



Alan Barr, Creative Director at Blink Design Group

The architecture of vision

Alan Barr, Creative Director at Blink Design Group talks with MICE Now about smart hotel property design ideas, identity creation and the importance of adopting a forward-looking mentality

Q: First off, what are some of your recent projects in China?

A: In China, we do a lot of work in Sanya, which is obviously very resort- and MICE-oriented. We've been doing the Le Meridian and Westin projects in Xi Shuang Ban Na in Yunnan. The places we work now also include Shanghai and Guangzhou.

We also have quite a few renovation works in existing properties in Sanya, since there is so much new inventory coming online over the past five years. The early ones now look old, and have to keep up with their neighbors. So we are starting to see more early-renovation in the history of properties.

Q: Is the renovation cycle getting shorter in China?

A: Yes, the renovation cycle in China is becoming shorter in some cases than other parts of

the world. We are working on a Hilton project in Sanya now, as an example. That property is just six years old, and we are already working on the lounge and lobby renovation design, whereas normally you would wait for ten to twelve years and just do a major refresh instead. Because of the inventory competition, the lifecycle of renovation is getting shorter in China. It's a unique trend that we don't see in many other parts of the world.

Q: How do you cater to Chinese consumer tastes?

A: China certainly demands or dictates its own vernacular, its own style. It's a market maturing at a rate so much faster than other places. There was a generation of design where you put red and blue in vases everywhere, and you put furniture and keys around hardware with loops – it was very cliché. That generation of design has



Jumeriah Maldives exterior
马尔代夫迪拜Jumeriah酒店外景

completely gone away. The customer has matured. China is very modern, forward and progressive, and it moves at a speed that no one else does, which is part of the magic of the education and evolution of the guests. And the customers are really varied. If I have to pick which side they lean to, I would say the majority lean towards traditional, although they might not say that.

Q: What's the major challenge in de-signing MICE-oriented properties?

A: The problem for planning MICE venues is that in terms of visitors, it's all or nothing. There is a time of absolute saturation and a time of vacancy where occupancy rate drops down to a very low occupancy rate, with not much in-between. So we invest time on planning so that when properties are full, they don't feel crowded; and when there are no events going on, they don't feel vacant. We try to create special moments so that sometimes a piece of property can be actually shut down without affecting the operation as a whole.



Conrad Sanya Haitang Bay
三亚海棠湾康莱德酒店

Q: Can you give us one example on how you solve this problem?

A: We would like to bring, if we can, the back-of-house spaces to the front house. If the back-of-house is wrong, it can break a hotel or cost the owner 30% more to operate.

A very good illustration of what we are doing a lot now is to put flower room in the lobby as a flower shop. The activity of the flower arrangements for the hotel becomes an interactive guest experience, but it is also the opportunity to generate revenues where was not before. We are trying to push more floor area to front of house and convert it. That's the idea of "dual-purpose space".

Q: And what about meeting spaces?

A: In China, it's about not being too corporate or commercial. Ballroom is ballroom at the end of the day. We try to design banquet or ballroom meetings facilities so that they have a perspective. The opposite would be a blank white box, where the guests or clients have to come in and build the set. We try to do the opposite in design - coming up with banquet facilities with a perspective that people actually can do less decorating inside. We want to give the architecture interior a perspective or

style that blends with the hotel or resort. We really like to integrate the experience.

Q: What's your understanding about creating unique hotel identities?

A: Identity has a few faces to it. It might be developing a whole new brand. Before a certain brand is developed, you need to think about what are the characteristics and attributes, what are the mission, value proposition and logo? Before we design the physical space, we design the ethereal, intangible aspects and the DNA of the brand. The other side of the identity is working with what you've created, or working with an existing brand identity which can't be changed, but it has to be integrated into a property. It has to become physical.

Q: How important is technology in your design?

A: Technology is a double-edged sword: You want the tools and gadgets in your design, and you want what technology brings us, but you don't want it in your guests' face. It has to be so smart that it is easy to use and it's not frustrating to anyone who has never seen that piece of technology to operate easily. We want the technology to be almost secondary to the experience. ■



放眼未来的设计

Blink Design Group建筑设计集团创意总监艾伦·巴尔(Alan Barr)与本刊谈及巧妙的酒店设计理念、身份品牌的创立以及采取前瞻性心态的重要性

问：首先，您和我们一起介绍你们近期在中国从事的项目？

答：在中国，我们有许多项目在三亚，这些项目显然是典型的以度假村和会展奖励旅游为导向的。目前，我们正在云南西双版纳建设艾美(Le Meridien)和威斯汀(Westin)项目。现在我们从事的项目地点也包括上海和广州。

我们在三亚还有一些现有酒店的翻新项目，因为在过去5年里，有太多新库存上线。早期的酒店现在看起来已经陈旧了，它们必须能够赶上与周边新建酒店。所以我们开始对老的酒店进行更早期的翻新。

问：这是否意味着在中国，酒店翻新周期正在缩短？

答：是的，在某些情况下，跟世界其它地方相

比，中国酒店的翻新周期正变得更短。以我们现在正在进行的三亚希尔顿项目为例。这个项目只有6年，我们已经在进行大堂和休息厅的翻新设计，而通常你要等10到12年，而且只是进行一次大的整修。由于存量竞争，（酒店）翻新的周期正在中国变短。这是我们在世界其它很多地方不曾看到的独特趋势。

问：在设计风格上，你们如何满足中国消费者的偏好？

答：中国显然需要适合其自身的本土语汇和自我风格。这是一个迅速成熟的市场，比其它地方要快得多。曾有一个时期的设计是在所有的地方摆放红蓝色调的花瓶，在器皿周围用绳套把家具和钥匙串在一起——这些都老掉牙了。那个时期的设计已经彻底过时

了。消费者成熟了。中国非常时尚、前卫和进步，它的速度无人能及，这也是顾客教育与演变奇迹的一部分。而消费者真的是各式各样的。如果一定要我选择他们倾向于哪一边，我想，大部分倾向于传统的体验，尽管他们或许不会那么说。

问：针对以会展奖励旅游为导向的酒店，您认为设计的挑战是什么？

答：规划会展奖励旅游场所的问题在于，从客人数量的角度来说，要么客满，要么空空如也。有时候是绝对的饱和，有时候是入住率降至极低点的真空状态，很少有两者之间的状态。所以，我们在规划时花时间使酒店在客满时不至于产生拥挤感，而在不举办活动时，不显得过于空旷。我们试图制造一些特殊的时段，以便



Jumeriah Maldives exterior
马尔代夫迪拜Jumeriah酒店外景



Clearwater Bay Sanya
三亚清水湾



Clearwater Bay Sanya by night
三亚清水湾夜景

在某些时候，可以关闭酒店的一部分而不影响整体运营。

问：您能具体举例说明吗？

答：如果条件允许，我们也想把房屋的后部空间搬到前部。如果房屋后部设计错误，它可以破坏一座酒店，或者使业主增加30%的运营成本。一个极好的例证是，我们现在多将花房作为花店搬至酒店大堂。酒店花艺布置的行为成为一种具有互动性的顾客体验，而且也是之前没有的创收机会。我们正努力在酒店前部推出更多的楼层面积，这就是“双重用途空间”的理念。

问：你们对会议空间的设计特色何在？

答：在中国，会议空间的设计要避免过于公司化或商业化。宴会厅的本质功能不会改变。我们试图将宴会或会议厅设施设计得具有想法和景观性。其之相对的则是一个白色的空壳子，必须由客人或客户来打造布景。我们尝试在设计中反其道而行——采用带景观的宴会设施，从而切实减少客户的内部装饰工作。他们总是可以进行背景或帷幔装饰。我们试图营造一个与酒店和度假村

整体景观与风格相融合的建筑内部装潢。我们真的很喜欢把这种体验整合进去。

问：您对打造独特的酒店身份如何理解？

答：身份的建立涉及好几个方面。这可以是开发一个全新的品牌。在某个特定品牌开发之前，你需要考虑，品牌的个性和特质是什么？它的使命、价值主张和标识是什么？在我们进行实际空间设计之前，我们先要设计好品牌非物质的，无形的方面，以及它的DNA。另一面是与你所创造的，或已经存在的，无法改变的品牌合作，而这也需要和酒店融为一体。它必须转化为实体的设计。

问：科技元素在你们设计中有多重要？

答：科技是一把双刃剑：在设计中你需要一些工具和小配件，你需要科技给予我们的便利，但你不能当着客户的面追求科技。它必须十分巧妙，使用方便，使从未见过这种科技的人也能方便操作而不感到困扰。我们希望科技相对于体验永远是次要的。科技的目的是为了提升了客人体验，但永远不是这种体验产生的原因。■

如果一定要我选择（中国消费者）倾向于哪一边，我想，大部分倾向于传统的体验