

CHECKING IN

NEW HOTEL DESIGN

2009 was a bit of a nasty year for the hospitality industry. In the early months hotels in the US were facing some of their lowest occupancy rates since 1971. Individuals and businesses put their travel plans on the backburner and American consumers exhibited more conservative spending patterns. So much so, it has been observed, they notched their highest savings rate in the past eight years.

Now that 2010 has finally arrived, the signs of recovery are encouraging yet emerging gradually – especially in the US. This may not please travel service suppliers, in particular those in the luxury sector, as value will continue to be in vogue. Both business and leisure travellers will fine-tune their travel planning and purchasing skills to ensure they don't overpay, hoping to bag a bargain online and squeeze suppliers' profit margins even further. It seems 2010 may be a year when many consumers will be leaving luxury resorts and five-star dining establishments, to opt for mid-priced hotels, all-inclusive packages and cruises. The trend for taking shorter vacations may continue. This year, one hotel's gain will be another's loss, and marketers will have to demonstrate even more creativity to entice cost-conscious business travellers and holidaymakers. With the economic malaise continuing, cautious optimism seems to be the mantra for now.

Across the Asia-Pacific region, hotel revenue is down almost 30 per cent, echoing the situation in the US and Europe. Occupancy rates have started to pick up, but room rates are still under pressure. Although most economists warn the global economy isn't out of the woods yet, hotel managers are betting big on Asia. Construction projects that were paused midway are restarting, and hotel companies big and small are pressing ahead with expansion plans. French hotel giant Accor (which operates the brands Novotel, Mercure and Sofitel) is opening 54 hotels, totalling 10,000 rooms, this year. They say they plan to do the same next year, and in India alone, the company plans to open 50 hotels by 2012. "We're growing more rapidly here than in any other region of the world," said Michael Issenberg, who heads Accor's Asia-Pacific business.

Meanwhile, in Hong Kong three major upscale hotels are already making waves – the small designer-style The Upper House, a soon-to-be-reborn 300-room Ritz Carlton and East

Hotel in Taikoo Place. In Asia, growth is back on track, shaking off the deep funk elsewhere. China, with its population of 1.3 billion has only 1.7 million hotel rooms, while India has only about 120,000 – making Asia fertile ground for growth opportunities.

Inevitably, design will play a large role (if not the largest) in luring guests to new or newly revamped properties. While big, traditional hotels may pale in their attractiveness beside more lean, sleek and chic boutique establishments with themed rooms and signature restaurants and bars, the global financial crisis seems to have created a niche for the escapist – a quiet, tranquil oasis within the city that people can conveniently retreat to without having to travel far.

Another trend cropping up is the challenge to the traditional room layout. While some customers may still want the best/coolest/sexiest/most prestigious room in the house, the phenomenon has no doubt arisen in part due to the growing demand for something creative in spite of the smaller rooms and tighter budgets. A breakaway from the typical entry-bathroom-and-bedroom floorplan to give guests a different experience can therefore be expected to remain the stuff of imagination in the years to come. Technology, in varying degrees, will also continue to keep hoteliers and designers on their toes, as lobby-less hotels become a common sight, the front desk fades into the background and a paperless world emerges. Indeed, sustainable design and practices are slowly ceasing to be just marketing tools, instead becoming a way of life. And as in years past, current trends in hotel design will naturally influence some of the design touches we incorporate in our homes in the near future.

In the ultimate analysis, hotels are not only spaces where we wine and dine, socialise and sleep; they are also where great things happen and business is done. Hotels are our homes away from home. They can be the incentive that makes us want to get on a plane for an amazing, other-worldly experience. They are the havens that give us refuge when our flights are delayed or cancelled, and the lairs that make our journeys between cities, countries and continents that much better. Cheers to that.

The Upper House – Hong Kong AFSO



In comparison with the bigger hotels surrounding it, The Upper House carves its own niche as a boutique 'house' within the city's bustling business district. The intention here was to create a cosy and intimate atmosphere that would emulate a private residence or hideaway from the activity outside.

A strong Zen influence pervades every square foot of the space (which happens to be a sister property of The Opposite House in Beijing). To escape the street-level chaos, one must ascend to a higher realm. This concept is literalised by the facade in the form of a Bedonia stone doorway by Thomas Heatherwick, which leads up to a looming 13ft nickel door. A large circular bamboo lantern marks the beginning of an upward journey on an escalator, lined with dimly-lit lamps and culminating on level six, a common area flush with natural light. The stairway-to-heaven allusion is unmistakable.

Instead of a swimming pool, level six of this lobby-less hotel (you can check in and check-out from the hotel anywhere on the premises) holds a small lawn equipped with beanbags for lounging under the sun; the space is also ideal for twilight cocktail parties. Indoors, an array of contemporary artworks and sculpture is displayed on almost every available surface, creating a veritable gallery for artists from across Asia.

All 117 rooms are an example of simple yet sophisticated and contemporary surroundings. Here, timber, shoji glass, limestone and lacquered paper panels fall under two colour schemes – Bamboo and Celadon. The former consists of solid ash flooring, bamboo timber and lilac upholstery, while the latter features 'green tea' upholstery, lime-oak flooring and cream timber. Tech-savvy patrons will also revel in the hotel's iPod touch-interactive guide equipped with music and games – among the hotel's 'go green' initiatives. Another highlight of the hotel is the sky bridge leading to the Sky Lounge and Café Grey Deluxe on the 49th floor. A skylight floods the area with daylight from above, with added drama courtesy of a 40m-high atrium. Perhaps we've reached Nirvana?



Aman – New Delhi Kerry Hill

Images courtesy of Amanresorts



The Aman in New Delhi seeks to demonstrate that you don't need to leave the city in order to escape it. It seems the Indian capital was an obvious choice for the Amanresorts group, which already own two properties (Amanbagh and Aman-i-Khás) just a few hours away in Rajasthan. Apart from its combination of east and west, the city's rich urban and historic fabric is the inspiration behind the design of this city resort, with old building forms reinterpreted as opposed to mimicked. As architect Hill describes it, "We prefer to build upon what is there and to contemporise our understanding of what it can be. I think of it as being current, but filtered through a sieve of traditional values."

The result is a cool and serene oasis achieved by keeping things simple and minimal. Hill focused on creating the resort using local materials, and producing most of it in India, too. One such feature is the jaali stone screens – an arguably voyeuristic element used to filter sunlight and give privacy to the interior while providing glimpses of the view outside. At night the screens double as lanterns. Four-by-four-metre plunge pools in all the 61 rooms and double-height outdoor terraces allow for plenty of natural light, breeze and recreation. Khareda limestone floors and sandstone walls from Rajasthan blend effortlessly to create a harmonious and earthy elegance, while the courtyards, walkways and swimming pool owe much of their style to the courtyards and colonnades of Mughal buildings. Several reflection ponds are also incorporated, complementing the hotel's chic and composed ambience.





Axis Hotel – Viana do Castelo, Portugal VHM, Departamento de Arquitectura

Photography by Nelson Garrido

Located on the site of a former bus station, the arresting profile of this contemporary hotel would make anyone want to queue up (if necessary) to take a peek inside. From the outside, however, the building certainly speaks volumes with its contemporary form. The overlapping, stacked shapes produce a series of perspectives ranging from a full box from the front, to a complex column when viewed from the side. Comprising 88 rooms, this lego-like hotel includes two swimming pools, a sanatorium and a Turkish bath together with a 2,600sq ft spa.

Due to the density of the programme and the dark exterior image of the hotel, VHM decided to reduce the variety of materials used in the hotel's interiors, creating a contrast of light and shadows alongside a black-and-white theme. Like the outside, each of the hotel's facilities highlights chic, modern spaces that are impressive, cool yet practical and, for its guests, liveable.



Grims Grenka – Oslo Kristin Jarmund Architects

Grims Grenka takes on modern design elements and combines it with traditional Norwegian features to achieve a luxurious and sensual atmosphere.

Tactile natural materials such as stone, wood and leather have been paired with glass and painted surfaces in daring shades of red and black. Striking accessories including folk art, reindeer antler lamps and a moss garden embedded in the reception desk are just a few unconventional features. Lighting is closely integrated with furnishings to create a different atmosphere for the various rooms and zones in the hotel, as well as the time of day and season. To accentuate the linearity of the interiors and the 'floating' concept of the furniture, Kristin Jarmund Architects placed concealed light sources under beds, tables and shelves, aiming for a sense of weightlessness.

All the furniture designs at Grims Grenka are Nordic and European, with custom-made writing desks, benches and shelves in the guestrooms. The Summer rooms follow a black-and-green colour palette with natural oak, while the Winter rooms are grey, white and blue combined with a darker, warmer oak. The colour of the ceiling is applied on one of the walls, while the colour of the floor is taken up on the opposite wall – creating a wrapping effect. The bathroom blends seamlessly with the bedroom, divided only by semi-transparent glass walls, or in some cases, are totally opened up to become part of the room itself. However, it is the entrance to these rooms which is most exciting: Each is accessed via a wooden bridge, enclosed by wooden walls and a ceiling and accented with mirrors. Cool.





Hôtel Le Germain de Montreal – Canada Lemay Michaud Architecture Design

Images courtesy of Le Germain de Montréal

To mark the 10th anniversary of this hotel, its owners decided to 'rejuvenate' its 16-storey premises, encompassing 100 rooms besides the public spaces.

Every possible comfort had to be kneaded into the design process. The owners were also insistent Lemay Michaud ensure the old 'flavour' or appeal of the hotel would be present in its new avatar.

Each room takes advantage of the panoramic views of adjacent towers. Previously an office tower itself, the hotel highlights its history by stating its transition from a commercial or work space to a leisure one. White lacquer, frosted mirror and nuances of chocolate, black and white dominate the interior colour palette. Marie Saint-Pierre beddings add a touch of glamour to the rooms. Key elements of the layout, such as the bathrooms opening onto the bedrooms and the original chocolate woodwork, were judiciously preserved. New lounge chairs were also created for each room and are located next to a luminous table which also serves as ambient lighting. A 4m-long wall unit was designed to integrate a closet for clothing, ironing, work areas and a mini bar. All public areas including corridors and conference room also follow the same white-black-and-chocolate colour scheme, resulting in a new product that has remained true to the original image of the establishment.



St. Regis Hotel – Mexico City Yabu Pushelburg

Located in the heart of the city on Paseo de la Reforma Street is a 30-storey building that stands 490ft tall, and is divided into a hospitality and real estate component – St Regis Hotel and St Regis Residences.

At this unique and historically significant site, which overlooks the Chapultepec Park, Yabu Pushelburg has captured the essence of Mexico while complimenting the iconic architecture and floor-to-ceiling glass exterior.

The lobby, Pushelberg's proclaimed favourite area, is located on the fourth floor, offering unparalleled views of the city. Here, textured white plaster walls and clean, neutral tones are accented by bursts of intense colours. Bamboo green Italian marble floors play host to Mexican-inspired carpets that are grand in scale and bold in hue, each done in swirling jade greens with carved floral insets. Variations of the concept can be found throughout the hotel; particularly noteworthy is the rose-print carpet in the reception area that complements the neutral hand-cast plaster tiles lining the wall behind the front desk. Furniture in the lobby space includes tooled-leather chairs and luxurious, tufted sofas.

The richly coloured, custom-made carpets found throughout are the hotel's standout design feature, as are the customised metal-and-leather-work details. Many of the materials used, including the Onyx mosaic used in all guest bathrooms, the metal screens and furniture, as well as a number of the artistic wall finishes, were sourced locally and crafted by local artists.

All the guestrooms exude a light, clean feeling, in large part due to the neutral colour palette infused with fresh green and crisp purple accents. The room floorplans afford a natural progression – the hallway invites guests into the main room, where laser-cut silver mosaic screens and similar metal furniture pieces attract the eye. Underneath the feet, more flower-pattern carpets line the entire room. Behind the lavish bed, which is dressed in neutral-toned linens, stands the modern, charcoal-leather headboard with intricate details woven around the edges.

The bathrooms feature slabs of pale-green marble, which is mixed in with the Onyx mosaic. Frosted glass walls demarcate these spaces from the living area, making the whole room feel even larger and brighter. A Mexican-inspired motif is etched into the glass wall panels while the bathtub and cylindrical shower cubicle induce a grotto-like feel.



The PuLi – Shanghai

Layan Design Group



Shanghai's lively hotel scene is fueled by some of the highest occupancy rates in Asia, thanks to the city's apparently inexhaustible allure for business and leisure travellers. But not often does a new opening excite the senses like The PuLi Shanghai, a unique, Asian-toned property in the very centre of Puxi. Named after a particular type of jade beautiful in its raw form, The PuLi was created by Melbourne based Johannes Hartfuss, Indonesian firm Jaya & Associates and lighting design specialists The Flaming Beacon, all working for Hong Kong company Urban Resort Concepts. They have produced a true oasis in the bustling city core of Jing'An district, just off Nanjing Road. The aura of tranquil remove initiates the moment one steps off the curb: the building is a sleek, slim slab of glass and steel and the ground level entry sequence is 100 per cent chic understatement with a decidedly Chinese soul. Although the command of materials throughout – local but imaginatively employed, including the stunning use of Chinese ink-block stone – is superb, it is the proportions that make the strongest impression. Hartfuss has a strong sense of how to produce visual and spatial beauty through the stretching, elongating, juxtaposing and shortening of surfaces, axes, sightlines and objects.



One passes from an almost monastic entry portico through a vertical vestibule lined in backlit screens and directly into the hotel's principal and most dramatic space, the lobby lounge and bar, which stretches away to near infinity from the oversized doors. In a stroke of brilliance that immediately seemed obvious, Hartfuss replaces the classic 'reception desk' area with what is likely the longest bar in China, a 32m set-piece in solid timber, set against a continuous glass facade looking onto Jing'An park. At the near end, the bar surface doubles as reception. The rest of this lobby-lounge is occupied by separate seating areas graced by art, furniture and objects. It is a place one doesn't want to leave. The designer states that he was after a feeling not unlike one's home, where one can feel comfortable alone or with others. If home looked like this, one would never leave to travel. Off the lobby is a delightful space called The Library which is, well, a library. Intimate yet grand, warmed by dark wood tones, fireplace and a plethora of books and objets d'art, this space is ideal for solitary contemplation or hushed conversation. It is no less than superb.



Jing'An, the second floor restaurant, overlooks the park from three enfilade rooms that are among the most excellent in the building, generously proportioned, beautifully appointed, with custom designed furniture and lighting and once again, tastefully positioned artworks. It does multiple duty as restaurant, private dining rooms, or just another ideal spot for a quiet discussion or internet work (Wifi throughout the hotel). The fitness and leisure facilities at The PuLi Shanghai are unsurpassed, with probably the city's most jaw-dropping lap pool, set into a great hall that seems to hover directly over the park outside. The Anantara Spa rooms are retreats within the retreat, surpassingly tranquil chambers that threaten to decimate any other plans for the day.

Guestrooms are the litmus test of any hotel, and The PuLi's pass with exquisitely-matched colours. The unique furniture and light fixtures are set within a highly practical layout that blurs distinctions between entry foyer, bathroom, bed and sitting areas, etc, while avoiding all boutique hotel cliché's. Giant window walls overlook the city and the six-star accoutrements, from complementary mini bar, complete electronics and excellent bath products, seem prepared for a sultan – one with unequalled taste.

Long in the making, The PuLi Shanghai has been worth the wait. Single-handedly, it has raised the ante on accommodation design in the city, introducing an original concept – urban resort – while at it. Already garnering awards and a veritable roar of buzz, The PuLi is that rarest of things: what we were always waiting for without knowing it.



D2 – Pattaya

DWP

Images courtesy of Le Germain de Montréal

Although Pattaya has a shady reputation among Thailand's resort towns, a handful of recent developments have aimed at elevating the locale's general standing. These have included high-end condominiums and, ever so slowly, hospitality properties with more luxurious credentials. Well, the Dusit group has plenty of those, and their boutique, high-design offshoot brand, D2, recently embedded its second property in the very heart of Pattaya's centre. This small hotel, designed from the ground up by Bangkok-based DWP, is thoroughly in the contemporary category, and has overnight shifted the thinking on Pattaya. From its cooler-than-cool lounge-type lobby to its expansive rooms and suites, D2 pushes all the buttons that discerning, hip customers now demand. There is a lot of programme fitted into this modest-sized property: two distinct bar-lounges (the rooftop is the perfect sundown spot), a stellar restaurant poolside and special space called the 'Library' that can be used for private events or just hanging out, and also one of the hotel's best aspects. The courtyard pool makes very clever use of a constrained linear site, essentially commencing right at the lobby – which is itself designed as a bar/lounge, another success – and the inviting blue swathe of water becomes the view focus for all the rooms above. Because D2 does not sit waterfront, using the pool as its representational centerpiece made sense; the relationships between the public areas on the ground floor are equally intelligent. The lofty lobby is one of the most attractive spaces to people-watch or simply hang out in, any time of the day. Colour tones and materials hue to a light, often white, laidback, beachy palette, with accents of turquoise and orange to liven things up and keep the vacation mood prevalent. The guestrooms may tread a tad too close to over-designed, thanks to open bathrooms and large object beds front and centre, but they do benefit from generous proportions and complete amenities.

D2 strikes the right note of conspicuousness in Pattaya; it is just near enough to everything to be totally accessible and a part of the action, yet offers respite as well. Move closer to the 'perpetual party' atmosphere – a common risk here – and the luxe angle fails. Guests need to unwind in different ways, many of them quiet, and D2 delivers. The brand has wisely differentiated itself from its Dusit lineage, even as it exhibits the same expertise in making guests feel good. Often design hotels come across a little too stridently, or as ersatz – like an elderly person trying to dress as a youth. D2 sets out to do something original, and its fresh approach to combining quietly young design with superb service ought to make affluent travellers with style seek it out.



Playa Vik Jose Ignacio – Uruguay M Daglio & Asociados



A retreat on the Mansa beach that defines eclectic, this property, though small in size, is gargantuan in imagination. Within the chic bohemian context of Jose Ignacio village, Playa Vik sets a benchmark for interior design, presenting a series of differentiated spaces that seem, in specific terms, to have little to do with each other, or even to actively contradict each other. But that's precisely the game here, and experienced as a whole, the Playa Vik is very clever at unifying a vision of the world at play. Taken as a kind of 'living' art gallery, the rooms and spaces become opportunities for displaying artworks by many of Uruguay's leading contemporary painters and sculptors. These interact with the materials of the building in a witty tango of architecture and art, providing guests with a constant visual adventure. The building boasts a long, inclined glass facade that affords spectacular coastal views. Giant sculpted bronze doors by Pablo Atchugary recall Ghiberti's famed work at the Florence Baptistery. Lateral walls of curved titanium panels backdrop floors in Patagonian ebony. In the main building are living and dining spaces, three bedroom suites, a library and a kitchen. Six small multi-bedroom casas flank this building. These, too, are filled with original art. Running underneath the buildings is a long cellar for wine, a gym, a spa and a playground, as well as a dining space that opens onto the Playa Mansa. The relationship between interior and exterior spaces is elaborated throughout the resort, with large openings and a constant visual connection to the external site.

In many cases the spatial envelopes or building materials used are simple. The spark in terms of design here is ignited by the original approach taken to decorating those spaces and surfaces, the role of the artworks themselves – integral to the architecture to a high degree – and the interplay of the different spaces. To reside here, even temporarily, is to undergo an intense aesthetic experience, albeit one that calms.



Alila Villas Hadahaa – Maldives SCDA

Occupying virtually the entirety of a private island in the Maldives, this new resort by Singapore-based SCDA sought to maximise habitable space while minimising environmental and site impact. That is to say, the architects were engaged in a dilemma of sorts: how to fully build out the small site without producing an overcrowded built environment. After all, it is precisely the untouched, remote and unspoiled nature of the Maldives that visitors go to enjoy. SCDA established a straightforward contemporary language for the buildings, emphasising access to the views while protecting privacy. The vocabulary is simple and current, never crying 'look at me'. Instead, this high-end resort offers guests extremely comfortable accommodations, plentiful public spaces and garden environments, and many places to get away from others and commune directly with nature (in this case the sea). The water villas, though closely spaced, allow maximum privacy, with timber shed roofs that bend down to become privacy screens for the rooms, which, but of course, face the horizon. Materials and details here faithfully reproduce the tropical Asian palette, and there are plenty of spaces for inserting objets d'art. An interesting take on the indigenous Dhoni boat is found in the lobby space, where an enlarged hull is recreated and flipped over as a roof form – a direct and successful reference. The move from impeccable residential work in Singapore to this scale of hospitality architecture is certainly a step upward for SCDA.



Alila Villas Soori – Bali SCDA

A full-service, five-star resort on a beautiful stretch of Bali's southwest coast, this compound offers visitors a variety of accommodation types from one to four bedrooms, most with private pools, and all designed with SCDA's signature attention to visually pleasing details and viewpoints. Thanks to the firm's environmental stance, the property received Best Practice certification from Green Globe. While the proliferation of tropical Asian resorts over the last few years has tended to inspire scepticism in terms of design, SCDA's expertise in a language sympathetic to climate and landscape again reads loud and clear here. The architects state: "Liberated from stylistic notions and visual representation, the abstracted language of its modern architecture is built on the archetypal elements of volume, light and surface." And so it is. Most materials were sourced locally, and numerous indigenous motifs and elements were incorporated. Materials include timber, concrete, terrazzo, terra cotta, silk and volcanic lava stone. Sun orientation, natural air movement and the provision of generous shading elements help lessen the need for mechanical use. The Alila group has been pioneering sensible and sensitive contemporary design in its Asian properties for years, and SCDA has furthered the company's claim to intelligent hospitality.



Quincy Hotel – Singapore Ong&Ong

What sets this establishment apart from its fellow hotels on Orchard Road is its distinctive facade – a bold palette of anodised steel and shimmering modular windows. Located in a quiet enclave just steps away from Orchard Road, Quincy is a four-star boutique hotel that offers the utmost in privacy and exclusivity.

Taking care of all its design aspects, from the architecture of the building and its interiors, to its logo, down to the napkins and tea sets, were local architects Ong&Ong. The aim was to create a distinctive, sustainable and timeless space that went beyond the existing boutique hotels. A major effort involved the creation of rooms from different permutations and combinations of exterior glass and steel cladding. The rooms were then randomly stacked, forming a one-of-a-kind exterior facade. Thus the Quincy sports a distinctive visage, with custom-glass panelling coupled with a unique logo and contemporary lighting. The facade is composed with a push-pull of glass and concrete panels, producing a lively 3D effect.

The interiors are whimsically bold – the muted off-white walls contrast sharply with the raw look of concrete. In the hotel lobby, concrete flooring exudes an industrialised, modern feel. The material is also cleverly used in the guestrooms to double as a feature wall against the bed, while black Galaxy Granite flooring creates a seamless look from the bathroom to the bed area.

The perimeter of the pool on the 12th floor is lined almost entirely with glass. External grade timber decking laid out around the pool reinforces the resort feel, and lends an outdoorsy touch. The landscape philosophy is one that is sensitive to the contemporary design of the building and maintains a reflective quality in relation to the surrounding space. Playing on themes such as glamour, luxury and sophistication, the design team ensured the hotel was fitted out the latest amenities. From steel claddings to exotic, rich suede and custom glasswork, only the finest materials were used to create this stunning masterpiece.



W Washington D.C. – US

Dianna Wong Architecture + Interior Design



As the closest hotel to the White House, W Washington D.C. offers spectacular views from all sides of its 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue location. Owned by Nakheel Hotels, W Washington D.C. has replaced the historic Hotel Washington, which opened on the same site in 1917. The W hotel mixes its predecessor's iconic Beaux Arts architecture with the edgy yet elegant designs of Los Angeles-based designer Dianna Wong.

The W's vibrant colors, innovative textures and cutting-edge elements ring in an era of modern glamour for Washington's power elite and jetsetters alike. As guests walk through the F Street entrance doors, they are welcomed by a digital fireplace, crackled paint, fixtures and artworks evoking 'old Washington', and the deconstruction of the former Hotel Washington. In the W Living Room, many of the building's original architectural elements, including famed plaster mouldings, playful chandeliers and majestic arches, have been restored to their former lustre. Wong's concept of the duality of masculine and feminine power – or in her own words, 'pinstripes and lace' – underscores the design theme of the hotel.

W Washington D.C. features 317 guestrooms, including 23 Marvelous suites, seven WOW suites, and an Extreme WOW suite (W's reinterpretation of the traditional Presidential Suite). All of them incorporate Wong's neo-romantic designs. The hotel also features more than 12,000sq ft of ultra-modern meeting and event space, including The Great Room – W's take on a grand ballroom – and the Altitude Ballroom, which overlooks the Washington cityscape. Wong infuses The Great Room, which has capacity for 700 guests, with an updated version of the Hotel Washington's Beaux Arts glamour, featuring a dramatic staircase at the entrance, striking chandeliers (new and 1920s originals remodelled) and glimmering columns throughout.

The dining room at J&G Steakhouse, also designed by Wong, boasts 20-foot ceilings with double-height, arched windows and mirrors providing sweeping views of the White House Gardens and the Washington Monument. San Francisco artist Julie Chang has created a modern mural of cherry blossoms and coins on the ceilings and walls of the restaurant, in homage to the US Capital's famous cherry trees and the neighbouring Treasury Department. Located just below the dining room is J&G's stylish Wine Bar, a cosy tavern-style lounge with slated floors, brick walls and exposed concrete beams.



Michelberger Hotel – Berlin

Werner Aisslinger



This budget design hotel is the brainchild of six friends who got together to create a sustainable, passionately-run establishment that offers authenticity. The hotel is named after founder Tom Michelberger, a 31-year-old from Southern Germany. He and his cohorts believed that character-driven enterprises are the ones that truly succeed. In the end, they created a cosmopolitan, street-savvy hangout where they themselves would love to stay.

The three-star, 119-room hotel, fashioned by renowned German designer Werner Aisslinger, is located next to the famous Oberbaum Bridge and the river Spree. A landmark building from the turn of the last century, the Michelberger's shell is a former factory with details typical of the period. These include a clinker brick facade, a generous courtyard, high ceilings, stone archways and massive paned windows. The natural advantages of all these features – retained in what has been repurposed as a hotel – are obvious: space and light to allow easy interaction, and a sense of ease and play.

Five different room categories offer a range of layouts. The standard rooms feature king-sized beds on brushed larch-wood platforms, glass-walled bathrooms, complimentary Wi-Fi, and flatscreen TVs running loop compilations of Michelberger's favourite movies and documentaries. Larger accommodations sleep up to four persons, conjuring a sense of vertical drama and airiness – made possible by the placing of loft bed areas above the bathrooms. The 'Big One', an eight-person loft room, is perfect for a travelling band or even economy-minded business colleagues.

All rooms sport soothing grey tones and sunflower-yellow curtains, as well as custom-made wallpaper. Attention was paid to small details, from the hand-lettered stickers on the water bottles to the signage on the shower gel – everything bears the team's playful disposition. The hotel's public rooms heighten the person-to-person experience. From the facade with a Hollywood-style marquee sign, guests enter a short corridor filled with oversized light bulbs. The courtyard, bar and restaurant areas flow into one another to encourage dynamic interactions. Instead of constructing an imposing reception desk, the Michelberger team created an inviting welcome island, circular in shape and placed in the centre of the bar and mingle zone. Raw, rebellious and creative, Michelberger Hotel will appeal to local trendsetters and tourists alike.



The Peninsula Shanghai

David Wells Beer, Pierre-Yves Rochon, Henry Leung



Amid the flurry of design hotels, boutique hotels and trend-conscious hotels that sprout each year, the newest addition to the traditionalist brand, The Peninsula – known more for impeccable service than hipness – may seem out of place. But The Peninsula Shanghai is something quite new; a hotel built from the ground up, smack dab on the Bund, that fits into its loaded, historical context like a haute couture gown on a supermodel. The project took over six years from inception, thanks in part to its extremely special site, in fact at the corner of the Bund and Suzhou Creek (Shanghai's latest hotspot). The prestigious address came with extra challenges, such as grave governmental concern over things such as building height, style, access and so on. The owners of the famed Peninsula brand, The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, does things for the long term, so the extended gestation period didn't faze the company. Landing a site like this, in the hottest city in Asia, was worth the wait. To realise the company's high ambitions for the building, it turned to New York architect David Wells Beer and Parisian interior designer Pierre-Yves Rochon, along with some Hong Kong help on the restaurants, from Henry Leung of Chhada Siembieda.

Beer's architectural achievement is considerable. He managed to produce a building that, first of all, could easily be mistaken for a refreshed Bund original, while avoiding both overstatement or pastiche. The Peninsula Shanghai is an exceptionally handsome, mid-rise building that presents a quiet, regal facade to the Bund while turning its actual front elevation sideways to Beijing Road, in order to allow for an ample entry court for vehicles. This 'forecourt' element is a signature of the brand, after the famed Hong Kong version, and in Shanghai is likewise graced with the hotel's fleet of Rolls Royces, always at guests' beck and call. Beer also created an internal plan that reconciles the two-fronted parti, and on the guestroom floors, enhanced the old-world aspect by deliberately stepping and turning the building on all sides, producing hallways that never stretch too far. The architectural details are convincing and display a well-versed knowledge of Shanghai-Deco precedents without pandering or replicating precisely. The building hits a bull's-eye on the modern-classic register, seeming exactly what was called for given the location and programme. It is serious, quietly luxurious, respectful yet strong.

The interiors of the lobby lounge (another Peninsula signature), public spaces and rooms gently update the brand's reputation for elegance with impeccable colour tones, furniture, amenities and artwork. The rooms are easily among the best-designed high-end hotel rooms in Asia. Even the non-suite Deluxe tier rooms are generous and feature a full-sized dressing room and six-star spa bathroom. Within a clearly classical genre, it seems as if every possible need or desire has been predicted and readied for: from a well-equipped business desk complete with fax/copier and complimentary international call service, to top-of-the-line AV equipment and coffee machine. Most impressive is the design of the lighting systems, often a failure in design hotels when overly complicated. At The Peninsula, there is complete, multi-faceted control of lighting in every corner of the space, and it is designed to be intuitive. You don't need 10 minutes to switch fixtures on or off, or an engineering degree to comprehend the system. A 'Mood' switch in every room instantly transforms the space into an oasis of softly-lit calm.

The restaurants and lounges at The Pen are varied, but Sir Elly's and Yi Long Court stand out – one a chic Western cuisine specialist with astonishing views of Pudong, the other a journey into the romance of China's past and present. Capping off the facilities is a swimming pool flooded with natural light from a glazed ceiling – and fit for a Roman emperor. All the designers worked closely with The Peninsula's in-house design team to realise the project.

Highly established brands such as The Peninsula (and there are only a few) could choose to coast on their reputations and, with the right location and maintained service standards, take the easy way to profits. But The Peninsula Shanghai is a hospitality case study on how to expand while burnishing a brand, innovate while protecting what is already loved, and carefully enhance both its own desirability and that of its place. By granting the hotelier such a remarkable site, the city of Shanghai has been superbly rewarded.



Palazzina Grassi – Venice

Philippe Starck

Images courtesy of Design Hotels



Practically inventing the design hotel category decades ago, and having proven time and again his ability to revisit hospitality design across architectural types, eras, sizes and price-points, with refreshing results in each instance, Philippe Starck has put his latest stamp on the design world, in Venice. This new addition to Design Hotels, a tiny property of only 16 rooms on the Canal Grande, set out to let its guests become 'temporary Venetians'. It feels very much like stepping into the private home of a somewhat eccentric local, albeit one with impeccable taste, an active imagination and great resources. Starck clearly had great fun playing with some obvious Venetian references, such as masks, Murano glass, jewel-colour palettes, the spectre of light bouncing off the famed waterways, and the natural sense of mystery that has always pervaded this unique city. The discreet lobby evokes a private club as much as anything, perfectly attuned to the idea of sinful indulgence and in-the-know pleasure. The rooms are bright white, with mirrored glass cabinets and closets, setting off the patina of the city right outside the windows. The restaurant, intimate and warmly toned, features a pair of 7m-long dining tables, one in marble, the other in mirrored glass – something of a Starck signature by now. Walls are wood-paneled, and various examples of Murano glass sparkle in the room. The nearby G Club offers a red-yellow-and-silver tiled room for cosy meetings or social gatherings. Starck's contrast of tones between the light guestroom interiors and the public rooms heightens the drama at Palazzina Grassi, and helps keep guests' aesthetic radar on high alert. There are a number of the designer's famous touches, among these the deliberate clash of materials, the use of graphics such as whimsical faces or masks on surfaces such as lampshades, and the play of scale.

The project may be modest in size, and by way of specifics there is little here that is unprecedented, but Starck continues to prove he hasn't lost his spirit or energy, or his ability to mix things up. But we expect this of him. The pleasure at this point comes not from being surprised, but in seeing what new things have caught the Frenchman's eye and been re-rendered in his vision of the world.



Viceroy Anguilla – Greece Kelly Wearstler



Located along 3,200ft of beachfront and bluff-tops on Meads and Barnes Bays, Viceroy Anguilla unfolds across 35 acres with 166 private villas, townhouses and residences, destination restaurants, a 8,000sq ft spa and a private beachside club. Wearstler's timeless and sophisticated interiors combine organic elements with textiles and techniques from all over the world, creating a visually striking contrast to the geometric architecture by Wimberly Allison Tong & Goo and granting a distinct singularity to the resort.

In the hotel lobby, guests are greeted by 8ft-tall geometric wood sculptures set before the ebony-stained walls of the entry vestibule. A few steps across, the stone floor leads to the front desk of charcoal-coloured parchment, while alternating bands of interweaving stone slabs create entrancing geometric patterns up the lobby walls. The colour palette of ebony, driftwood brown, oyster gray and bronze, is highlighted by a ceiling light fixture reminiscent of seaweed. Decorative accessories from Kelly Wearstler, such as a pyrite-encrusted brass kaleidoscope, can be found throughout the lobby and the rest of the property.

Wearstler's imaginative eye and chic sensibility is revealed through the use of organic elements such as driftwood lamps, petrified-wood tables and Italian silver travertine marble floors, as well as a neutral-and-metallic colour scheme in the guestrooms. Wood interiors are set with contemporary hardware, while Wearstler's signature furnishings and accessories set a sophisticated scene throughout the living areas. Serta Eurotop pillow-top mattresses are dressed with bespoke Sferra jacquard linens and set upon specially commissioned frames. In the bathrooms, marble and travertine countertops harbour rectangular sink vanities with Dornbracht taps. Customised lighting casts a sensual glow on luxurious soaking tubs surrounded by local stone and oversized glass shower enclosures with travertine footing and rainhead taps.

In each area of the Viceroy Anguilla, Wearstler creates spaces of timeless quality and inviting beauty. The effect is balanced and calming, with a hint of theatre to keep things interesting.



Park Inn – Krakow Architecture, J. Mayer H. Interiors, JOI-Design

Photography of architectural images by Jakub Kaczmarczyk
Photography of interior images by Christian Kretschmar



Located at an intersection of important transport routes, the hotel stands as a contemporary piece of architecture amidst a splendid historic city centre. The structure is characterised by a clear and thick horizontal line that delineates the panoramic views from the building. The facade is further emphasised by black-and-white aluminium stripes separated by glass windows.

The interiors also follow the bold moves applied to the hotel's structure. It was imperative the design set a trendy vibe to attract younger segments of the market, thereby enhancing the recognition of this four-star hotel brand.

Given just a few interior walls, JOI had to demarcate the hotel's various public areas using furniture and strong shapes for the flooring. Thus the lobby's décor is drawn from the radius and various angles of the building's structural envelope. The curves of the lounge chair seats, wall covering motifs and interior columns mirror the rounded edges of the exterior windows. The vertical mullions are reflected in the pendant lights descending through the stairwell. The building's strong horizontal and angular lines are interpreted through the inlaid pattern of the floor tiles. Furniture pieces such as the racetrack inset of the stairwell enclosure and the black-lacquer reception desk double as monolithic sculptures. The company's rainbow emblem is interpreted as a column of backlit coloured glass, providing some punch to this project's largely limited colour palette.

With a flexible layout in its public areas (which can stretch anywhere from the reception desk to the bar), the hotel proffers a nebulous, casual space with a convivial atmosphere. Guests are invited to relax while using the laptops scattered on various tables. The idea is a reflection of the hotel's move towards 'bleisure' (business and leisure) – whereby guests and their activities are relieved of any classification. After all, it has become a way of life, and the industry is merely trying to mould itself around it.

