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Driven by DESIGN TRENDS

Hotels, pushed by travelers' shifting demands, refurbish and refresh more frequently

BY SUZANNE ROIG

Real-time reviews by hotel guests and a desire to be attractive to millennials—those in the tech-savvy, experience-seeking generation—are shrinking the amount of time between hotel room renovations, interior designers say.

Just a decade ago, hotels would change their public spaces and room décors every seven to 10 years, says Bryce Sprecher, Summa Hawaii Inc. president and chief executive officer. They'd be content with pineapple-shaped fillials, floral bed spreads and scenic water colors.

But not today. Hotel room "soft goods" renovations—bedding, carpets, pictures and window coverings—are being done three to five years for the



Jennifer Toba-Davila

that accommodate families or groups of friends," says Jennifer Toba-Davila, a designer at Phillipot Interiors in Hawaii. "Millennials like to travel in groups."

Today designs are as creative and eclectic as a cocktail made by a craft bartender, a mix of old world and modern. And all of these changes must tell the story of the place, designers say. Today's travelers want fresh and new experiences; and they want to know the story behind the place.

The numbers tell why this is important. Tourism is the king industry in Hawaii with more than 8 million annual visitors in 2016 (the most current annual figures available) staying

trendier hotels. And they don't include one pineapple filial. Or thousands of the same chair.

"People are demanding different guestroom experiences, furniture, art and suites

in 43,912 hotel rooms statewide and spending more than \$15.6 billion a year, according to the Hawaii Tourism Authority. And room rates have been



Carl Bonham

averaging about 81 percent occupancy in the first quarter of 2017, says Carl Bonham, University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization executive director and professor of economics.

Armed with this data, it only makes it harder for businesses to take a large number of rooms out of service for renovations. "Even at 80 percent to 85 percent occupancy rate, a hotel is operating at near capacity and it does make it challenging to remove rooms from service to refurbish them," Bonham says. "Major renovations will often involve taking entire floors or wings out of service to limit disruptions."



The bar and guestrooms (below) at the Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club were refreshed by Summa Hawaii Inc..
PHOTO COURTESY SUMMA HAWAII INC.

Culture in the Mix

Still, hotels today work hard to stay fresh and ahead of the changes in décor.

Designers say it's a constant juggle between keeping up with the trends and maintaining the integrity of the brand. Some hotels, like the Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club, The Laylow, Autograph Collection and The Modern Honolulu—all in Waikiki—have a shorter window for updates because their looks need to stay fresh and new for the millennial clients, says Colette Lee, a senior interior designer with AHL, a Hawaii multi-disciplinary architectural firm.

In Hawaii, Lee says, it's important to represent the culture in authentic ways and at the same time infuse the space with trends that hotel guests have come to expect: vivid colors, textures, metals and fabrics.



Robert Friedl

"I feel like you need to be flexible," Lee says. "We live in such a beautiful place that we like to supplement that; we don't want to take away from the natural beauty.

"We are always looking to tell the story of a place by using color and texture to represent the culture of Hawaii. The well-traveled tourists today are looking for more local experiences. They want to see Hawaii as an authentic destination."



Robert Friedl, GM at The Laylow, says "the jumping-off point for our design was the work of Hawaii Modern

master Vladimir Ossipoff, especially his Liljestrang House in Honolulu. Our designers were inspired by his approach to simple tropical luxury, from the low-slung custom furnishings that invite leisure to the way he works with nature, instead of against it—exemplified by the lush foliage and breeze blocks that seamlessly connect the public spaces on our



Custom carpets for the rooms and corridors at Waikiki Gateway Hotel were manufactured by Embassy Carpets.

PHOTO COURTESY EMBASSY CARPETS

lobby level.

“The tone in our public spaces and in our guestrooms is mid-century modern style meets Hawaii charm, brought to life in each carefully curated detail,” Friedl adds. “The closer you look, the deeper the story gets.”

“Of course, curation is a hallmark of millennial living, and there is an Instagrammable moment around every corner here. But our aim was to attract experiential travelers of all stripes with something completely new and different, yet totally at home in Hawaii. We’re very pleased that our guests—and lovers of well-considered design—have responded positively.”

The average three- to five-year hotel renovation runs \$3,500 to \$7,500 per room and the more extensive five- to 10-year renovation runs anywhere from \$7,500 to \$15,000 per room, Sprecher says.

And materials need to be good quality. A complete hotel room renovation could cost as much as \$80,000.

Quality Counts

From redesigning the space to laying quality solution-dyed nylon carpet and

replacing furniture, hotels don’t just settle on what they can find at their



Dara Jilla

neighborhood hardware and furniture store. Good quality carpet means longer lasting products, says Dara Jilla, of Embassy Carpets.

When hotels buy a carpet that isn’t made of two-ply yarn, they wind up replacing that carpet, Jilla says.

“It won’t last long,” he says. “A good carpet only will need vacuuming and steam cleaning.”

Designers say that quality materials are not the only aspect of a good design. The other is knowing the market and providing a story-telling component through the design materials that embrace the host Hawaiian culture. At the Four Seasons Resort at Ko Olina, designers turned a piece of artwork into wall coverings, Toba-Davilla says.

Hotels traditionally deal with room designs differently. Two hotels come to mind to illustrate this, says David

Evans, Kapiolani Community College Hospitality & Tourism Department chairman and professor. The Hyatt Regency Waikiki Beach Resort and the Aulani, A Disney Resort, he says, approached their story-telling in different ways.

The Hyatt, built in the 1970s, looks like it could be found anywhere in the world, Evans says. In contrast, he says, the Aulani “did a great job developing



Dave Evans

some authentic elements in the design that supports Disney’s ability to tell the stories and history of Hawaii.”

In fact, the design is just as valuable an element as the brand. “We sell memories, experiences and emotions, and our designs, décors and environments are critical to guest experiences,” says Evans.

High marks from visitors on TripAdvisor.com and other ratings websites have created a synergistic buzz at the Surfjack Hotel & Swim Club on Lew-



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— DALE EVANS

Olina who provided hotel guests a personalized experience by mixing and matching furniture and decorations to provide a curative look. Completed in June 2016, new design elements included woods and stone that can be found in Hawaii and a neutral palette that would bring the outdoors in open-air

areas, she says.

“Hotels need to keep up,” Sprecher says. “Everyone wants to be No. 1 on TripAdvisor. It’s forcing hotels to keep their product current and keep it in good condition or else people won’t stay at the hotel. I only book a place based on the reviews.”

ers Street in Waikiki that pushes the boutique hotel to keep mixing its ’60s beach culture with modern Hawaii, says Lynette Pan-McDonald Eastman, hotel general manager. Launched in 2016, the hotel features hand-made wallpaper, poolside entertainment, vintage



Lynette Eastman

board games, books and fast WiFi, according to the hotel’s website. What’s more, the pool’s tiled words, “Wish You Were Here,” are recognizable on Instagram because so many guests share their photos, she says.

“The hotel’s mid-century vibe was art-driven with local community artists all the while celebrating the creative movement that is reshaping Honolulu today,” Pan-McDonald Eastman says. “The Surfjack’s ultimate focus is on guest service to the point that the guests are inspired to share their experiences with the world.”

Toba-Davilla worked with a team of designers on the Four Seasons Ko



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