

hospitality design

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beauty spots

the luxury issue

HD *expo* preview
a hospitality design event



from the editor

the new luxury



Lavish. Luxurious. Indulgent. Three words that essentially mean the same thing, but ask a handful of people what luxury means to them and prepare for myriad answers. That's true when it comes to a hospitality experience as well. Luxury today doesn't necessarily mean grand gilded interiors and butler service. To some, it equates to personalized options, free-flowing spaces, and a truly local experience.

In this issue, our annual look at luxury, we not only talk with Christopher Norton of Four Seasons (an industry benchmark in this segment), but we delve into the impetus and design highlights of nine new lifestyle brands—some from hotel newcomers, others from well-established flags—who are all embracing the next generation's idea of the L word. In my decade-plus with this magazine, I have never seen such an influx of new brands (and we didn't even cover them all) in such a short period of time, and I think it speaks clearly to the new mindset of today's traveler, and the need to break out from traditional ways of thinking. The projects we feature in this issue further showcase the varied looks of luxury—from a stunning One&Only resort in Australia to a residentially informed redo of a boutique New York hotel.



Photo by JEFF MOSIER PHOTOGRAPHY

I will be moderating a panel, dubbed "Defining Luxury," at HD Expo (May 13-15th at Mandalay Bay Las Vegas) on

this very topic Thursday, May 14th. Listen as Margaret McMahon, Wimberly Interiors; Liubasha Rose, Starwood Capital Group; and Diego Gronda, Rockwell Group Europe share (through case studies) how they approach the daunting challenge of crafting luxurious spaces for today's traveler.

In the meantime, turn the page, and indulge.

PS: Luxury is one of 20 project categories of our annual HD Awards. If you haven't entered, do so by March 10th. Find details at hospitalitydesign.com.

Stacy Shoemaker Rauén

Editor in Chief

stacy.shoemaker@emeraldexpo.com

hospitalitydesign

STACY SHOEMAKER RAUEN ← Editor in Chief
stacy.shoemaker@emeraldexpo.com
646.668.3751

MICHAEL ADAMS ← Editorial Director
michael.adams@emeraldexpo.com
646.668.3690

JONATHAN MARSLAND ← Creative Director
jonathan.marsland@emeraldexpo.com
646.668.3733

KATHLEEN KERVIN ← Managing Editor
kathleen.kervin@emeraldexpo.com
646.668.3728

ALISSA PONCHIONE ← Associate Editor
alissa.ponchione@emeraldexpo.com
646.668.3749

ERINN WALDO ← Online Editor
erinn.waldo@emeraldexpo.com
770.291.5617

GRACE CASEY ← Production Manager
grace.casey@emeraldexpo.com
646.668.3706

CECE LOFT ← Marketing Director
cece.loft@emeraldexpo.com
770.291.5435

KARA KOBRZYCKI ← Conference Director
kara.kobrzycki@emeraldexpo.com
770.291.5513

DOUG HOPE ← Vice President/Content
doug.hope@emeraldexpo.com
770.291.5453

JOE RANDALL ← Senior Vice President
joe.randall@emeraldexpo.com

advertising

PAUL BIENKOWSKI ← Publisher
860.644.3861
pbienkowski@cox.net

COLIN VILLONE ← Associate Publisher
770.291.5413
colin.villone@emeraldexpo.com

PHYLLIS VISCIDI ← East/Midwest Brand Strategy Manager
781.431.1320
phyllis@viscidi.com

LILIANA CONNOLLY ← East/Midwest Brand Strategy Manager
781.431.1320
li@viscidi.com

GERRY KREGER ← Western Brand Strategy Manager
323.999.0991
kregerg@aol.com

SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES/BACK COPIES
nhd@omeda.com
800.697.8859
847.291.4816

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Editorial + Executive Offices

→ 85 Broad Street, New York, New York 10004
646.668.3749

special feature

lifestyle brands

By Kathleen Kervin, Alissa Ponchione, and Stacy Shoemaker Rauert



MODERN MINDSET

Nine brands enter the lifestyle market



Lifestyle hotels have been all the rage this past year, with a new offering seeming to be announced every few weeks. The impetus for these new brands comes from changing guest demographics (thank Millennials in part for that) and evolving needs. Authenticity, community, location, and technology are now the dominant drivers. Here, we take a deeper look—from the history to the ethos to design highlights—at nine recently debuted industry game changers.

Virgin Hotels

The Backstory: Four-plus years in the making since its original announcement that Sir Richard Branson's prolific brand was entering the hotel sphere, Virgin has opened its first property in Chicago, housed in the Old Dearborn Bank Building, a 27-story Art Deco landmark in the Loop designed in 1938 by C.W. and George L. Rapp Architects. Now it is home to 250 guestrooms, multiple restaurants, and a spa.

Highlights: "People are surprised that it's not what they expected—something very modern, very sleek, like the airline," explains Raul Leal, Virgin Hotels CEO. "We surprised them by saying, 'Hey, this is another side of Virgin you haven't seen.' It's warm, comfortable, not over designed. It's not in your face." Working with Rockwell Group Europe, original details like a cigar bar and ornate ceilings mingle with elements that bring to life Virgin's don't-take-

1+2. The Funny Library and Commons Bar in Virgin Hotels Chicago's Commons Club, part bar, study, and restaurant and the communal heart of the hotel.

special feature lifestyle brands

3. A guestroom (or Chamber) at Virgin Hotels Chicago, divided into distinct zones by wood sliding doors.

4. The reception desk, a vintage oak cigar sales counter from the 1920s, is backed by whimsical artwork.



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yourself-too-seriously voice. Skewing toward women travelers, expect “a comfortable and efficient home away from home with a simple and modern feel,” explains Diego Gronda, managing and creative director of Rockwell Group Europe. “Understated and playful, it’s the ultimate pied-à-terre with a relaxed ‘in-your-own-living room’ ambiance.”

“Our proposition was always to build a better hotel room,” Leal says. That equates to both design and operations: street prices and customization capabilities for minibar goodies; a layout where rooms (called Chambers) are divided by custom wood sliding doors into two

distinctive spaces, the dressing room and the lounge, allowing for flexibility and seamless room service; and the custom Lounge Bed, which features a corner seat on the bed opposite the headboard. “You can work and play at the same time in your bed, which seems to be what people are doing today,” Leal says. Adds Gronda: “Couples typically sit next to each other, not facing each other. So we added a second headboard that’s in no way imposing, leaving room for guests to experiment and use their imagination.”

Design Details: A dramatic red-carpeted grand staircase leads to the hotel’s signature restaurant-bar-hangout hybrid space dubbed the Commons Club, where 75 percent of the original, highly ornamented two-story coffered plaster ceiling was restored, and an oval-shaped bar clad in red leather and zinc demands attention. The registration desk, a vintage oak cigar sales counter from the 1920s, is backed by “artistic reinterpretations of the stuffed animal masterpieces” recreating famous works of art, and a musically inspired chandelier is a “wink to Virgin’s roots in music,” says Gronda. “Fun and whimsy are present everywhere throughout the hotel. There’s a lot of instability and uncertainty in the world, and we like the notion that lifestyle

culture should be increasingly immersed with humor.”

Upstairs, guestroom corridors give the sense of entering a private residence from the street, thanks to carpeting that takes its cues from pavement, and red wall lamps and British townhouse-inspired red guestroom doors. Inside, expect great lighting, a dedicated vanity area, a massive shower, natural wood on furniture and finishes, and gray felt wallcovering. For other touches of Virgin’s signature color, a few red tiles stand out in the otherwise all-white showers; suite desk chairs are ruby Vespa seats; and there’s a retro cherry Smeg minibar. “This project represents a new kind of luxury hospitality experience—one that is defined in non-glittery terms and breaks the classic, traditional codes,” Gronda says.

Outlook: Nashville (headed up by BLUR Workshop and Mark Zeff) and New York (being crafted by VOA) are up next for the brand, with plans to open two hotels a year for the next seven to eight years. “Virgin Hotels is for the mass consumer, but we’re not going to roll out 60 or 70 of them,” says Leal. “We want these to be special and unique places that are grounded in their community, and that can help us bridge the gap between lifestyle and legacy hotels out there.”

Photos courtesy of VIRGIN HOTELS