

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Reimagining hotels with service culture and inobtrusive technology in new world order

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Hotel design will be transformed in a post-COVID-19 travel environment. Image courtesy of Leo A. Daly

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Design will be key if hotels and resorts have to win the trust of travelers in an era dominated by health fears and economic concerns triggered by the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

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Architecture firm Leo A. Daly convened a group of planners, engineers, architects and interior designers to imagine how consumers inhabit these spaces to examine how germs spread to come up with designs that fight back.

"A guest's perception of cleanliness and safety is tied to architectural elements that emphasize space, order and form," said Ryan Martin, Fitwel ambassador and vice president and director of design for hospitality at Leo A. Daly.

"COVID-19 will push us toward greater transparency, open spaces, natural light and crisp lines," he said. "But that's just the beginning. Designers will need to emphasize the visual perception of cleanliness in combination with actual comfort and cleanability.

"Material selection will matter a great deal, leading to new interpretations of classical materials, synthetic alternatives and finding subtle ways to integrate new technological appointments.

"The increased role of technology in guest check-in will have ripple effects on how we design lobby spaces as well. We may see check-in desks transitioning to something more like a waypoint, as guests may prefer to check in virtually or in their suite."



The guest room of the future should include anti-microbial materials. Image courtesy of Leo A. Daly

New Guest Journey

To reimagine how hotels can be safe places despite the number of people that pass through every day, [Leo A. Daly](#) looked at the personal, behavioral, operational and infrastructural issues to identify and address the big issues.

The interactions begin once guests arrive at a hotel. They may interact with a bellhop who opens the front door, go to the front desk to check in, talk to other guests, sit in the lobby lounge area or engage with the concierge. They may touch the front desk, handrails and elevator buttons before arriving at their room.

To stop the germs in their tracks, one idea is to have a wellness concierge greet guests first thing to screen any health concerns. The trick to this approach is to take a white-glove approach, so that guests feel special and catered to and not alienated.

A wellness lounge could spray negative pressure air and use thermal cameras to detect illness and clear it from circulation. There could even be a bio-containment room if needed, but the wellness lounge should be a place of comfort, not concern. Guests are not turned away, but are instead cared for, if needed.

The post-COVID-19 hotel design should also include a high-tech, low-touch approach. This means that technology will guide the new guest journey from automatic doors and mobile key cards, to voice command elevators and robotic baggage handlers.

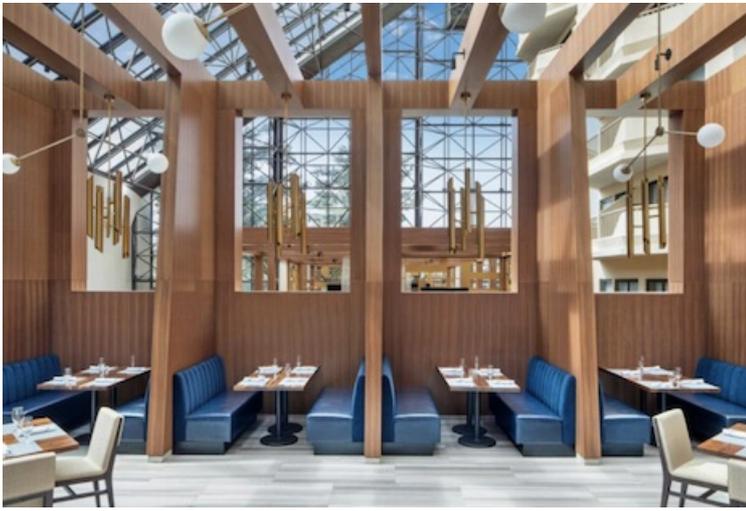
One big change that guests can expect is that furniture, fixtures and equipment will be updated to include anti-microbial, self-cleaning materials. Think countertops, flooring and walls that do not capture germs and are easily bleached. Guest rooms will be harder to soil and easier to clean.

UVC lighting could even become standard to help with decontamination.

"Health is top-of-mind for guests right now," Mr. Martin said. "This will remain the case until it's understood universally that hotels consider their safety is the highest value, along with the guest experience.

"Generous space allowances and overt cleanliness standards go a long way toward setting the tone for calm, memorable and luxurious setting," he said.

"Once a guest feels at ease about having an adequate amount of space and trusts in the cleanliness of the space, then the sexier aspects of tone, mood or vibe of a brand or destination can take hold."



Hotel restaurants of the future should be high-tech and low-touch. Image courtesy of Leo A. Daly

Dining out will be transformed

In the restaurants, buffets will go away and servers will focus on customers with enhanced hygiene practices.

New daily paper menus will be printed and discarded.

Tables will be spaced out and to-go options will be more readily available.

Retail spaces will likely have less merchandise and more of a luxury feel.

"A mindful return to classical 20th century appointments and service culture with an overlay of 21st-century, behind-the-scenes technology is the best approach," Mr. Martin said. "Successful brands will showcase in a stylish way that measures are being taken to ensure cleanliness and safety while not being overtly clinical.

"Staff should make it a point to offer, suggest, or recommend services while ensuring the guest is aware of updated or preferred behavior practices," he said. "The best way to modify behavior is through design, so modifying public spaces to make new policies intuitive and natural is preferred over signage.

"For example, subtle way-finding elements can be used to cue the guest to exit a restaurant, bar, pool or spa environment rather than occupying a lounge or queueing at a host station.

"Service provided in spa and food and beverage environments may be adapted to remove the attendant while remaining luxurious and comfortable.

A technological overlay via on demand app-based services can be guest focused and remain personable and human."