



CREATIVE, TIMELESS & RELEVANT

There are some who follow trends and others who make them. However, **James Lehouiller, Managing Partner/CEO, DiLeonardo** says they focus on sustainable, culturally relevant and artistic designs for hotels and shy away from trends. Read on to find out what makes him weary of trends and why he feels guest rooms are the heart of hotel experience.

Anupriya Bishnoi



James Lehouiller

Which hospitality projects have you worked on?

DiLeonardo has worked on hospitality projects around the world for over five decades. We have been fortunate enough to have worked on unique projects in all corners of the globe. The scale and scope of each project is unique and as a design team we focus on bringing creative, timeless and culturally specific designs to each of our projects.

Have you done any hotel projects in India?

We have been extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with great owners and operators throughout India. Some recent completed projects: Hilton Chennai; Sheraton Bangalore at Brigade Gateway, Bangalore; Crowne Plaza Bengaluru Electronic City, Bangalore; and Hilton Garden Inn, Trivandrum. We also have exciting projects underway in Kochi, Kolkata, New Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

Do you see any difference in hotel designs and structures in India and abroad?

Projects in India are coveted by our design teams because of the great spirit of collaboration between consultants and the ownership team. There is a real understanding that each team member brings to the process. Indian history and culture is so rich and layered that designers love the opportunity to dive deep into a region in order to make a property truly reflect the values and aesthetic of the place, be it a transitional or contemporary design. There is also a rich textile and craft tradition throughout much of India, so sourcing locally is a true asset to these projects. Improvement could be made in the overall project schedules. Things can take a little longer in this market and this can lead to costly coordination and re-startup costs. This is hard to control but could streamline the process.

What are the design trends in hotels?

Trends are something we shy away from. It is important that as designers we look at each project and listen well to the desires of the owner as well as the market research. What is happening in resort design in China will be very different from what is happening in India. I do feel that we need to continue to push for sustainable design



solutions that will help to improve the performance of the design and the bottom line. We also need to look at how hand held technology is changing the amenities required in a guest room.



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Architecturally, which part of a hotel needs the most emphasis?

The guest room is the heart of the experience. It really needs to be the starting point for the overall design story. Soon, registration and luggage handling may all be done seamlessly upon arrival and the lobby will need to be reconsidered. The large scale public spaces might be better understood as community food and beverage spaces or revenue generating versus administration and circulation as this can all happen in the room now.

What do hoteliers seek from a design perspective?

Hoteliers are the designer's partner. Their expertise and understanding of service is invaluable to

the design process. A good design will complement and enhance the guest experience and with the advent of social media, good design will make a property something that is being talked about. Hoteliers understand the value and power this can have on occupancy and ROI. This may be a shift from the past where interiors were considered one of the last steps in the process. It is generally accepted now that interiors need to play a role as soon as possible to improve and coordinate service as well as an aesthetic.

How do you bring sustainability in your designs?

We are always looking at how we can achieve this. Whether it is with planning, considering mechanical systems, daylighting, or product selection. As I mentioned previously; local sourcing of materials can play a critical role in reducing the negative impact of shipping. Another simple strategy, is that creative design solutions last longer. This is why we are so wary of trends. We do not want to be part of a throw away culture where a latest trend will lose its lustre in 3-4 years.

