

Implications

VOL. 05 ISSUE 07

www.informedesign.umn.edu

A Newsletter by Informedesign. A Web site for design and human behavior research.

Hospitality Design that Meets a Hierarchy of Needs

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Needs-based Hotel Design

In 1943 Abraham Harold Maslow wrote a seminal research paper entitled, "A Theory of Human Motivation." In this paper he presented a concept of a hierarchy of needs, for which he is most noted. He postulated that there are five distinct needs or drives that motivate all individuals. (Subsequently, in 1970, Maslow added two additional needs.) His theory states that all humans begin at the first need and rise to the higher needs as the previous ones are satisfied. He also taught that one could not "jump" a need, and that it was possible to fall back to a lower need if disequilibrium occurred, for example because of the loss of one's job. In addition, he theorized that fewer and fewer people reach the higher needs and that very few actually attain "self-actualization" or fulfillment of one's potential. (He postulated less than 2% of the population reach this state.) Hospitality design is evolving to support higher levels on the hierarchy of needs.

Mass-market hotels work to insure mass-market standards. For decades, the driver for most hotel chains was consistency to insure that each hotel's offer was mini-

mally the same. Hotels were designed to support the most basic of needs. Then, over the last seven years, hotels found that they were losing market share to smaller, more personal hotels and responded, not with personality, but with higher standards.

First there were the "bedding wars" that moved the bed to the front of competition. Each hotel chain branded an upscale bedding line and promoted it like crazy. In 1998, when Starwood hotels launched W Hotels, the owner modeled the brand's bed after his own bed at home. In 1999, they started a bedding revolution when he threw out all the old beds at Westin Hotels and introduced the now iconic Westin Heavenly Bed®. More of their brands followed, along with competitors Hilton, Marriott, and others close after.

Next came Starwood, with upgrades to shower systems, towels, amenities, and baths. Upgrades included items like double showerheads, upscale soap and shampoo, really thick towels, as well as a bowed shower rod to keep the curtain from



Maslow's hierarchy of needs.



IN THIS ISSUE

Hospitality Design that Meets a Hierarchy of Needs

Related Research Summaries



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grabbing guests when it billowed. Now we are moving into the “technology wars”—desktop connections, flat screens, I-pod docking, even custom alarms. But do any of these connect with the guest?

Satisfied Guests

Many of us who travel make decisions on where we stay based on the most basic needs. Will the hotel be safe? Will I be comfortable? But can a hotel support and engage my higher needs? Can a hotel be designed to support not only the base needs but also needs like self-esteem and even self-actualization?

One hotel group seems to think that it can and must do so. Chip Conley, CEO of Joie de Vivre Hotels, insists that he must make connections with both his teams and his customers at the level of higher needs, not just supporting them with nice beds and good showers, but making connections with them. Chip has a blog that describes his strategy for connecting.

“I want to segue into talking about the emotional connection that is created with customers. We are launching a new Joie de Vivre Hotels website tomorrow that’s pretty revolutionary. It’s all about engaging in a relationship with our customers. It’s the California Connect part of our site (very Web 2.0) where people can connect with each other based upon common interests revolving around the California travel experience. Check out the cool People Map that allows you to see which people in the JDV online community are most similar to you and how you can learn interesting hidden treasures from them. Our “JDV Gives” portion of the site allows you to understand which specific grassroots non-profits each of our hotels supports (each General Manager has annual philanthropic giveaway goals just like they have net income goals). All in all, this website is really about creating a community around how to experience California in a way that ideally suits who you are” (<http://www.chipconley.com/musings/>).



Petite Theatre Bijou, located in Joie de Vivre's Hotel Bijou, San Francisco.

So how is this strategy supported by design? Each unique property is designed to produce what Chip calls “identity refreshment” for his guests. The company gleans inspiration for each hotel from popular magazines such as *Rolling Stone* (The Phoenix), *The New Yorker* (Hotel Rex), *Real Simple* meets *Dwell* (Vitale), *Wired* (Avante), and others. Each one is designed specifically to connect on a higher level with the guests. No generic designs are here to appeal to a mass market.

In one hotel that is designed to appeal to *The New Yorker* crowd, there are extensive literary references in all aspects of furniture and fixtures and even unique lighting for that nighttime read. For the techno-nerd crowd, one hotel has all the furniture on wheels. Joie de Vivre’s newest hotel, the Tomo, contains all things Japanese, but with a decidedly updated feel of animation, as well as the newest pop-culture items that are a must in Japan.

The Joie de Vivre Web site is designed to allow the guest to find where they belong. It is almost like a dating site. But in the end it is about belonging: “This is my hotel and it is a reflection of my life.” Each hotel is designed to impact the guest on a daily basis. Every item selected for use reflects that choice. Just like a magazine ‘fits’ so do these hotels.

Engaged Employees

Can the interior designer meet the higher needs of the staff? Hotel staff in almost every chain have some guidelines about keeping guests happy; but can the staff support guests’ higher-level needs, like the need for esteem? This is where the design can support the staff. How does the staff interact with the guest at

check in? Are they still imperiously standing behind the counter, or does the space allow for a different sort of interaction?

Designers historically focus their most creative work on the public space of a hotel, but leave the non-public spaces—the back of the house—to white paint and cheap carpet. New ideas need to be considered. In each facility, is there space for the staff to develop and engage each other? At a fundamental level, can each team member do his or her job? It's often a fight for resources and the front of the house typically wins, but it is in the best interest of the property as a whole to move beyond the traditional model of neglecting the support spaces.



The back of the house supports the staff of this restaurant.

Most hotels can meet the base needs of their guests and staff. The difference is felt when the threshold of friendship, respect, and creativity is crossed. It is then that relationships are forged. The relationship between employer and employee, staff and guest, as well as the relationship between a guest and the property becomes both memorable and important, creating a full circle. Human nature calls on us to recreate pleasant, happy experiences. When a full circle of satisfying relationships is realized, employee

retention becomes less of an issue and guest loyalty skyrockets. It's when we design the physical space to nurture the staff that we realize this full circle.

Moving from the mindset of being “just an employee” to becoming “part of the family,” an employee realizes his or her position is more than a one-hour orientation and a day of job shadowing. This shift in thinking produces an environment that encourages each staff member to focus on creating an experience for the guests, and it provides ongoing recognition of that effort. By sharing the organization's vision and goals and empowering staff to breathe life into the mission statement, a business moves from being a place to work, to a network of relationships that carries a common value proposition with them during every human interaction.

Companies can engage their employees in a way that makes them feel a deep sense of mission and meaning in what they do. The National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago just published a study in June showing that the professions with the highest job satisfaction ratings and general happiness were those where the employees look at their occupation as a calling. The top three professions were the clergy, physical therapists, and firefighters. What these professions have in common is a deep sense of calling in what they do every day; they know that their “results”—whether it's ministering to someone in need, providing physical therapy to someone who is frail or injured, or putting out a fire at a family home—make a big difference to those they are serving.

Self-actualization includes morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem solving, lack of prejudice, and acceptance of facts. It should influence every activity in the design of a hotel for both guests and employees. Designers strive to create spaces that promote self-actualization; this should show in the designed environment. If it is embodied in hotel design, then everyone will benefit.

Financial Success

Most hotels have unique operation and ownership structures. Many, if not most, are not owned by the name of the company on the door, but rather by investors. Unions, insurance companies, and retirement firms, as well as private individuals, often hold the mortgage, but hire outside firms to design, construct, and provide day-to-day management. The inherent conflict is about how much to spend and on what. Investors want the quickest and highest return on their capital, but by considering the needs of the staff and guests, the designer, by default, brings the investors what they want, a return on their investment.

Design for hospitality should no longer be simply considered only a “wow for the eye,” but a “wow for the mind.” Using design to engage higher needs supports the guest, the employee, and the investor. To that end, some advice on hospitality design follows:

- Work with your client to insure that attention is paid to the back of the house. This might require you to educate and/or convince them of the importance of investing in this environment.
- Look for opportunities to create lounge areas and break rooms for staff that encourage interaction and stimulate the exchange of ideas.
- Take a look at other businesses that are working to break down barriers; focus on designing collaboration and teaming spaces for staff using fewer hard walls.
- Create opportunities for your guests to connect and learn what they have in common with each other, much like the Petite Theatre Bijou inside Joie de Vivre’s Hotel Bijou. Design to create connections and conversation (see photo, p. 2).
- Analyze every space that supports interaction between staff and guests. You never know where you’ll find your next great opportunity!

About the author:



Bruce Goff, principal, Domus Design Group, is a licensed interior designer with over 20 years in the interior design industry. In addition to residential design clients, Domus serves commercial clients in a wide range of fields including technology, hospitality, residential real estate development, gaming, and telecommunications. Mr. Goff is a member of the American Society of Interior Designers, the International Interior Design Association, and the Illuminating Engineers Society. He is licensed as a registered interior designer in California and Nevada.

Recommended Resources

—www.chipconnely.com

—www.jdvhotels.com

—www.holisticentrepreneur.net

—www.starwood.com

Related Research Summaries

InformeDesign has many Research Summaries about hospitality design and other, pertinent, related topics. This knowledge will be valuable to you as you consider your next design solution and is worth sharing with your clients and collaborators.

“Environmentally-Friendly Hotels in Europe”
—*Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*

“Hotel and Resort Programs for Children”
—*International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*

“Understanding Health Conscious Tourists”
—*Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*

“Music and Job Performance”
—*International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*

“Effects of Music on Customers and Employees”
—*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*

“Functional and Aesthetic Lighting Design”
—*Lighting Research and Technology*

“Improving Unhealthy Hospitality Work Environments”
—*Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*

“Experience and Meaning of Place”
—*Journal of Environmental Psychology*

“Satisfaction with Cultural and Heritage Destinations”
—*Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*

“Mood Affects Customer Service”
—*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*

“Conserving Water in Hotels”
—*International Journal of Hospitality Management*

“Workplace Personalization”
—*Environment and Behavior*

“Increase Hotel Profits Through Planning”
—*Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*

“Hospitality Building Design and Materials Impact Fire Safety”
—*International Journal of Hospitality Management*

“Alleviating Mental Fatigue in Urban and Natural Settings”
—*Journal of Environmental Psychology*

“Sense of Place Affects Job Satisfaction and Motivation”
—*Journal of Interior Design*

“Accommodating Hotel Employees with Disabilities”
—*Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*

“Napping and Worker Alertness”
—*Ergonomics*

Photos courtesy of:

<http://www.pateo.com/images/maslowmaster4ts.gif>, diagram (p. 1).

Joie de Vivre Hospitality, photos (pp. 1-2).

Bruce Goff, Domus Design Group (remainder).



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