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Putting on the style

Elaine Williamson
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Hotels with tired-looking decor will never command the premium rates enjoyed by their boutique rivals, but looking good doesn't have to cost a fortune. Designer Elaine Williamson offers some tips on how to stay with the trend without undergoing frequent refurbishments.

As boutique hotels maintain strong occupancy and room rates it's easy to see why more hoteliers are tempted to take the plunge and indulge more risky design ideas. But interior design, like fashion, is an ever-changing industry and can date quickly.

Styles, materials, furnishings and decor follow trends and seasons, so it's important to strike a balance between cutting-edge style and longevity. A well-considered hospitality interior design will provide flexibility and scalability, allowing a hotel, pub or restaurant to remain current in its aesthetic for many years ahead.

Interior design and decor trends change with every season, but with a strategic foundation of baseline elements, like furniture and flooring, a property can easily keep up with the trends without sacrificing the essential style elements of the space. A successful strategy for longevity means investing in furniture and flooring for the long term, which can be reupholstered to reflect current trends (see "Bone-dacious" furnishings).

Here's a glimpse of the latest ideas in hotel design and decor.

SENSIBLE SCALING

First and foremost in any interior design is the scale and placement of the furnishings. If the scale is off for fundamental baseline pieces, the space will not evoke the desired emotion among guests.

For rooms with high ceilings consider adding architectural features such as painted beams, low-hanging fans or chandeliers for added cosiness. For rooms with low ceilings consider warming up the walls with a slight bluish-white shade of paint to give an added feeling of spaciousness.

Narrow rooms should always have a useful focal point at the far end. It is also helpful to add a horizontal tone-on-tone striped paint treatment around the entire room.

"BONE-DACIOUS" FURNISHINGS

For the past few decades, designers have purchased furniture that served one particular style purpose for a specific room. This meant that as soon as the owner or property manager decided to redecorate a space all-new base furnishings had to be purchased.

Lately, however, it has become popular among hospitality interior designers to purchase a high-quality piece of furniture that has desirable, style-transcendent "bones" with the intent to reupholster it as fashions change, rather than simply discarding it when it's time to update the look of the lobby, hallways, guest rooms, suites, pool/patio area or restaurant. This trend has resulted in an increase in purchases from domestic manufacturers who make top-quality furnishings built to stand the test of time.

NATURAL CAUSES

There is a growing trend for eco-friendly, natural fabrics and textures, such as linen and burlap, in today's hospitality design marketplace.

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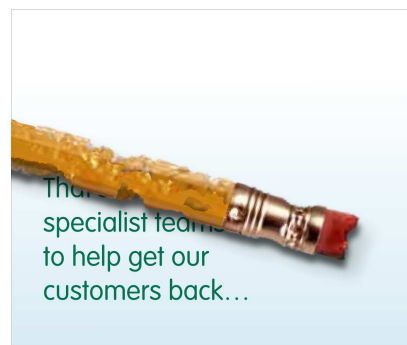
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While the concept of these fabrics is not new, the array of available colours has surged of late. Among others, oranges, blues, pinks and greens in all tones and values are now available to co-ordinate with any interior decor option.

Antimicrobial carpeting, bathroom and bed linens are also making a strong statement in the hospitality industry. Many boutique hotels are also offering these items for purchase, giving them a strong retail bump to boot.

DODGE DISPOSABLE DECOR

Designers are no longer purchasing one-time use "disposable" decor items, be they furniture, rugs, window treatments or decorative items. Instead, when considering a purchase, they think about a piece's reusability in another future design.

This is the most efficient and cost-effective way to make over a hotel space - both now and later.

COLOUR CRAZE

The world of colour has undergone a makeover of late, too, with yellow and grey paving the way. Together, these colours add a level of calm to the feel of a guest room, while still adding eye-catching colour highlights.

The grey - a neutral colour - works well as a base colour on upholstered furniture, especially when coupled with another hot trend right now, espresso-stained wood.

This stain colour, which exudes an air of sleek sophistication, is an enduring classic that has realised a surge in popularity.

The yellow, best utilised in small bursts, serves as an impactful infusion of excitement in the room. For instance, a yellow throw pillow on a grey sofa can make a stellar statement.

SEE THE LIGHT

Lighting is currently making a huge push in the hospitality space. As the design of table lamps has waned and the marketplace has begun to embrace cleaner lines, pendant and other types of overhead lighting are popular choices for making a design statement. Beautiful materials, unique shapes and versatile sizes simply cannot be overlooked.

GROUND CONTROL

Natural wood floors are also making a comeback, and as properties "go green" other types of types of natural flooring such as travertine, limestone and honed marble are in high demand.

Recyclable flooring, either in wood or carpet, is also in fashion. In fact, all things natural and recyclable are at the top of the hospitality style scene. There is also an increase in the use of natural gemstones in flooring. Tiger's eye, sodalite, malachite and mother-of-pearl are just a few of these fabulous new materials being put to creative flooring use at the high end.

Elaine Williamson is the principal of [Elaine Williamson Designs](#)

SIMPLE SWAPS THAT MAKE A BIG IMPACT

If you're searching for a new look for a lobby or other common area, build on the baseline furnishings already installed. There are several ways to update your property without breaking the bank.

Here are five quick, easy and inexpensive ways to make a big impact:

- Freshen up lamps or other ambient lighting fixtures.
- Change pillows or cushions on existing upholstery.
- Use a contrasting, high-impact colour to paint on a wall behind check-in counters or other such focal points in common areas.
- Clean up all botanicals on site, as nothing dates itself faster than a stale floral arrangement.
- Change out a neutral rug for a bold, colourful entry-area rug or carpet.

Whether you execute one or all of these five simple strategies, introduce fresh style elements that allow a space to be updated as decor trends change, without having to alter the entire composition of the space.

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