

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Four Seasons provides testing ground for guest experience in playful workspace

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*Four Seasons Research & Discovery Studio*

By SARAH JONES

Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts is encouraging experimentation, customization and attention to detail in a hands-on workshop facility at its global headquarters in Toronto.

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The hotelier's Research and Discovery Studio, officially unveiled Oct. 27, provides a space for its employees to test out touchpoints of the guest experience, from the bedding and table settings chosen to room layout and staff wardrobes, before rolling them out to its properties. With hotels in more than 40 countries, this studio will provide a means to individualize the appearance and service at each of its locations in a scalable way.

"Perfecting the guest experience has been the driving motivation for Four Seasons since our founding," said Dana Kalczak, vice president, design, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. "Everything that exists within a Four Seasons property is there because we decided it should be.

"The Studio gives us a central venue to examine all of those decisions and to view them in context," she said. "Context is a key consideration it is one thing to view the bed, the technology, the space and the different features of a guest room on their own, and quite another to examine them alongside one other.

"A space that lets every decision be examined and made holistically is an important tool for us as we move forward."

### Hospitality lab

The layout of Four Seasons' R&D Studio inspires creativity. Graffiti enlivens the walls, while communal spaces for working and meeting encourage collaboration.

This will serve as a place for employees from across the Four Seasons organization to run simulations of their ideas in a virtual world, perfecting them before taking them to one of the group's hotels.

Within this workshop are elements that would be seen at one of the chain's properties, including its Four Seasons bed and a fully functional bar where coffee and cocktail equipment can be tried out. An atelier provides an area to make and model staff wardrobes, while a tabletop staging area focuses on another form of dressing, allowing employees

to play with combinations of glassware, dishes, cutlery and linens.



*Employees design staff wardrobes in the R&D Studio*

According to Four Seasons, it was the first hotel brand to include in-room bath amenities. Continuing this tradition, one part of the workshop provides an area for sampling scents for products.

A Modular Room built of durable cardboard includes matching cardboard replicas of furniture, including beds, desks, closets, end tables, dressers, chairs and doorways. This enables the team to try out room layouts with these cost-effective furniture surrogates before building the real thing.



*Four Seasons' Modular Room*

The functionality of hotel rooms has changed with technology. Laptops and cell phones mean that making a call or working might not happen at the desk, but rather on a couch or the bed.

Four Seasons' studio will test out layout concepts to provide multiple purposes for the guest, looking for solutions to give them flexibility in how they use certain parts of the space.

"The Studio was created with a different aesthetic than the rest of the office space - everything from the open concept layout to the loft-like ceilings, polished concrete floors and graffiti walls were designed to inspire creativity and collaboration, bringing team members from our hotels as well as our corporate office together in an inspiring, yet functional environment," Ms. Kalczak said.

#### Innovation game

Adjusting to today's market, a number of brands have created centralized workshops to foster innovation.

For instance, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide has revealed its New York-based Starlab, an innovation studio that will help funnel the brand's design teams into an omnichannel environment.

The 46,000-square-foot office in the Garment District will bring together the company's design, digital and luxury brand teams into one space. The new initiative will attempt to combine high-touch with high-tech to bring guests an unique and modern experience across all its brands ([see story](#)).

German automaker BMW has created a financial services innovation lab to encourage early-stage startups to partner with its brand.

The Innovation Lab in the United Kingdom was launched by BMW Group's Financial Services, the retail and commercial finance provider for the automaker. BMW's Innovation Lab will target startups working on new technologies that will help deliver new and improved services to consumers ([see story](#)).

"The space is meant to be constantly evolving - its modular elements allows us to experiment with decisions and

respond to changes in guest behaviors," Ms. Kalczak said. "We use the R&D Studio to explore rooms that can serve multiple purposes rooms that give our guests greater freedom and control to use the space as they choose.

"A guest room used to have fixed features you sleep here, you pour coffee there, you work in one corner and relax in the other. But mobile devices have changed this dynamic," she said. "You no longer need to sit at a rectangular wooden desk to work' you can just as easily email and take calls from a sofa or from the bed."

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