



*Photo of Puro courtesy of Blacksheep*

# Design Trends

## Redefining Space and Experiences

*by Chris McBeath*

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Design concepts used to be solely about soft furnishings, luxurious linens, and sleek plumbing fixtures but oh, how the world is changing. Today's guests not only have higher-than-ever expectations, but they defy traditional definitions of type.

Business travellers play as they work. Leisure travellers include multi-generational families. Tour groups are small and specialized. And all are seeking an individual experience.

Designs must involve creating spaces that fulfill a multitude of personal lifestyles and individual preferences. It may sound like a daunting task, but boutique hotels have embraced these values with such success that brands like Best Western and Hilton are now conceptualizing new ways to empower guests and customize their hotel stays.

**Active Social Spaces**

“There’s been a huge shift in how to utilize public areas,” explains Tim Mutton, CEO of Blacksheep, an award-winning international design firm based in the UK. “Lobbies and lounges are being redefined into meaningful social venues that are inclusive of their community.” As the lead designer for the Puro Hotel in Poland, the 2012 award winner at a European hotel design competition, he took the concept one step further. “In offering free coffee and free WiFi to all patrons, the lobby became an incredibly busy destination where locals and visitors exchange real conversations about their respective histories and cultures. In other words, we enabled guests to connect in a personal way, and therefore made their experience an individual one.”

*2014 will be a blue-toned year, with shades of green running a close second*

Lobby redesigns are also a current tour de force for Jennifer Jordan, whose consulting firm specializes in hospitality industry designs. “Creating an authentic story plays a big role in giving a hotel a sense of place, so giving the lobby a feeling of discovery, arrival, and passage is especially important”, describes Jordan. “If you are working with a chain, it’s equally important to have design elements support the brand,” she says, referencing her work with Hilton Garden Inn, a global chain that is rolling out its new Project Grow initiative: the redesign of all lobbies from being a place of transaction to a place of interaction for guests. “Design parameters for this particular chain also call for garden elements - whether that’s in artwork, fire pits, or the use of natural materials - to have every lobby reflect its local environment as well as a convivial garden atmosphere.”

Holiday Inn Express is another brand that is re-engineering lobby design into a hub concept where activity areas flow from one to the other in a connected space. While Regina boasts the first purpose-built hub, other HI properties such as the Holiday Inn & Suites Vancouver Downtown are following suit, working within existing space to express the same interconnectivity.

**Tailoring the Experience**

For Mutton, designing a guest-empowered experience requires that each hotel service be nimble enough to cater to every guest preference. Rooms need to accommodate multiple purposes, whether it’s providing enough space for yoga stretches, or the ease of moving a table (preferably on casters) to the foot of the bed to work while watching TV, or in front of the window to enjoy the view. “Although when designing a guestroom getting a good night’s rest is seen as a priority, things are changing rapidly; it’s a mini office, dining room, entertainment centre, and a

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Photo courtesy of Holiday Inn & Suites Vancouver Downtown

place for simply lounging,” notes Mutton. “It’s all about designing an experience that flows seamlessly from one activity to another, and using innovative design and technology to help make that happen.” He continues, “Technology is evolving so fast that I foresee a day when hoteliers will respond to different needs by providing services almost on an à la carte basis - including telephones and TVs - because within five years, nearly everyone will be streaming their favourite shows, playing games, and ordering room service using their own iPad or smartphone. The cost savings

in hotel inventory could be significant, and perhaps [will] allow investment into other trend areas involving sustainability issues and even barrier-free designs for all the aging baby boomers.”

### Paperless Technology

With more consumers using the digital experience to link with their local environment, hotels should already be moving towards tablet-readiness in rooms, restaurants, and on the front line.

## Quick & Trendy Fixes

### Budget-Conscious Designer Tips

- >>> Reupholster furniture using polyurethane fabrics. They’re durable, long-lasting, and available in many styles and colours.
- >>> Install drum shade lighting. It’s architecturally neutral and inexpensive, and easily replaces outdated lighting in any space.
- >>> Use custom wall graphics strategically on focal walls for maximum impact.
- >>> Simplify window coverings. Trade heavy drapery for light, crisp new sheers, blinds, and shades.
- >>> Remove compartmentalization. Allow lobbies to flow into food and beverage service areas.
- >>> Update way-finding signage. New fonts and symbols make a difference on how guests see your property.
- >>> Incorporate occupancy-based lighting/climate controls. It’s the environmentally responsible way to reduce operating costs.

Tips courtesy of Jennifer Jordan Interior Design



Just as the airline industry has turned mobile devices into effective booking and check-in mechanisms, technology is also changing the hotel registration experience. “New bold designs are moving towards barrier-free check-in stations that are more touch-base centres for check in and check-out services,” describes Jordan. “Over-the-counter service is disappearing in favour of front desk personnel with mobile tablets, and self-service automatic check-in is turning smartphones into room keys. It’s all leading to a paperless system that

reduces back-of-house requirements. As a consequence, space can be released to revenue-generating purposes, such as retail or food and beverage.”

**Familiarity & Comfort**

With economic woes still very much a part of current memory, familiarity and comfort are high on the trending list. Luxurious linens and quality amenities are certainly here to stay, but

earth tones are passé and we’ll be welcoming back colour. According to the International Furnishings & Design Association, 2014 will be a blue-toned year, with shades of green running a close second. Soft furnishings will be accented with silky, shiny fabrics in red, orange, yellow and magenta as an inexpensive updo to tired neutrals.

**Sustainability**

Consumers seek out Green Key properties as well as green initiatives, and things that are imaginatively repurposed or reused are particularly important to younger clientele. If you haven’t done a “footprint” review for a year or two, take a second look. Advances in technology have made eco-installations more affordable, especially since they can be phased in over time.

LED lighting falls into this category. Units now screw into traditional bases. Their colours have improved, and their dimming capacity is more reliable.

“Fabrics, too, have come a long way,” notes Jordan. “Synthetics, like the new polyurethanes, are the super hero of fabrics. They are amazingly versatile, good looking, water resistant and anti-bacterial. And they come in a variety of textures.”

If hard times and poor economies have had a positive side, it has forced designers and the hospitality industry to work with a new set of priorities and values. Once, hotels changed out designs every 5-7 years, but today, the new rule of thumb is double that lifespan. Agility is the new modus operandi; and durability with panache is the new credo - two trends that promise to be around for some time to come. ⚡

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