle brands to come together and claim their fair share of business. Designers and architects will be exploding on the scene with creativity dripping with ingenuity and breathing new life into their properties. I expect to see additional new brands coming from within the travel industry itself, for example Virgin's own luxury boutique hotel brand.

As the economy begins to return in 2010-2011, there will be renovations and re-builds of old properties, which will all be « rewired » to include boutique elements. It is cheaper to ►

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buy than to build as well as to upgrade a property now and in doing so, prepare for a better economy. This strategy will provide a competitive advantage over a neighboring property, which is doing nothing.

Also, as consumer confidence rises, these lodging establishments will have the opportunity to rise to the occasion, building awareness campaigns around the new customer.

HYB: Are there any particular milestones or events that you and other observers of this part of the industry are going to be watching out for in the next 12 months ?

FK: Not to be repetitive, however: As the trend continues to dominate the scene, the world will be closely watching the big brands as they stray from the masses and put their toe in the water to test their newly launched or launching boutique & lifestyle brands. What business will these new brands be replacing from the old solid brands that have been around forever? That is most certainly a question that will soon be answered. Research and consulting hospitality firms will need to add boutique/lifestyle as a new category among the regular labels such as Economy, Mid-Scale, Extended Stay, Luxury, etc.

And there will be some interesting openings next year. The joint venture of Marriott and Ian Schrager in the new Edition hotel brand, with the first property set to open mid-2010, will be watched closely by the industry, as will Ritz Carlton's new Reserve brand, a luxury boutique set to open its first property in Asia. And Virgin's new boutique brand, which will open in destinations where Virgin flies, beginning in the Americas.

HYB: Thanks for the primer, Fran! Now over to you.

Trending upward for 2010

From designers, crossing over from sports car and high fashion lines to make their imprint on the boutique hotel landscape, to globetrotters and property owners craving more creativity and independence, the individuality and personality of the hotels in this sector really shine through.

Owners of these properties dismiss brands as a « checklist in a box, » while describing a boutique as « a feeling, an experience, a passion, » according to Tim Dixon, owner of The Iron Horse Hotel. He loves the fact that, jointly with the designer and architect, he makes the decisions on getting the most impression for his investment and building a stronger connection with his guests. He enjoys the flexibility of the art selection and budget and feels that boutiques like his should bring a sense of community into the property.

This sector is trending upward for 2010 with the big brands adding their own take to the mix. They have realized that the customer is in the driver's seat and is demanding much more for his money – something boutiques can deliver on beautifully. These properties will be called everything from *hip* to *trendy* to *aloft* to *distinctive*. They will be built in the city, at the seaside, in the desert and the mountains.

Boutique & Lifestyle hotels will continue to comprise one of the strongest segments in the industry. Quoting John Russell of NYLO Hotels, « Travelers are tired of cookie-cutter hotels. They want something that's beautifully designed and unique with all the comforts of home. Lifestyle hotels put the fun back in travel, and they do it at nightly rates that greatly appeal to today's cost-conscious travelers. I see continued growth for the segment with a lot of exciting new designs and rich lifestyle amenities that make luxury affordable. Lifestyle hotels will become the next generation hotel of choice. »

The interesting diversity of players in boutique & lifestyle lodging gave me an opportunity to speak with a few intriguing executives from various parts of the industry and catch their thoughts, their outlook for 2010 and other personal observations.

Richard Hatter: a school project

General Manager of a new project opening 2010 in Hong Kong, Richard Hatter commented, « Attributes of style, passion, responsiveness, and confidence are not easy to engender in a large corporate hotel. To me, boutique means intelligent, stylish simplicity, convenience and value without sacrifice, and an environment that is passionate, purposeful and creative. » ►

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Mahmoudieh's Resorthotel Berchtesgaden

His 260-room project in is being built and managed by the Polytechnic University Hotel Management and Tourism School, using university staff and resources. Its design takes region into consideration. « Managing relationships anywhere, and especially here in Hong Kong and Asia, requires a tremendous amount of coordination and marketing discipline. People want simple, pragmatic design, operators that are non-intrusive and demonstrate the inherent Asian values like humility, care, selflessness and, and above all, confidence. »

What are his plans for opening such an unusual property?

« We need to do more with less and streamline our processes and structures for efficient multi-skill application, while keeping our customers and employees in mind. With fewer and shorter

business trips, value for money and mid-level prices with upscale touches are essential. How we communicate that value and create the emotional appeal is paramount. »

What about brands? Richard says, « There is greater sensitivity to being more in-tuned to other leading brands and learning from them. We should study worldwide companies outside hospitality, like LVMH, more closely and familiarize ourselves with the way they honor their brand promise across countries and cultures. »

Cheryl Rowley: godmother of design

In the world of boutique hotels, Cheryl, Principal of Cheryl Rowley Design in Beverly Hills, one of the largest design firms

in the US, is known as the « godmother of design. » I asked her about her views on the sector's performance as well as how she will approach new projects for 2010 and beyond.

«Boutique hotels are doing better than the rest because of higher value as well as being an acceptable alternative to the big five-star brands – and this is mostly because of design. Design is good business and is more accessible today than in the past. It changes the fundamental values of the properties. It has to be smart, but it doesn't have to cost a lot. »

Design is really « the sum of a thousand decisions, » says Cheryl. « The essence of boutique is authenticity, and this provides direction for the enjoyment of local art and history as well as a connection between people and the property. Every hotel tells a story. Design is a horizon, where the creator can engage us with a sense of living, of beauty and intrigue us with elements of adventure, discovery and fun. Creative is frequently at odds with corporate mandates. However, the battle is over and good design has won! Good designs win awards and are photogenic. »

Looking at 2010, Cheryl believes that for firms like hers, there will be an enormous amount of renovation work as investors with money find unbelievable deals and will want to reposition properties into the boutique/lifestyle category. This will entail a lot of redesign work. « I also believe the current economic conditions are responsible for a trend towards more classical designs, » she says. « These have a longer shelf-life than the most edgy and contemporary designs and are therefore a safer bet for owners just now. From the guest's point of view, there is a timelessness associated with this genre, as well as feelings of comfort and nostalgia which we all long for in this time of uncertainty. »

Enrique Sarasola: road warrior

President & CEO of Room Mate Hotels, Enrique shared his vision for 2010 with me. The brand – aimed at customers on a budget – began with 12 properties in Spain and grew to the US, Mexico and South America. « Whatever you do, » he says, « think beyond your neighborhood, think of the *world* as your

audience. And focus on cohesive, 360° promotions in all media. Be more charitable and greener. And please, keep rate integrity intact and the impact of your rate tactics. »

The philosophy behind the brand comes from Enrique's personal travel experiences. « Room Mates started because my favorite way to explore a destination is by staying with a friend. When I am on the road, I am out of my room anyway – working, sightseeing, partying. So, there was definitely potential to share vision with other tourists and road warriors, who, like me, resent the approach that the more you pay for the hotel, the more you will end up paying for the amenities, like Wi-Fi and gym. And what vacationer likes being pressed to make it to breakfast before 10:30? At Room Mate hotels we serve breakfast till noon! »

Enrique believes that trends for 2010 include a key principle of providing a solid value for the money in an environment that can only be compared to *staying at a friend's place*. Room Mate Hotels embodies that philosophy by going as far as naming the hotels after their loyal customers and friends. Affordable luxury in the center of big cities will become the new mantra in this economy, and their brand can deliver on their promise of bed, shower and breakfast at an affordable price.

Also for 2010, Room Mates believes that mobile must not be overlooked. They just introduced their proprietary destination guide application, available exclusively to their guests, and listing « in the know » recommendations of local night and cultural life, within close proximity to a Room Mate hotel.

John Russell: get 'em while they're young

The CEO of NYLO Hotels states that his goal is to « own the customer from womb to tomb. » In support of this philosophy, NYLO is big on investing in campus brands/student housing for the purpose of maximizing the student potential; in other words, getting the student familiar and comfortable with the NYLO brand during his college years with the goal of creating a NYLO-faithful customer after graduation. Parents would feel confident in their children's on-campus housing facility because the design and concept is focused around sociability and ►

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security, featuring student lounges for more interactivity and networking, and bright work areas, food centers and courtyards.

NYLO is interested in doing the new development and taking charge of conversions of underperforming properties, specializing in increasing occupancy. « The student market is hugely underserved and is an enormous opportunity, » says John.

Being proactive in a down market is the way to secure future opportunity and success, he believes. « Every 15-20 years, the industry reinvents itself with new categories, similar to when Extended Stay suddenly appeared on the scene. This is the way that Lifestyle emerged while Boutique got stronger after a few years of almost fading away, » he said.

« Consumers are looking for high style that's highly affordable, » he says. « These preferences are strong in other sectors. What Starbucks, JetBlue and Mini Cooper have accomplished in their industries, NYLO aims to do for business and leisure travel. We have *random acts of cool* in our designs. We even went to BMW because we wanted a very particular blue paint. »

What advice would John give a hotelier in this segment for 2010 ?

- All-inclusive rates: Consumers are tired of being « nickel-and-dimed » to death, i.e. being charged for Internet use, \$7 bottles of water and so on. Consumers would prefer to pay a fair price that covers all these extras.
- Sociability: Clients want to talk to you. « When clients want to talk, respond back and actually do something; be on top of it at all times. »
- Something new and different: Clients want this! High-tech gadgetry is good.
- Point of difference: Go the extra mile to be a part of the community, for example i.e. organize art contests, participate in charities.
- Social media: Affordable to manage and free to use, have a great functional website, classy and always updated.

- Female travelers: Women are looking for different and new; some want privacy and others are outgoing and want to be around people; try to support both profiles.
- International: The traveler is attracted by great images coming through the internet. Keep yours fresh and interesting.

Richard Russo: fill the rooms to fill the restaurant

Richard Russo, Director of Development for Morgans Hotel Group, states that they will continue to aim for 150-300 room properties, generally in order to get critical mass in their highly profitable F&B outlets. « Food & Beverage creates buzz and supports the hotel vibe even though F&B and the hotel itself are operated by two different companies, » he explains.

Whether leased out or internally operated, F&B is not overlooked and underestimated in the boutique world. Instead, it is carefully leveraged for healthy margins and impact on the hotel's overall image. Building excitement around bars and restaurants brings in the customers – and profits.

Claus Sendlinger: the return of the masterpiece

Commenting on design trends for 2010, Claus Sendlinger, CEO of Berlin-based Design Hotels, offered the following: « Today's best design uses the finest materials – but not just for their prestige factor or luxurious texture and look. Increasingly, these materials are chosen for their plain and simple durability. Well-designed interiors and objects are made for the long haul and will offer timeless style that will stay beautiful for years. It is quite the opposite of trendy, planned obsolescence. »

Although it has always been an important mark of quality, genuine craftsmanship is also making a major comeback. « Outsourced mass production is giving way to locally handcrafted pieces. Perhaps you can call it the *return of the masterpiece*, but design aficionados are investing in truly unique, limited edition possessions that add unlimited intrinsic value. »

« Having talked about the value shift in our society and people longing for a re-discovery of simple values, even humble values, one big trend we are going to see in 2010, more than



NYLO, The Loft

ever is going local,» says Claus. «That will translate itself not only in terms of design and the use of materials, but also using local talent, local wines, local produce, etc. – which ties in with authentic, real experiences. Hotels will have to embrace this development and offer services that go far beyond a bed and a bar. They have to be able to manage the experiences of their guests. It's not just about sending them to a gallery. It's more about showing them around as well. Future hotels will also be created around experiences such as the Ana Yela in Marrakech, or the Uma Paro in Bhutan.»

«You can see this taking place in other areas,» he adds. «For example, the return of the small, corner store, the slow-food movement, handmade spirits, and as such, consumers don't want to find the same exact hotel in Los Angeles as they would in Mumbai or Tokyo or Bali. It's about individual experiences and the connection to the locality.»

Yasmine Mahmoudieh: rethinking materials

For 2010, watch for creativity in materials and social spaces, says architect Yasmine Mahmoudieh. «As a designer, you must envisage what people do in a property and take them away from boredom and into engaging activities. An example: the Soho House in LA was a club and later they added hotel rooms. A hotel stay can be lonely, but there you meet other people. The hotel can actually create a club-like atmosphere.» Hotels can also have special activities to bring people together, e.g. wine tastings or local art exhibits, but many don't currently

take advantage of this great opportunity to engage their customers. «Imprisoned guests can use their free time more intelligently,» she says enigmatically.

Yasmine believes that a luxury boutique hotel should turn its walls into canvas for artists, always keeping design fresh and new. They can work closely with local galleries and develop cross-marketing opportunities which elevate each other's presence. «You must work with the most talented artists and ultimately create something extraordinary.»

Ecology and sustainability are also important characteristics to consider today, she says. Rethinking materials occupies a lot of Yasmine's time. Her firm has done extensive research and «discovered» some very interesting materials which she is using in contemporary design including things like broken glass, recycled shoe leather, and TV screens in Japan made out of bamboo and banana leaves. As her research continues, Yasmine believes there are some wonderful materials not yet discovered, such as organic fruit.

«Take care of all five senses, wrapping it up with design. As examples, smell – use scent pads throughout the property; comfort – ensure your seats are comfortable after thorough testing and analysis, taking an entire holistic accounting of the furniture you select. It should not just be beautiful to look at. It's more challenging to get it all right, but success absolutely depends on it,» says Yasmine. ▶

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Paolo Pininfarina: from vroom to rooms

There are new designers from all walks of life who find that they have yet to fulfill all their creative desires. There is no better example of this than from Paolo Pininfarina, Deputy Chairman of Pininfarina S.p.A. and CEO of Pininfarina Extra, known for creating Ferrari high performance vehicles. Recently he transformed a century-old historic building in the Gaslamp Quarter of San Diego into The Keating, the city's first luxury boutique hotel.

« I have always supported the extension of the Pininfarina design to various global sectors, » he says. « Pininfarina's staff members bring a wealth of their heritage and personal experiences, which is a vital ingredient of our creative process. Any new member of the Pininfarina design office has to integrate into our process and to share our vision. In other words, you can be a good designer, but not good for Pininfarina – and this subtle evaluation is part of my everyday job. »

Did he find any similarities between designing a luxury sports car and a boutique hotel? « Yes », he responds, « specifically in the required outcome, which has to demonstrate innovation, elegance and essentiality. » His hotel project, The Keating, brought to San Diego an extract of « Made in Italy », from the iconic red of the Italian sports cars, to the Lavazza coffee machines to the Laurentana mineral water, from the Gancia wines to the Jacuzzi baths, all designed by Pininfarina, and his personal selection of hand-picked white and red wines, from the Piedmont area in northern Italy where his family and company are based.

What about environmental concerns? « Sustainability is a not a trend, but a necessity, » Paolo insists. « A good design must be equally good for the user and for the environment. This is the huge challenge that the design community is facing for 2010. »

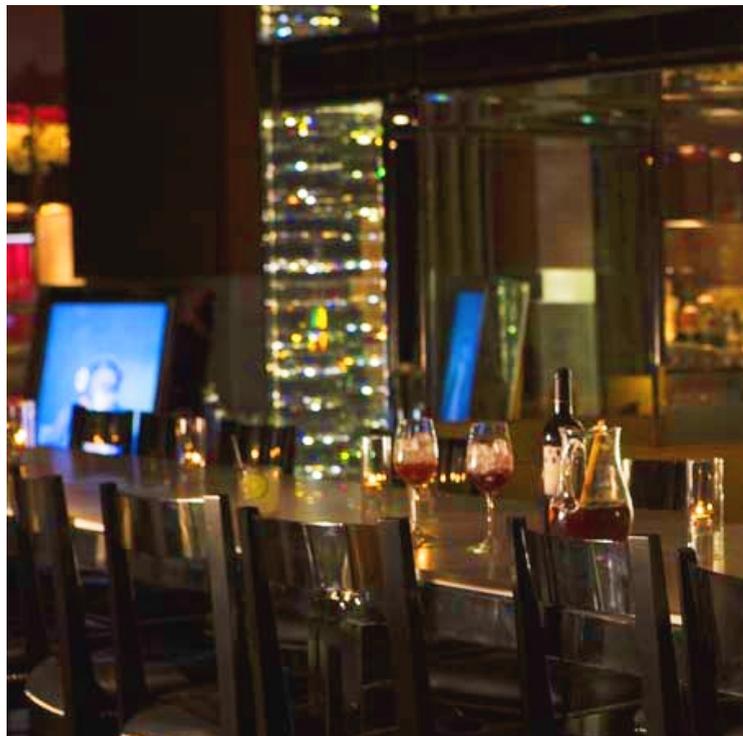
Jose Andres: his food tells his story

Hotel Food & Beverage designers have a different viewpoint for 2010, as I found from interviewing internationally-recognized culinary innovator Jose Andres of The Bazaar Restaurant at

the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills, who recently created this project at the request of ambitious entrepreneur, Sam Nazarian and renowned designer, Philippe Stark. Jose is also the owner of THINKfoodGROUP.

Does a client have different expectations from a hotel restaurant than at a free-standing establishment? I asked. « As a hotel guest, I want to be able to get the food I'm comfortable with, like pancakes for breakfast, as an example, or Caesar Salad for lunch. I also want something that tells me about the city I am in, something unique to the destination. If I'm a local, I come looking for an amazing dining experience. Remember, hotels are destinations themselves. Hotel dining should never be safe, boring or beige. »

I also asked Jose, What are some of the « ingredients » that differentiate a remarkable dining experience from an average one in a luxury boutique or lifestyle property? Have they changed in the last year or so? What will continue to change in 2010? His reply: « The same things that distinguish a great restaurant from a mediocre one; to some degree it is about



personal vision, about point of view. Not trying to make everyone happy but telling your own story. I cook to please myself; that is not to say that I don't want people to like what I cook, but ultimately I am the judge of whether it is successful. I think that is what makes a difference quite often. We make hamburgers. We make the best hamburger. We don't try to be what everyone else wants. That is true also for Spanish tapas. »

Bradley Cox: going green

COO of Green Globe International, Bradley Cox tells me, « We know from our work with hundreds of properties across the world that every accommodation is different; from eco-retreats in protected natural areas through to five star lifestyle hotels in major capital cities of the world. Fundamentally, however, the return for hotels and others investing in green compliance and certification comes through in many ways. »

Does sustainability help make a hotel more profitable? There is no clear-cut answer today; however, there is no doubt that as green practices make their way into our homes, we, along with our customers, will expect to maintain the same lifestyle

standards on the road. A hotel's attention to such sensitivities may result in attracting new business or, on the contrary, losing market share to a more progressive competitor.

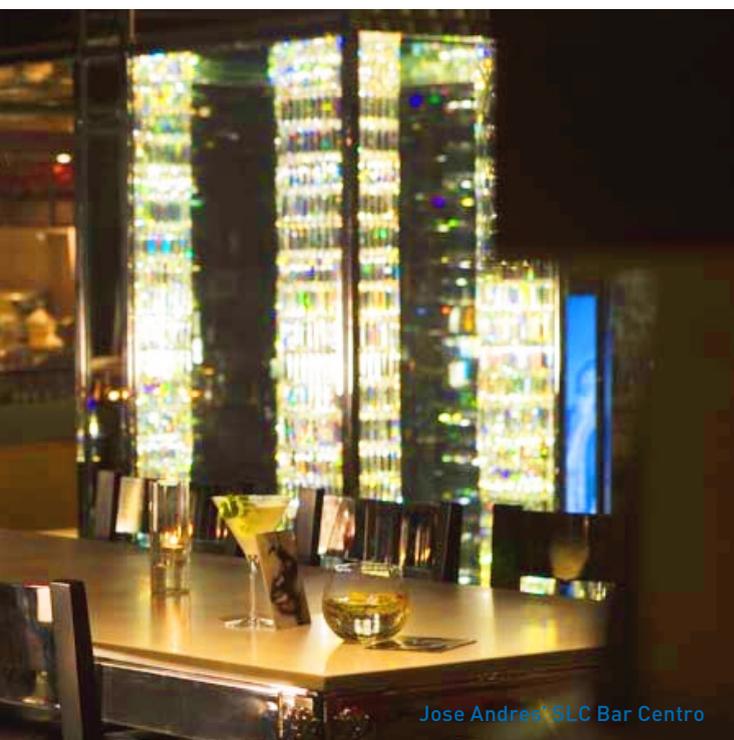
Bradley continues: « Changes in behavior, such as reviewing back-of-house practices to reduce energy and water usage, as well as inviting customers to refrain from air-conditioning their rooms when they are vacant, require no new investment but still make a significant difference. Most importantly, all people – staff, management, owners and guests – want to be part of the global green movement for 2010. Promoting green achievements and inviting everyone to be involved is a proven way of creating loyalty which retains good customers and quality staff. »

So the question in 2010 is no longer, « Should my business be going green? », but « How do I become part of the global movement toward sustainability? »

The boutique hospitality sector in particular has a history of working toward greater efficiencies for water and electricity usage per guest night. Even smaller brands recently introduced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies across their properties to echo the needs of local communities, their developers, employees and guests, who are the core of their tourism offering. Combined, this is the framework for true sustainability: economic, environmental and social.

Recognition of green achievements is underpinned by green certification. Many tourism associations offer local green certification or accreditation via a checklist system. For accommodation providers who need international standard green recognition, certain companies who specialize in this area provide international sustainability standards to be met and require an independent auditor to verify completion of the standards. ■

With Lana Dubovik, Principal, Hospitality Atelier



Jose Andrea SLC Bar Centro