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All Front

It is often said that first impressions count and with growing competition within the hotel industry this maxim is increasingly important as properties vie for customers. With front of house and public areas fast replacing rooms as the new hotel area hot spots, Spacetailors Managing Director, Andy Powell, discusses the importance of 'making an entrance'...

Even with the hospitality sector experiencing a series of fluctuations in profit over recent years, hotels continue to spend much of their income on refurbishments to improve the experience for the consumer and the results speak for themselves.

At the top end of the market The Savoy Group's Claridges hotel in London improved its turnover by 38 per cent, increasing profit by 90 per cent, following a refurbishment. Meanwhile, The Goring Hotel in Westminster, a bastion of quality and individuality, won national acclaim for its dining room refurbishment.

But this type of success isn't easy and getting the right mix of furnishing, fabrics, design and lighting is key. And for public areas such as front of house

there is even more to contend with. In addition to being sleek, stylish and special, they must be functional and usable for all manner of purposes; for staff, for management, for luggage and storage, for disabled guests and for access to restaurants, rooms, amenities and bar areas. All of this combines to underline that space planning is vital.

One man realising the significance of thoughtful design is David Morgan-Hewitt, Managing Director of The Goring Hotel: 'The first two minutes of any hotel stay are without doubt the most important to the client. The movement from the pain and strife of modern day travelling into a space of welcome, calm, vision, excitement and entertainment is vital. Here at The Goring we are already working on a new Reception area to wow our future guests

as part of our Centenary renovations. Underestimating the importance of the public space is very risky. When David Linley re-designed our Dining Room last year, the theatre and impact both on our guests and our business was enormous!'

The most important things when it comes to undertaking refurbishments are planning and design. It is essential to bear in mind the overall look and how this will work within the hotel as a whole and it is also important to plan every stage of the refurbishment meticulously to ensure that all areas are covered, right down to the smallest detail. For example, there is an increasing use of technology in front of house areas and many hoteliers wish to disguise the use of computers by integrating them or hiding them in the overall design; this obviously



requires planning in advance. By contrast, some hoteliers use open displays of technology with large self service 'check in/out' kiosks; a trend recently adopted by the Hilton hotel chain. But regardless of what technology you have in this space and whether you require it to be hidden or displayed, the subject requires careful consideration and thorough planning.

Furnishings also play a pivotal part of any refurbishment as it is essentially the dressing of the room that adds to the ambience and atmosphere. The choice of materials, flooring, artworks and furniture is a major consideration that will sometimes need to comply with corporate identity requirements for multi-site properties. Combined, these elements can give an area its characteristics and personality. For example, many high end hotels may opt for rich material such as silk and marble and period features in the form of antique light switches or tables; this retains a continuity and maintains the hotel's status as a luxury venue whereas many modern boutique hotels are using bespoke art pieces and subtler palettes which provide a more trendy and design-led approach suitable for their clientele.

Whichever style you opt for, and there are many, it's important to choose objects and materials that fit the purpose and can cope with the pressure of daily use, in addition to being in keeping with the overall design. A marble reception floor is a great example of how a hotel can exude luxury whilst being a cost effective solution in the long term. Marble will wear well and should last for a long period of time becoming the focal point around

which other refurbishments develop. Many less expensive materials won't fair so well, especially in areas where there is continuous and often heavy footfall.

Unless the hotel is to be closed hoteliers need to consider how to complete the refurbishment without disrupting the running of the hotel and the comfort of guests, thus ensuring that revenue streams will continue. One way to achieve this would be to set up a reception area in a different part of the hotel, likewise alternative arrangements for eateries and bar areas may need to be considered. If you have space in the back of the hotel or an available conference room these could be used whilst the front of house areas are stripped. Alternatively, if this space isn't available you can always bring the reception desk forward in order to work in the space behind it. This is common practice when changing a desk or building in a reception administration area.

Whatever reception or front of house areas you are wishing to enhance or replace it is essential that you take into consideration the atmosphere you want to create. Remember your brand is a tangible asset and the refurbishment will need to be in accord with how you wish your customers to view your property. Getting this part right will increase the likelihood of continued guest loyalty and repeat business. •

We'd like to thank Andy Powell for this article. Andy is Managing Director of Spacetailors, an industry leading fit out contractor. www.spacetailors.co.uk Several of the images shown in this feature are from Spacetailors' portfolio.



Top 10 tips for Front of House refurbishments

1. Prepare and plan – Front of House design should mirror the complete hotel image you want to portray.
2. Get the right mix of design and functionality.
3. Pick colours and furnishings that will increase the 'wow' factor.
4. Find the right balance – hotels typically have a mixed clientele, from business visitors to tourists – try to find a concept that will attract them both.
5. Test run furnishings and consult reception/front of house staff before implementing change as some items may disrupt them from doing their job.



6. Don't go mad – make choices carefully picking one main focus and only accentuating with additional pieces.
7. Don't go over budget on luxury items – it is the 'whole' look which will attract the guests, not one expensive table or lamp.
8. Pick a look that compliments and harmonises with the rest of the hotel.
9. Consider the design ergonomically – your staff and guests need the reception area to do its job not just look great.
10. Never try to follow current trends – this can make your refurbishment date almost instantly.

