

# Come As You Are – The Design Hotel Experience

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## ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 80's, the Design Hotel concept arrived as an alternative to the impersonal and industrialized leading hospitality business. When just feeling at ease thru service and recognition wasn't good enough, Ian Schrager<sup>1</sup> launched in New York the first boutique hotels by Putman and Stark. The intention was to create hip and trendy interiors that would bring together local people and travelers, introducing the idea of "lobby socializing". Lifestyle oriented, the concept developed on the terms of Joseph Pine's "experience economy"<sup>2</sup> and now, thirty years later, it had spread worldwide. Comfort, technology and smart services, allied to innovative interiors come to respond to the aspirations of a new generation of mobile citizens that can choose "who they want to be" when they check in. Nevertheless, we may ask if these hotels are just another trend. On their behalf, these projects are revitalizing whole neighborhoods. Thru their restaurants and bars, they attract like-minded people and help create a new kind of experience, in which the hotel acts as a portal to discover and experience the destination in a different way. As a part of an ongoing research on Design Hotels<sup>3</sup>, this article wishes to discuss more about this architectural concept and its relationship with contemporary travel practices.

## Keywords

Design Research; Design Hotels; user experience;

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Schrager (born July 19, 1946) is an American entrepreneur, hotelier and real estate developer (...). Originally, he gained fame as co-owner and co-founder of Studio 54. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian\\_Schrager](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Schrager). Accessed on 19/03/15.

<sup>2</sup> Pine, J. and Gilmore, J. (1999) *The Experience Economy*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Ponzio, A, Machado, A. *Espaços de Estadia Temporária - O Caso dos Hotéis Design Contemporâneos*. UFRGS, 2014-2015.

## 1. THE TARGET: NOT ONLY MILLENNIALS...

Recent researches developed by the tourism industry on new traveler's expectations<sup>1</sup> reached the conclusion that not only the incoming generation of millennials but also older ones are seeking more and more for unique experiences. However, what does that really mean? On a few words, it is occurring a radical shift from simply being a tourist to becoming an "explorer". By not wanting readymade travel plans, this group is looking for places to discover where they can interact, meet and exchange information with locals and travelers alike. In addition, they are highly internet connected and know exactly where they do not want to stay - "cookie cutter"<sup>2</sup> hotels that would make them feel like one more in the pack. Rather on the service provided, the focus is on the potential relationships facilitated thru the hotel. A sense of belonging is essential to create new perspectives on that matter for these "mobile citizens" or flashpackers<sup>3</sup>. In order to achieve that, architects and interior designers are on the make of an "artificial phenomenology", trying to recreate hotel interiors with a sense of place.

**Figure 1 - 2.** Interior and folder - Levi's 25 Hours Frankfurt; image @ ponzio



## 2. THE BRANCHES

A report from 2001 published on the Hospitality Net<sup>4</sup> site states that boutique<sup>5</sup> hotels can be detached in two "branches": city or resort destinations. Although

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<sup>1</sup> [https://extranets.us.amadeus.com/whitepaper/nextgen/next\\_gen\\_travel\\_trends.pdf](https://extranets.us.amadeus.com/whitepaper/nextgen/next_gen_travel_trends.pdf). Accessed on 15/02/15.

<sup>2</sup> Cookie-cutter: "Marked by sameness and a lack of originality; mass-produced."

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=cookie-cutter>, accessed on 15/03/15.

<sup>3</sup> Definition of flashpacker: "independent travelers with money to spend",

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=flashpacker>, accessed on 10/03/15.

<sup>4</sup> Lucienne Anhar, Consulting & Valuation Analyst at HVS International at:

<http://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/4010409.html>, accessed on 10/03/15.

<sup>5</sup> In this article the term "design hotel" will englobe the term "boutique hotels", as coined by Steve Rubell, Ian Schager's late partner. He used that expression in an interview in 1984, when comparing the Morgans Hotel to a small boutique shop: "You can go clothes shopping at Macy's or you can go clothes shopping at one of these small boutiques in New York City,"

they both share the same basic design principles, we can identify some differences. In order to build a scenario of this hotel concept and modern travel practices, this article will present some aspects regarding location, program and materials of both branches.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Concept 01: the new neighborhood

Strategically situated on downtown areas or city outskirts of urban centers, these hotels mostly occupy historical or old buildings and can be a major attraction point in order to revitalize neighborhoods. The Design Hotels™ Company clearly states that the selection of its hotel members relies on the relationship with the place where they are located – identity and belonging are key words as they expect these attributes to act as a way of introducing the city to their guests.<sup>2</sup> By experience, it is in fact true that the perception of a place enhances depending on the departure point, on this case - the hotel where we stay. To promote interaction some of them even may have independent entrances to attract locals to their restaurants or cafés. However, if part of the idea is to bring the neighborhood to the hotel, sometimes the facilities may be so overcrowded that it is difficult for the guests to use them.

**Figure 3 – 4.** *Restaurant and Street image- Levi's 25 Hours, Frankfurt; image @ ponzio*



Regarding the program, hotels in urban centers tend to be technology oriented on the facilities provided and on the installations of their interiors. In the Aloft brand, for example, guests are invited to control the music and light of the lobby – as the front desk acts as a centrally located DJ booth. In the Hi Matic hotel in Paris, a code received during internet reservation enables the access to the building where one can check-in, pay and get the keys thru public computers – all DIY style.

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“This hotel is going to be like the boutique of hotels.”

<http://www.hotelnewsnow.com/article/PrintVersion/6749/>, accessed on 10/03/15.

<sup>1</sup> For this purpose the authors have selected a group of design hotels and in that way, this article do not wish to exhaust the subject. N.A.

<sup>2</sup> The Design Hotels Book, Edition 2012, p.006.

**Figure 5.** *Vending machine – Hi Matic Hotel, Paris<sup>1</sup>*



Creativity and sometimes irony are a trademark on these hotels as hip and trendy interiors of communal spaces are the stage for events and performances on restaurants, disco clubs or lounge areas. In the Levi's 25 Hours hotel, a music room is available for guests or local bands to rent including a connected bar for parties; at the Standard hotel in New York High Line park, there is a rooftop bar with a plunge pool in the summer. Other important features in these city locations regards unusual services like a bakery in the lobby; a food truck right in front at the street entrance, vending machines with healthy food/slippers/books; an ice rink and many more attractions in an effort to surprise and entertain a variety of tastes.

**Figure 6.** *Reading nook and communal space, 25 Hours Hotel, Zurich West<sup>2</sup>*



As for the hotels rooms, they tend to gather in theme groups or in one of a kind suites. Investing in personalization, they can offer from flexible furniture changeable from day to nighttime to colored led lights, sound and fragrances

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<sup>1</sup> Design: Matali Crasset. Image @designboom.  
<http://www.designboom.com/architecture/matali-crasset-hi-matic-hotel-in-paris/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

<sup>2</sup> Design: Alfredo Haberli. Image @designboom.  
<http://www.designboom.com/architecture/alfredo-haberli-design-development-25hours-hotel-zurich-west-2/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

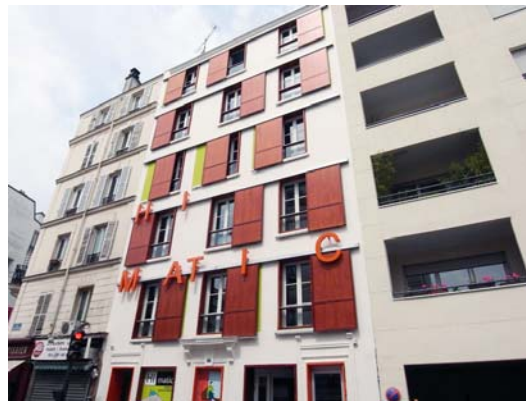
monitored by the guests. They also present unusual hospitality gadgets and décor as iPads, electric guitars, jeans, plush toys and many more. In any case, the interior atmosphere of the rooms relate to the main hotel concept – preconceived according to the location: if in Paris suites may have a romantic theme, in Hamburg we can find a maritime décor, in Milan fashion and design, in Rotterdam art and architecture, in Berlin music and so on...

**Figure 7.** *Postcard room – New Hotel Athens<sup>1</sup>*



Regarding the nature of construction, many of these hotels are the product of a retrofit project in charge of industrial designers, where the interiors and façade are the highlights. As a result, the urban fabric is renovated thru with a variety of lighting and graphic design propositions.

**Figure 8.** *Exterior façade – HiMatic Hotel<sup>2</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> Interior design by Campana brothers, Image @designboom.  
<http://www.designboom.com/design/campana-brothers-new-hotel-athens/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

<sup>2</sup> Image@designboom. <http://www.designboom.com/architecture/matali-crasset-hi-matic-hotel-in-paris/> Accessed on 20/03/15.



## 2.2 Concept 02: naturally sustainable

Resort destinations are off big centers and can be located in exotic places. Most of the time they are hard to reach and relate to either sports or relaxation, targeting couples or groups. As much as they can promote isolation, they try to relate to the local community on a different manner: by interpreting local materials and culture in the design and services provided. In that sense, they tend to melt into the scenery as part of the natural landscape.

**Figure 9.** Exterior - Tierra Patagonia Hotel, Chile<sup>1</sup>



Regarding the program, technology is not the focus and in many cases, they do not provide internet access and television. The emphasis is instead, on the activities related to the location and some may function only in certain periods of the year depending on the weather. Spas, indoor pools and reading rooms are recurrent with an accent of intimacy.

**Figure 10.** Indoor pool - Tierra Patagonia Hotel, Chile<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Cazú Zegers Arquitectura. Image@piavergara.  
<http://www.designboom.com/architecture/cazu-zegers-arquitectura-naturally-shape-tierra-patagonia-hotel-10-30-2013/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

<sup>2</sup> Cazú Zegers Arquitectura. Image@piavergara.  
<http://www.designboom.com/architecture/cazu-zegers-arquitectura-naturally-shape-tierra-patagonia-hotel-10-30-2013/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

The authors of these projects are mostly architects that can be associated with interior designers. Not exclusively built as one construction, communal areas can be concentrated in one reduced volume as individual rooms may be independent sharing a strong relation with nature and contemplation.

**Figure 11.** *Endemico Resguardo Silvestre - Mexico*<sup>1</sup>



Subsequently, the selection and use of construction and finishing materials evoke determined experiences and feelings related to the hotel concept. Sustainability is present on the majority of these hotels and many have an eco label.

**Figure 12.** *Interiors of cabins - Elqui Domus Astronomical Hotel- Chile*<sup>2</sup>



### 3. CONCLUSIONS

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<sup>1</sup> Gracia Studio. Image@graciastudio. <http://www.designboom.com/architecture/gracia-studio-endemico-resguardo-silvestre/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

<sup>2</sup> Rodrigo Duque Mota. Figure 12. Image@JamesFlorio <http://www.designboom.com/architecture/los-domos-timelapse-chile/> Accessed on 20/03/15.

It is no doubt that nowadays travelling is accessible to a larger number of the world population and that exploration and interaction are the new key words. Price is also not a constraint as we can already find cheap alternatives that advocate the “design” experience. Hostels, popup hotels, “notels” are getting more and more frequent all over. In any case, what distinguishes this type of lodging is the investment of their projects regarding the relationship with the place, as the main design strategy is to recreate the mood of the location in the design. Moreover, they help define a way of travelling and the idea of belonging to a group – and there is no coincidence when one of these hotels uses the title song of a band as a slogan: come as you are (as I want you to be...).

**Figure 14-15.** Interior and exterior of pay-as-you-wish Daspark Hotel - Germany <sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Project: Andreas Strauss. Image@dasparkhotel. <http://www.dasparkhotel.net/rooms/> Accessed on 20/03/15.



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