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# HOTELS

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## NEWS

### **Design in Asia about specialization, segmentation**

By [Jeff Weinstein](#) on 12/3/2014

Specialization and segmentation are key future trends for Asia's luxury hospitality design industry, according to the regular roundtable series hosted and organized by Blink Design Group, Hong Kong. A group of hospitality operators and owners gathered recently in Hong Kong at the Yah Toh Heen restaurant in the InterContinental Hong Kong on the fringes of the annual HICAP event.

In a session titled, "What's The Big Idea," moderated by C9 Hotelworks Managing Director Bill Barnett, hospitality luminaries were charged with bringing their experience to bear with the objective of defining what is next for luxury hospitality design. "The industry is changing in many ways. The axis is shifting from Europe becoming more influential towards Asia rather than the other way around, and more than anything else this is bringing with it specialization," said Blink Design Group Founder and Senior Creative Director Clint Nagata.

Blink's Managing Director Christopher Chua added, "Hotels are looking for icons to set them apart, and this is happening with restaurants and bars. Hotel designers and restaurant/bar designers are very different from one another, and we are seeing more and more F&B experts come into projects to establish a stand-alone restaurant or iconic bar. And there's much more collaboration between design specialists."

MGM Resorts International Vice President, Design and Construction, APAC John Miller agreed: "There's a major opportunity for new ideas. Twenty years ago in Asia all international-quality restaurants were in hotels, while since then they've sprung up outside hotels, in the cities and even in resort destinations such as Bali. But now they're on their way back, and there is a fantastic opportunity to create strong identities for restaurants housed in hotels."

Participants argued specialization could manifest itself in other areas too, such as redefining the archetypical meeting spaces in hotels. "There are a few brands considering this question, us included," said Langham Vice President of Development Andrew Jessop. "We see an opportunity to reach the new entrepreneurs in Asia and create new types of spaces that appeal to this generation."

Miller added that his group is also seeing this trend. "Younger entrepreneurs need to work on the road and are attracted by design, but not everyone wants to work on a sofa," Miller said.

"It is important, however, to ensure that the design integrity is maintained but allow hotels and resorts to differentiate and be more personal to the destination," added FRHI Hotels & Resorts Senior Vice President Wayne Buckingham. "But, design needs to be done within a clear framework, so that spaces can generate revenue and meet the return-on-investment requirements needed by owners."

In Europe, participants agreed segmentation was a deeply rooted concept that had been a key driving force behind design concepts that would appeal to different groups of travelers.

"We have family hotels and adults-only hotels, and they are completely separate," said Melia Hotels Vice President of Development Gonzalo Maceda. "They are each working very well. We have themed hotels, too, such as The Flintstones. I don't see it in Asia yet, but it could work well."

Buckingham added, "I think it is a case of adapting design to meet what the customer wants. The emerging younger wealthy families traveling with children and extended families also need to be well taken care of. This is important for hotels to recognize, as they can do very well by tailoring their offering through flexible room product, bedding type, interconnecting rooms and customized amenities allowing operators to differentiate."

Yoo Hotels Chief Executive Officer Marco Nijhof said the big ideas for him were celebrity design and innovation. "Celebrity design sells. We don't have this at home; this is something that is different, and it sells," he said. "Innovation is key too. I stayed in Dallas recently, and there was an air-purifying machine under the bed. It cost an extra US\$40, and I slept fantastically. With the air pollution in some Asian cities, small innovations like this could get traction."

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