



THG's Malmaison collection

Best of Luxe

products & projects for the upscale client

BY NICOLE CARLINO

Comfort. Indulgence. Elegance. Simplicity. The word luxury encompasses all of these things, but what truly sets this hotel segment apart? With Smith Travel Research's (STR) key performance indicator outlook for year-end 2013 reporting that the luxury segment will lead increases in occupancy (2.7%), ADR (5.9%) and RevPAR (8.8%), it makes sense that this segment will continue to be a focus for both manufacturers and designers alike.

"Luxury transcends the guest experience," said Shawn Basler, principal, Perkins Eastman. "It's not just about using expensive materials. You need quality materials, but it's how they're put together—something new and unique, but well tailored."

"We have to perform at an optimal level," said Pedro Uranga, national director, THG-USA, noting that even beyond the decorative, a luxury product must be functional and reliable. Deborah Lloyd Forrest, president of ForrestPerkins, agreed. "It is impossible to fool a true luxury consumer with 'eye wash' or a great look that covers up shoddy workmanship or low quality materials," she said.

Jonathan Peykar, VP of hospitality, Nourison, noted that design can't be discounted, however: "Color and design are extremely important: You can have very expensive high-end carpet in your lobby, but if it is not designed and colored correctly, it will add no value to the property."

Kirk Nix, principal, KNA Design, said that guests are the most important thing to think about. "Ultimately, we are orchestrating an interior environment for the end-user, and it is important we bring these experiences to life," he said. Forrest added, "As a designer, clients look to my firm to create environments that support the promise of their brand, so exceeding guest expectations for quality, comfort, sophisticated design and a sense of being pampered in a unique environment is a must."

"You have to think about feel, proportion, the finish and the fit and the visual," said Lisa Villarreal, president/founder, Lily Jack, adding that lower-scale design has to be a bit more simplistic—there's less budget available for costs like curves and labor-intensive custom work—so luxury inspires creativity.

Jennifer Skaife, senior associate, DiLeonardo International, noted that it's important to allow for open spaces so a room can breathe. "Excessive ornamental devices and the overuse of opulent materials and expensive FF&E do not automatically represent luxury," she said. "They can be lovely when used sparingly, in a thoughtful way."

When it comes to balancing a budget for a luxury product, Nix said it's the designer's job to "refine the owner's brand and the guests' expectations." Forrest noted designers have tricks up their sleeves, and done right, "great design and high quality contribute significantly to guest satisfaction, which results in higher rates and higher occupancy."

"This relates very well to the expression 'you get what you pay for,'" Peykar said. "If the budget is set too low for a luxury property, it will show over time and you will not get the return business that hotels count on." Others



Aloha Hotel and Apartment, Sanya, China; DiLeonardo International



The St. Regis Houston; ForrestPerkins

Photo: © Mark Silverstein



Duxiana's Dux
 818 bed

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Hotel Palomar Phoenix
CityScape; KNA Design



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echoed the sentiment that overall cost of ownership—how long a product will last—is more critical. According to Ed Curry, president of Duxiana, “Part of the beauty of our bed is a decrease in replacement costs because our top pad can be replaced instead of the entire bed.”

All agreed that it’s important for everyone to work together to keep costs down. “All we ask,” said Nix, “is that [product manufacturers] offer their product and services at various price points so all our clients can take advantage of the new technology. It’s a shame when certain lines price themselves out of the market as it renders them unusable and subject to reinterpretation.”

“High-end product at a very fair price—that’s what luxury has become since the economic downturn,” Villarreal said.

Tactile elements are also critical in luxury. Nix said, “Additional consideration should be given to any interior element that the guest touches, whether it be the phone, fixtures, controls and furnishings—quality is always detectable.” Uranga agreed, likening fixtures to jewelry: “When you feel a piece of jewelry, you know that it is high-quality.”

Forrest added, “Two areas that stand out as particularly important in terms of quality and comfort: the bed and the bathroom. Both must be inviting, sensual and over-the-top with regard to quality.” Curry agreed: “There’s a higher set of expectations in luxury, but ultimately, what guests want is a good night’s rest; true luxury is comfort.”

Basler agreed with Forrest, noting that while it’s possible to value engineer in luxury, one place owners shouldn’t skimp is the bedroom. He

noted that the bathroom is vital because that’s where you can see a real difference among the chain scales. “It’s not just a tub and a shower—it becomes an in-room spa,” he said.

Luxury does tend to set the pace for all of the chain scales, and Skaife noted that other segments will soon be doing what luxury does with the guestroom. “There are only so many ways to organize the room program, but what we do with that is often what sets one hotel apart from another: Transparency, openness, allowing visibility from the bathroom into the bedroom, redefining the ‘desk’ experience—technology has far surpassed the need to sit at a desk,” she said. Nix noted that technology will become more important in design in the coming years. “Everyone has access to it, and therefore the entire hospitality industry demands it,” he said. Skaife added that technology should be simple but effective.

When asked whether luxury design is about the big picture or the details, the experts agreed that it’s a balance of both: While first impressions are critical, the details matter. “You might buy a gown for a gala, and the jewelry might be smaller in scope, but in value it’s much higher and it’s what finishes the look,” Uranga said. Added Villarreal: “As a guest, as a traveler, as someone who enjoys luxury, a fabulous pillow, a phenomenal mattress, a fantastic showerhead—those are the things that for a traveler define luxury.”

Basler, however, stressed the importance of service: “Luxury is less about a fancy finish and more about amenities,” he said. “The most important thing in luxury design is service: You can do a great design, but if the service is bad, it doesn’t matter.”



Lily Jack’s No MO2317, part of the Monaco Collection



The Quin in New York; Perkins Eastman