

## INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES IN HOTEL ARCHITECTURE

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**Abstract:** Hotel architecture at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is symptomatic of the developments of contemporary architecture in general. Being a 'representative example' of a bundle of building types – residential, recreational, entertainment, sports and work related – makes it a fertile ground for studying the approaches and stylistic tendencies in current architecture worldwide. Based on this assumption, the paper explores the driving forces of hotel architecture and their manifestations embodied in the new hotel 'philosophy', goals, content and appearance. It is argued that there are new design principles guiding the avant-garde hotels of the new century that upgrade the conventions of Modern and Postmodern architecture. Those principles stem from the interplay of three strategies that lead the hotel development. Innovations in hotel architecture, design and services are outlined and discussed. The paper also examines the emerging new hotel types that go far beyond the common understanding of what has been defined as 'hotel' so far. Examples of creative hotel leitmotifs are also presented and analysed.

**Key words:** architecture, hotel, strategy, innovation, avant-garde, personalisation, experience, traveler, sustainability, corporate social responsibility.

The hotel changes its identity at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From a banal residential building fulfilling the almost industrial function of 'producing' accommodation for the anonymous stranger it transforms into a hybrid architectural persona, attractive and many-faceted. Its metamorphosis is unleashed by the dynamics of society and the new life-philosophy of the latest generations of travelers issuing from it [Baumann, 1998; Baumann, 2011; Gallup, 2014; Kessler, 2015]. Surprise, marvel, pleasure, discovery, insight – those values are in the core of what the new cohorts of hotel guests crave for. These hotel clients, unlike their predecessors, require something more than a mere fulfillment of their functional needs – they look for an exit from everyday routine to another world, different, unexpected, and provoking. They look for places never seen, activities never tested, emotions never felt. They value the richness of experience more than the possession of things, appreciate highly the communication with

others, the healthy way of life, the sense of personal wellness. Freedom of choice is a primary concern for them.

The innovative hotel at the dawn of the third millennium embodies the new guest's values and expectations into a new type of architecture.

'Anything goes' – this sentence, born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in England and spread out in America in the 20<sup>th</sup> one, becomes a leitmotiv of hotel architecture all over the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is in effort for other building types too, but in hotels it acquires its most powerful position. For the hospitality industry it is vital to constantly introduce new options that satisfy the requirements of ever more diverse and narrow niche markets. The hotel finds itself a hero in a drama that forces it to break clichés and build up new ones. That urges it to pour itself out into matrices moulded to fit the new society and the latest generations of travelers. That drives it to decide which ones of their newly born values to follow – richness of emotions, 'green' life, acceptance of differences, full-blooded communication, personal wellbeing, mindfulness, respect for the heritage, preservation of nature, contribution to society.

It would have been impossible to create innovative architecture without an experiment that would generate alternative versions and test their viability. The experiment itself would not be productive if pre-stipulated rules would stifle its freedom of expression. And it is where the role of 'anything goes' steps up – to open up the horizon for the attempts to invent variations for the new hotel identity. The unleashed freedom of imagination yields the amazingly diverse and creative hotel architecture at the beginning of the new century. The swarm of newborn subtypes of tourism – cultural, culinary and wine, fashion, adventure, romance, sports, religious, hazard, industrial, nautical, medical and health, eco and zoo, rural and agritourism – supports the anticipation of a "growing demand globally for increasingly diverse and customised hotels, resorts and leisure-time amenities for the world's largest industry" [Penner et al., 2012: 3].

The aim of this article is to outline the strategies that direct the process of generating innovative hotel solutions. The empiric evidence and the comments of the major actors in the industry, developers, architects, designers, reveal three leadings strategies that model hotel development after 2000 – 'personalisation', 'experience', and 'society'. 'Personalisation' rationally adapts hotel services to a particular client segment. 'Experience' builds on it by individualising emotions in order to open up a channel between action and feeling, functional and emotional, rational and sensory. 'Society' aims at preserving nature and endowing local communities. Each strategy is analysed in more detail below.

### **Strategy One: Personalisation**

From the universal to the individual, from the uniformed guests to the many-faceted diversity of guests – it is the trajectory of the innovative hotel at the beginning of the century, starting right from the point where its predecessor stopped frozen in time. The innovative hotel continues serving clients' rational requirements, reflecting not a standardised omnipresent standard but the specific profile of a limited group of people sharing similar features. It divides the society into smaller and smaller segments responding more and more precisely

to their expectations. It discovers invisible so far client niches that have been considered too small to provide the critical minimum of members making it profitable to build a hotel for them. Hotels get more and more specialised in order for each and every guest to find what they need. “Over 50 hotel types flourish in the increasingly segmented market today” state the experts [Penner et al., 2012: 4], and “the focus of hotels in the future will be less about branding and uniformity and more about diversity of styles and conceptual audacity” [Yu, 2012: 6].

The innovative hotel gets support by the advancement of marketing and its leading slogan during the past decade – “Customise!” [Rutes et al., 2001]. The urge to put “the emphasis on carefully targeting specific market segments so that the hotel may better fulfill its functions” [Penner et al., 2012: 4] is additionally invigorated by the fact that “individualised designs represent greater potential revenue for building teams than merely replicating prototypes” [Higinbotham, 2014].

Increasingly diverse groups of like-minded people get hotels designed especially for them: sports fans, nature lovers, attached to books and reading, tempted by the arts, practicing exotic philosophies, honey-mooners, chronic gourmards and epicureans, explorers of history and the unknown, detached misanthropes and extreme adventurers.

Among the recently invisible client niches are the transit travelers who need to spend some hours at the airport before their next flight. They are present since the beginning of commercial aviation but it was not before the last decade or so when the unprecedented volume of international tourism and the huge number of flights made their number sufficient to deserve a shelter of their own – the capsule hotels at the airports. Their ancestor is *Capsule Inn* in Osaka, designed by Kisho Kurokawa in 1979 and embodying the philosophy of metabolism in architecture. In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century capsules adopt a new identity and are rushed off by a wave of popularity to airports all over the world – *Yotel* in Heathrow and Gatwick, London, 2007; *Yotel* in Schiphol, Amsterdam, 2009, *Sleepbox* in Sheremetyevo, Moscow, 2011, *NapCab* in Munich, 2012, *First Cabin* in Tokyo, 2013, *GoSleep* in Helsinki, 2015. Capsule hotels vary in size and luxury, but provide the essentials for the transit traveler – a room to rest, privacy, internet connection.

Hotels are designed for a large scope of diverse groups of people. Sports fans get hotels equipped with sport facilities. *Quicksilver* chain, for instance, starts a special brand for “the independent, creative and innovative traveler, looking for active sports” [Quicksilver, 2016]. Mountain bikers have their camps in places unreachable by usual vehicles. Those who love the sea and underwater world could choose from many hospitable shelters to practice surfing, diving, yachting. Golfers could visit hotels with golf courses all over the world. Secluded retreats offer privacy to those who practice yoga and meditation.

Romantic souls could find a refuge in *Elqui Domos* in the heart of the Andes, where the sky is clear for 300 days a year – and to enjoy the night cupola sprinkled with stars. For those who want to be alone in nature *Attrap Reves* in France or the *Free Spirit Spheres* in Canada have been created. Those who are attracted by the pleasures of living in a farm could acquire all related skills in *Triple Creek*

*Ranch* in the USA or *Koe in the Kost* in Netherlands. How to extract olive oil could be learned in *Antik Zeytin*, Turkey or in *La Mancha*, Spain. Hotels for the admirers of Bacchus become centres of epicurean pleasures in many vineyards regions. Often, they give pleasure not only to the palate and the stomach but to the eye too – *Marques de Riscal* and *Viura* in Spain, *L'And Vineyards* in Portugal, *Loisium* in Austria, *Vina Vik* and *Tabonko* in Chile.

For book lovers, first in New York, 2001, and later on in Prague, 2004, Budapest, 2014 and Toronto, 2015, *Library Hotels* appear providing for their guests an abundant choice of books of all genres along with an undisturbed privacy for readers. In Tokyo *Book & Bed Hotel* offers books in English and Japanese. *Ostel* in Berlin re-creates the atmosphere and design of communist times. The ex-prison in *Karosta*, Latvia transformed into a hotel turns the guests into prisoners, supervised by uniformed wardens. Many other prisons, fortresses, castles and forts all over the world provide similar experience.

Music fans also have their enclaves. In *Ibiza Rock Hotel* in Spain they live among pictures and memorabilia of legendary and favourite performers, and could attend rock-concerts and jam-sessions of both famous and emerging musicians. *Nhow* in Berlin offers everything that a musician might need – high class recording studio, ‘room-service’ for guitars, personal music-manager [**Behance Net, 2014**].

To attract those who want to immerse themselves in history some hotels re-create (or rather try to do it) past times by copying architecture masterpieces. The aesthetic value of *Venetian Hotel* in Macau displaying part of the landmarks of the famous city is questionable – but probably those who are not able to visit Europe would be happy to attend a gondola ride in the pseudo-Italian waters under the Rialto bridge replica. *Parisian Macau Hotel* offers, of course, an Eiffel Tower and an echo from the Louvre. Other mega-projects – *Palazzo Versace* in Australia, *Atlantis* in Dubai, *Emirates Towers* in Abu Dhabi refer to the historic heritage in a slightly more delicate manner.

## **Strategy Two: Experience**

The striving to evoke experiences appears as an alternative of the dominant role of reason in architecture. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the emphasis in designing hotels shifts from rationality to the integration of mind and emotion; from the robot-like person to the individual endowed with both mind and sensibility. The innovative hotel aims to provide positive experiences for its guests, being aware that real people unlike the abstract “economic” men oftentimes make decisions not entirely in a rational manner but urged by feelings too; that the objective is always seen through the subjective [**Damasio, 1994; Lerner et al., 2015**]. Research findings of environmental psychology reveal that individual perception of environment is not direct and literal but is mediated by personal idiosyncrasies [**Gifford, 1980; Little, 1987**]. Hotel guests live as much in the real environment of the building or the resort, as in the world of fantasy, of the imaginative and elusive. They look for functional convenience, comfort for the body as well as for pleasures for the soul, stimuli for the mind.

In order to create an environment that stirs the senses, the hospitality industry mimics the refrain of the latest marketing hit – “experience management”. From a marketing position, “the designer’s role is to add an emotional dimension to the guest experience; to create those subliminal elements that trigger an emotional connection and engender loyalty to brand” [Copolov, Eastwood, 2013]. The extensively applied programs for emotional marketing and branding have the same purpose – to engage customers’ emotions in order to win their loyalty [Ellens, 2015].

To engage guests emotionally innovative hotel chains undertake steps that until recently have been inherent only to the manufacturers of goods. *Strawood Group*, for instance, starts Starlab – a laboratory for testing creative ideas – where “at any time visitors will see different concepts, prototypes, renderings, materials and models as we design next generation guest rooms, public spaces, spas or even furniture. Likewise, displays, graphics and stories will change and adapt so the space is always showcasing what’s new and fresh” [SHR, 2012]. Thanks to a similar approach – to explore customer preferences and ways of doing things and to tailor the product accordingly – Samsung has jumped to the market leader position [White, 2015].

Hotels take a new direction – from pursuing bigger profits to involving the customer into a swirl of unusual, bizarre, grabbing activities and emotions. It is not accidental that all guests of *Wanderlust Hotel* in Singapore get their own ‘experience ambassador’ to help them find out and take part in the most exciting events and places [Ardent Traveler, 2013]. ‘We design hotels as a journey’, reveals the President of SB Architects, Scot Lee [Herbert, 2015]. Clients, formed by the compulsively visual contemporary culture and barely sensitive to the usual stimuli of the environment, have to be tempted and dazed by the prospect of personal discoveries and achievements. To give guests the freedom to choose and create by themselves scenarios of their hotel stay, to infuse the awareness that they become more knowing and mature – this is the essence of the innovative hotel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

‘Hotel as a theatre’ is another expressive metaphor that synthesises hotel’s transformation in the new century. It is vividly described by Christian Urvat, Senior Vice President of *Carlson Rezidor*: “Within each ‘theater’, the flow of space is vital to the success of the concept and ultimately to the return of our guest. Flow can be seen when a person (our guest) is performing an activity and is fully immersed, energised, and focused on the enjoyment of the activity. Creating an environment that a guest can focus on and enjoy represents the ultimate experience. Harnessing and/or creating emotions in the service industry is nothing less than performing art” [Urvat, 2016].

Innovative hotels use a large scope of tools to create memorable experiences for their guests. Some of them target the building itself – distinctive architecture, constructive miracles, impossible heights, communicating facades. Others relate to non-architectural aspects of the hotel – exotic or difficult to reach destinations, famous owners or architects, virtual services and cutting edge technology.

Impressive architecture is among the most effective tools for creating memorable experiences for hotel guests. It becomes a part of the hotel or chain’s brand, attractive for the client, lucrative for investors and developers. Architec-

tural forms that defy the conventions grab the attention, agitate senses, stimulate emotions. The innovation here is in the visual peculiarity and originality creating the eerie feeling of a moment that is unique and rewarding. The attractive appearance gives not only an aesthetic pleasure but also a chance for visitors and spectators to identify themselves with an entity that is distinct and recognisable, present in media, therefore significant.

Remarkable architecture transforms the hotel from a building to an individual, a person. A selfie in front of a famous hotel endowed with a breath taking architecture that friends and colleagues would see adds value to the person on the picture and induces the same effect as to being photographed next to a celebrity. The neologism “instagrammable” – suitable to be published in Instagram, the popular image sharing online network, reflects not only how photogenic is the hotel itself, but also the prestige that the picture adds to the personality of the photographer. Satisfying the guest’s ego through the stunning architecture of the hotel becomes a tool in the strategy of creating extreme experiences.

The hotel, languishing for decades in the shadow of architectural types, traditionally more benevolent to the creative swish of imagination – concert halls and opera houses, congress centres, expo pavilions, sport facilities – finds itself in the spotlight, competing with them on creativity and even getting ahead of them by the expressiveness of its architectural attire.

Innovative hotels destroy the ruling axioms in architectural design while the designer provides “the vital connecting tissue between the ambitions of the hotel developer and the dream of the consumer” [Vickers, 2005: 11]. Inventive form-creation experiments with shapes and images ranging from allusions with identifiable objects, to visual equilibristics provoking the senses, to topologically amazing ‘things’ that defy definitions. Innovative architecture is not necessarily an aesthetic or good one (whatever that means) – its contribution lies elsewhere. It creates versions of the future in order to find out those of them that, blended in the spirit of the present, move the present ahead.

### **Strategy Three: Society**

The innovative hotel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gets out of its tight outfit of a commercial enterprise driven solely by the pursuit of profit. It is obvious why, by its first two strategies, ‘personalisation’ and ‘experience’, the hotel industry tries to respond to the functional and emotional needs of its guests – clients are in the focus of all companies. The innovative hotel adds to its leading strategies one more endeavour, that has never been considered before as one of its duties – a care for the local community, for society and nature in general. This ‘parallel altruistic current’, that modifies the values and accompanies the activities of contemporary business organisations in general, takes diverse forms, that are united by the notion of “corporate social responsibility” or CSR. CSR refers to the ethically orientated policies and actions that companies undertake to assess and regulate their impact on environmental and social wellbeing – to reduce the negative effects, to protect nature and foster community development [CSR Europe, 2016].

Avant-garde hotels apply purposeful efforts to be more socially responsible. Is it a manifestation of socially engaged thinking or a product of economic pressure and skilful marketing is not the main question when analysing the outcomes. Research reveals that ‘green’ initiatives and the participation in socially beneficial causes contribute to the hotel’s good image and guests’ satisfaction, increasing at the same time the revenue and profitability [**Accor Hotels, 2016; Johnson, 2016**]. Thus, both sides win.

To synchronise the vibrations of the hotel and the environment, natural and social, in order to achieve a symbiosis of indigenous and imported becomes a leading point of reference in hotel architecture. Experts in the industry believe that the preferences of the new cohorts of travelers for an ethical behaviour, based on respect to nature and local communities, leads to an increasing demand of a new kind of tourism – “more authentic and ethical with a focus towards luxury without the associated guilt” [**YML Extra, 2011**].

Sustainability principles are adopted by hospitality business, fueled by the rising waves of ecotourism as well as of the spreading normative regulation of the field. At the start of the new millennium the hotel industry’s first ‘green’ steps grow fast from the status of an experiment or an example to a largely accepted practice, certified by trade and governmental organisations. “In luxury hotels, respect for the environment has become standard”, states Jean-Michel Gathy, Principal Designer at Denniston Architects and an author of iconic buildings [**Gathy, 2015**]. After 2000, building performance evaluation systems are largely introduced all over the world in order to make sure that the new buildings will preserve nature and provide a healthy environment for the inmates [**Penevska, 2016**]. For the European Union it is the CEN/TC 350 standard [**CEN, 2011**]. In 2008, *Global Sustainable Tourism Council* (GSTC) is started with the aim to develop and administer sustainability standards in hotels and tourism. In 2011, initiated by the United Nations, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism is established in order to ‘support the implementation of sustainable tourism practices at destinations through adoption of effective policies, innovative and transformative projects, sharing of knowledge and experience’ [**UNEP, 2011**]. In Europe, the general framework for national evaluation systems certifying green hotels is provided by the *Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism* (VISIT).

Responsibility also manifests in the care for the local community and context. The unscrupulous urge to push a maximum square footage into the plot and to configure it by the most economical and profitable manner, whatever it might cost to the environment, starts giving way to purposeful attempts to preserve neighbourhood structure and its immanent activities, interrelations, culture. This new thinking spreads out as well to the choice of plots for new building construction initiatives. Gordon Beckman, a partner in the prestigious John Portman & Partners, sees a bigger payoff for the developer in selecting sites that are polluted and require fixing – “So you’re doing something positive for the urban environment, for the city, and for yourself” [**Beckman, 2015**]. The same motivation is often in effort when neglected buildings are transformed into hotels – but one should not ignore the advice that “an active social scene with restaurants, bars, and shops may seal the deal when choosing a location. In the case of slightly derelict sites, consider their future growth potential” [**Sullivan, 2015**].

Following the ‘society’ strategy the innovative hotel steps over one of the axiomatic conventions in architectural design – to set physical, functional and symbolic borders between the building and its environment. To blend into the tissue where it has been artificially installed the innovative hotel opens up the barrier between “in” and “out” – thus creating a channel for the activities on both sides to intermingle, allowing communication between incomers and locals. Hotel lobby, restaurant, pool, fitness become available for external visitors and tourists take advantage of the neighbourhood facilities and amenities. The hotel environment becomes richer and livelier – as does the neighbourhood. To support the local community, especially in isolated or decayed areas, the innovative hotel uses local building materials and artisans, applies local building traditions, supplies its kitchen with local products and chefs, arranges local plants in its spaces. Displays local art. Creates jobs, brings life back to crafts and skills, stimulates development.

“To revitalise derelict places” slogan is gladly embraced by hospitality industry. In London, commercial buildings in West End are transformed into “brilliantly original hotels” [Riewoldt, 2002: 6]; among them, the first two European projects of Phillip Stark, *Saint Martin’s Lane* and *Sanderson*, 2000. Norman Foster’s *ME Hotel*, 2013, “completes the grand sweep of buildings that make up the Aldwych Crescent, repairing the urban grain and restoring a little lost glamour to the heart of the West End” [Foster+Partners, 2013]. The brief for an architectural competition in the Netherlands, 2011, requires not a design for a hotel building, but a project that aims to improve the bad image of a problematic neighbourhood in Eindhoven [Archdaily, 2016]. In India, WOW Architects and Warner Wong Design, invited to design the ‘flagship’ of the new TAJ Group hotel chain, *Vivanta*, get inspired by the task and decide to add value to it – “to question and push the boundaries of hotel design, not just to address the needs of the discerning business traveler coming to Whitefield, but also to redefine and intensify the hotel as a contemporary socio-cultural hub” [Archdaily, 2010].

The three strategies together produce a multiplicity of hotel varieties targeting different kind of potential customers. Their further study could reveal the trajectory of innovative hotel architecture and also the newly spread values of particular social groups embodied in this architecture. The innovative hotel at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century could be used as a lens for marking out new phenomena in contemporary architecture along with the invisible trends in society that predispose them.

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