

The Future of Hospitality Design Lies in Wellness & Flexibility

By Bruce Greenfield, Partner, AO

The hospitality industry is defined by its ability to reinvent to fit the requirements of travelers the world over. As the industry evolves, many design trends that were in motion prior to the shutdown quickly accelerated with health and flexibility at the forefront. What types of design solutions and strategies can hotel developers and operators implement to elevate a sense of wellness, and provide options that cater to guest preferences?



The courtyards at Inn at the Mission San Juan Capistrano are flexible spaces that serve as outdoor dining patios for the hotel's restaurant, lounge seating for hotel guests, or adapted for private outdoor events.

Key to the successful design of a new space or implementation of a new practice is to execute it in a way that is natural, beautiful, and well thought out. While guests desire a palpable cleanliness, what they hope to avoid is a cold, institutional environment that removes them from the curated hotel experience. Patrons arrive at hotels with high expectations of fabulous spaces and services, and new changes to the hotel design or operations should foster a sense of ease, balance, and safety that only serve to enhance the guest visit.

There is a long list of design trends and practices that industry experts may recommend to improve hospitality spaces, but solutions are not a one-size-fits-all. Hotels owners and operators should carefully consider their options and only move forward with solutions that 1) make sense on their own merit; 2) add to a great guest experience; and 3) help keep people healthy and safe. If a design solution or practice checks the box on all of these requirements, we consider that a trifecta win.

With more than three decades of experience designing hotels, resorts, and destinations around the world for some of the most recognized and prestigious brands in the industry, I've compiled my top recommendations for clients who are looking towards the future of hospitality design.

Stay Flexible and Socially Distanced

Flexible furniture layouts and seating groups allow guests to comfortably gather and create their own space within a larger area. Spaces that allow moveable furniture to create group clusters promote social activity while remaining distanced from the next group. Additionally, transparent screening and landscaping can be used to help identify different zones within the gathering areas such as lobbies or lounges, while also allowing for visual connection. This approach carries to other spaces within the hotel such as dining and bar areas, retail outlets, the spa and pool areas. Current pool designs should accommodate multiple groups and provide separation, which enhances privacy, while still being a part of the larger whole.



*Furniture layouts at **Le Meridien Pasadena Arcadia** allow groups to gather in clusters while still being a part of a larger area, remaining comfortable and socially distanced.*

Promote the Great Outdoors

Everyone loves outdoor patios, recreation areas and gathering spaces. These spaces not only provide the flexibility for multiple groups to share a common place in individual, socially distanced spaces but have the added benefit of natural ventilation and airflow. Indoor-outdoor connection is important, with the most successful spaces providing the opportunity to blend between the two. Operable walls that fully open to reveal grand alfresco patios, particularly in areas with moderate climates and mild weather, are great assets year-round.

Outdoor areas can be leveraged for nearly all spaces including lobbies, amenities, and food and beverage venues. From fitness centers to restaurants, each space can benefit greatly from an outdoor patio, with a great view, nice landscape and great ventilation. The after-spa experience can happen on an open-air patio with landscape and water features, enhancing the overall experience and adding nature to the mix.

It is important that hospitality outdoor spaces are designed with the same quality and attention to detail as the major interior spaces. Furnishings, materials, and landscape should all be spectacular, and the views and vistas superb! When possible, decks and patios should overlook resort pools, golf course, or look off into distant vistas of ocean, mountains, desert, or city. The goal is to create ambiance and mood within the natural landscape, creating spaces that are exciting, invigorating, attractive, and safe.



*At **Le Meridien Pasadena Arcadia**, large, covered patios blur the line between indoor and outdoor spaces, featuring flexible seating overlooking expansive event lawns and mountain views.*

Go Touchless

Maintaining clean hands and clean surfaces have become one of the most important factors in staying healthy and minimizing the spread of contaminants. To maximize cleanliness in every step of the guest experience, hotel operators should consider reducing the number of touchpoints required to navigate through the hotel. This includes upgrading to digital solutions for valet and luggage tickets, mobile keys and check-in, and digital or biometric pay points at food and beverage, retail and spa outlets. While constant disinfecting is effective, technology has paved the way for hotels to promote a virtually touchless environment and spotless guest experience. Starting at the lobby doors, we see automatic parting doors open as you arrive. At the front desk, we tap our credit card to pay, and use our cell phone as a mobile key to open our room door. In the public restrooms, touch free fixtures are employed throughout. Antimicrobial finishes are employed where possible as well.

Further, voice activated elevators, doors, and in-room functions are becoming more popular, allowing guests to enter the hotel, check in, and get to their room without their hands leaving their pockets. Hotel-specific apps will allow guests to use personal or assigned smart devices to enter rooms, access amenities, and control functions from turning on the lights to setting the in-room thermostat. Further, in-room media should allow guests to leverage robust and seamless intranet technology to conference, do business, and host virtual meetings.

Breathe Deeply with Upgraded Ventilation

New technology and advancements in air filtration are taking hold in public spaces and resorts and hotels can certainly benefit from this trend. With a focus on wellness, ensuring that the air our guests breathe is free of contaminants should be a priority. Not only does clean air ensure the safety of our guests, it provides a sense of freshness that lifts our spirits and energy levels, and boosting the immune system. One of the most promising technologies for implementation lies in the evolution of the hotel HVAC systems in order to sanitize recirculating air within buildings, especially in public areas. Evaluating the different filter types, changing outside fresh cycles, and modifying ductwork are options, albeit their cost effectiveness requires evaluation. New breakthroughs in ultraviolet (UV) technology may soon reach our hospitality spaces to further clean air initiatives. While use of low-level far UVC is currently used to decontaminate medical equipment, it is still too dangerous for direct application on skin. However, there is potential to adapt UVC to make it safe to use in HVAC systems or localized entry points, providing a solution to keeping the air free of contamination.

Clean, Sanitized, and You Know It

To further improve the safety and cleanliness of guestrooms, hotel operators should be integrating new sanitation standards and technology into every facet of design—from bedding to bathroom to in-room amenities. The recent shift toward hard surface flooring, antimicrobial materials, non-porous surfaces and finishes, as well as touch-free fixtures will become mandatory.

Many hotels have established cleaning protocols and operational procedures to minimize the risk of contamination. While this effort alone is worthy, communicating it to guests helps put them at ease and understand you are looking out for them and want to take care of them during their stay. The new standards in sanitizing efforts should be communicated to guests regularly and often, with focus on high-touch areas. Easy to implement temporary signage will provide visual cues that let guests know that sanitation is a priority. Whether it is signage indicating deep cleaning and sanitizing is under way, or seals across guest room doors indicating the room has been sanitized and sealed, and you are the one to break the seal, these small cues give the guest a feeling of wellbeing. Most of all, it signals to guests that the hotel, operator, and staff care about the comfort and safety of each guest.

You Go Your Way, I'll Go Mine

Many hotels cater to multiple groups and diverse guest who are patronizing different spaces. For example, guests may be staying at the hotel, meeting friends for dinner, having business meetings at the bar, enjoying a spa day, gathering for a special event, or networking during a convention. Consideration should be given to exterior entrances and vehicular drop-offs in effort to minimize mingling and cross traffic between groups in order to reduce unnecessary opportunities for cross contamination. Specific entrances or waiting areas for spa guests or restaurant goers not only allow groups to remain socially distanced, but it is also a great opportunity for the hotel to design the guest experience with user-related content and specialized greetings.

The global pandemic has proven that living and gathering amongst uncertainty is part of our future. For the hospitality industry, this means adapting to meet the evolving expectations of travelers who demand an elevated sense of wellness and expanded options to meet their personal preferences. We can successfully achieve this and more by designing a 360-degree hospitality experience that transports guests while ensuring a safe and comfortable environment for relaxation, recreation, socializing, and gathering together.

**About the author**

Bruce Greenfield is a partner at AO, a leading full-service architecture firm with 17 distinct design studios serving the entire commercial real estate spectrum. Mr. Greenfield draws upon three decades of international architectural experience to lead mixed-use, hospitality, retail and global design projects for the firm. His ability to balance design and technical solutions with client service, budget and schedule results in well-crafted projects that consistently exceed stakeholder expectations. Mr. Greenfield is affiliated with the Urban Land Institute, International Council of Shopping Centers, American Resort Development Association and International Conference of Building Officials. He has a Certificate of Architectural Practice Management from the Advanced Management Institute for Architects and Engineers and received his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Arizona.