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The World of Hospitality
after Covid-19

Escaping the Everyday: How the COVID-19 Crisis is Challenging Our Thinking About Hospitality Design

Across the world, the hospitality industry has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures implemented to minimize the spread of the virus. As lock-downs are tentatively lifted in some countries and governments lay out road maps to reopening in others, a number of hotels and other hospitality venues have started to slowly open their doors again and imagine a new post-pandemic world.

There is no doubt that the landscape they are reopening in will be dramatically different to the carefree pre-pandemic days. Yet, the full picture of the long-term effects of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry is yet to emerge. At dwp, we believe that flexibility is the key to recovery.

“We need to take a long term view,” says dwp Director & Global Head of Hospitality, Justin Wells.

“While the hospitality industry has been ‘unplugged’, it will return to ‘full bandwidth’

with the return of international travel. In a post-COVID-19 world, we believe there is the potential for these kinds of venues to become an even more important part of the social fabric. People have been feeling a lack of connectedness in lockdown, and hotels can play a key role in bringing people together in safe environments.

These spaces already have such strong

systems and processes in place, and people may feel more comfortable gathering here than anywhere else.”

In the short term, however, hotel and F&B capacity in many locations could remain reduced for some time. Additionally, as people come out of lockdown, many will have [increased anxieties](#) around socialising in public places, and these feelings may lead to a temporary shift in the conventional notion of hotels as destinations for escape and relaxation. This raises the question of how people will need – and want – to interact in public spaces post-COVID-19.

“At its heart, the hospitality industry is about creating a welcoming experience,

From the simple act of greeting a guest with a smile to the complexities of crafting exclusive opportunities for transformative luxury,” says Wells.

“How can the hospitality industry continue to offer these kinds of meaningful encounters awash with feeling in societies that champion social distancing, cleanliness, and hygiene? At dwp, we believe the answer lies in thinking creatively about how learnings from other sectors can be applied to hospitality to create spaces where people feel safe and comfortable.”

In a post-COVID-19 world, the hospitality industry can take many lessons from health and wellness design – from ultra-hygienic and sustainable material palettes to “low touch” experiences. Hospitality venues will also need to recalibrate their focus across myriad operational areas, including business models, safety and hygiene, operating systems, and brand positioning – and question what that means for the guest experience.

As the hospitality industry evolves to cater to new expectations and restrictions around







distancing, hygiene and cleanliness, however, it is essential that it retain its power to inspire, motivate, and excite. It's these emotions that speak to guests around the world, and that will move them to return to these spaces in a post-COVID-19 world.

What Could the Future of Hospitality Look Like?

A New Paradigm

Public spaces in hospitality venues will see immediate changes in the way they function – most notably in relation to maximum allowable densities and face-to-face service.

This evolution will require existing spaces to be reimaged and could be reflected in the way future spaces are designed – either to meet ongoing social distancing regulations, or to future-proof them against any future outlier events. While this relates to lobbies, function rooms, and wellness and recreation areas, nowhere will these changes be as pronounced as in F&B spaces.

“Traditionally in hospitality, higher density has equated to higher revenue,” says dwp Director, Justin Wells. “Ongoing social distancing measures, however, will see the rise of a new paradigm for measuring business success – ‘available revenue’.” Similar to the metric of Revenue per available room (RevPAR), available revenue will be based on new limits imposed on the amount of seating and number of guests allowed in a given space. [As Margaret Heng, Executive Director of the Singapore Hotel Association, says](#) “space becomes more important in hospitality design”.

This reduction in density will fundamentally transform the guest experience. Social gatherings, for example, will likely comprise planned meetings with known smaller groups, rather than chance meetings with “unknown others” – and this has the potential to diminish

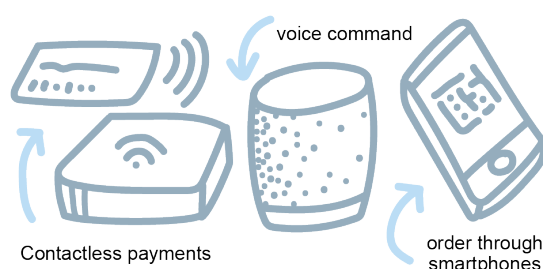
the variety of experiences possible in some public areas.

Additionally, as international travel is temporarily restricted and regional [“travel bubbles”](#) are formed, hotels will focus increasingly on guests holidaying close to home. These local and regional guests will have different needs, especially around F&B.

An Experience Beyond Touch

Hospitality has traditionally been haptic by nature, especially when it comes to communicating luxury. “The welcoming handshake, the feeling of a luxurious material, the mood-defining nature of softly curved forms that evoke a sense of wellness, or even the finely crafted surface and heft of a grand door leading to an exclusive hotel – these will all be compromised in some way in a post-COVID-19 world that values health, safety and hygiene,” says dwp Director & Global Head of Hospitality, Justin Wells. The result will be the rise of “low-touch hospitality”.

Sensor-led technologies – including automatic doors, especially in common-use areas, and touch-free hand dryers and towel dispensers – will become increasingly commonplace. The use of elevators will also be a strong focus for rethinking, as both social distancing and touchpoints are problematic in the current situation. As a result, apps that allow guests to call elevators, order room service, and access their rooms from their smartphones will be increasingly part of the hotel experience. Contactless payments will also increase, as will the use of voice command devices, using core technologies from Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa.



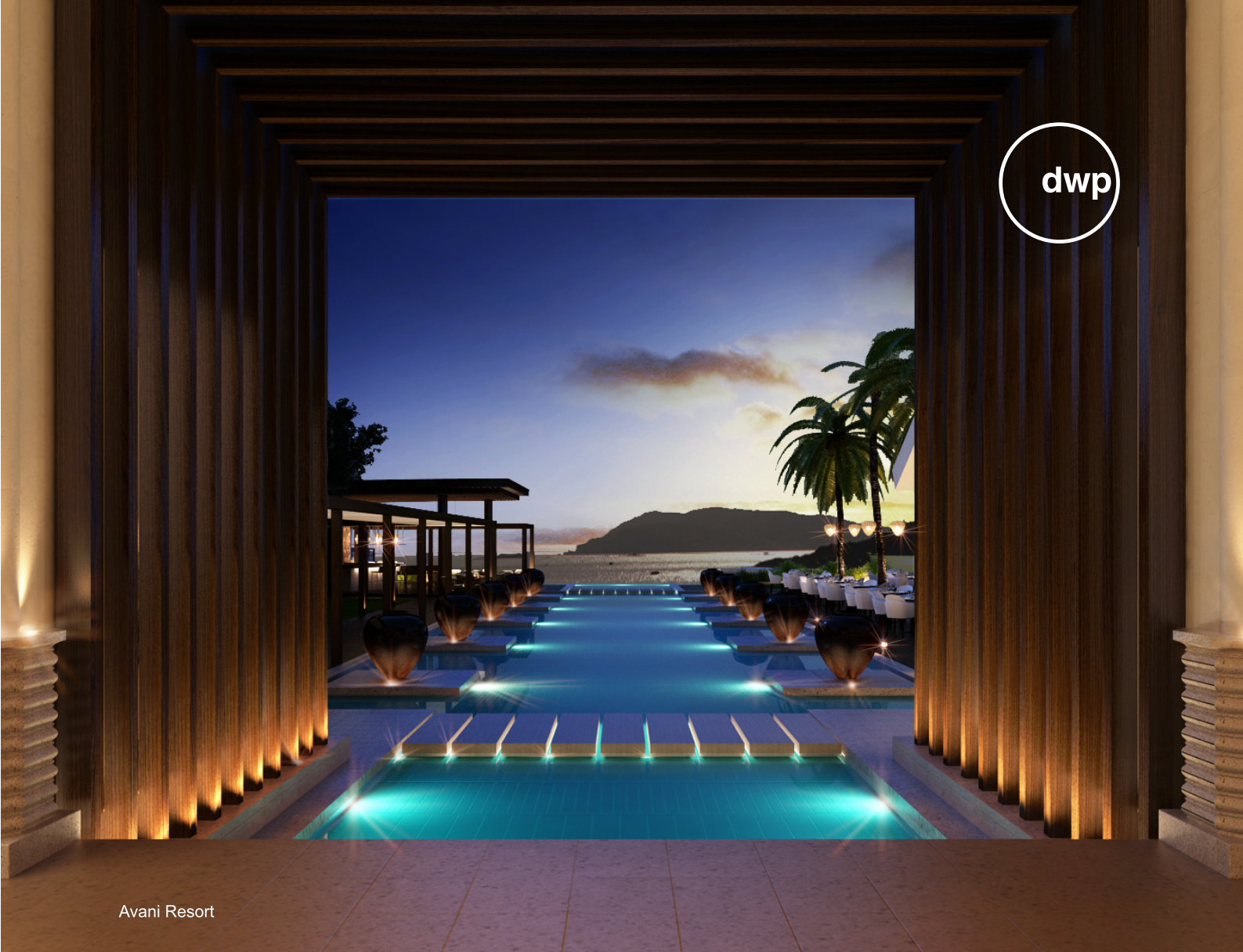
“This kind of experience recalibration has the potential to alter the way guests feel in a variety of ways” says Wells.

“A reduction in decorative and functional touchpoints – the inability to open and close doors, for example – limits guest choice and could diminish recognition of quality and brand differentiation, reducing feelings of satisfaction relating to hotel or other hospitality experiences.”

As a result, global hotel operators are rapidly reviewing the operational touchpoints of their brands. Kempinski has recently launched the [“Kempinski White Glove Service”](#) as a response to serving customers post-COVID-19. “While we need to give guests full confidence in the cleanliness and disinfection of our premises and reflect the seriousness of the current situation in all aspects of our daily operation, we are eager to continue and even surpass our dedicated service à la Kempinski,” says Benedikt Jaschke, Chief Quality Officer and Member of the Kempinski Management Board. Measures include the addition of sanitising stations throughout the hotels, and staff wearing bespoke face masks with the signature Kempinski floral print during all guest interactions – a move that cleverly re-enforces the brand identity and emphasises its focus on bespoke luxury in every detail.

The Race to Reassure

Like hospitals, hotels must now work to assure customers that they are safe spaces. “This reassurance will come not only from new operational practices, but also from visual cues,” says dwp Director & Global Head of Hospitality, Justin Wells. “We will see a rise in material palettes informed by the health sector, and a



Avani Resort

move toward a more minimal approach to adornment and ornamentation that allows surfaces to be easily and thoroughly cleaned.”

The [icare Medical & Wellbeing Suites](#) in Sydney, for example, is the first in a roll out of several world-class customer immersive experience suites. dwp created an oasis of health and wellness with a minimal palette of natural finishes that puts the focus on relaxation and wellbeing – an approach that could easily be adopted by hospitality venues.

At hotels have had to raise their cleaning standards to an even higher level, they have had to implement new protocols that reflect the changing times. The Marriott group has recently developed a new digital

platform – clean.marriott.com – that aims to reassure the public through the Marriott Cleanliness Council’s “Commitment to Clean”. This kind of messaging relating to elevated cleanliness standards and changing hospitality norms will become commonplace across the industry.

A focus on enhanced cleanliness is also driving a move toward a more minimalist approach, with a focus on innovative, easy-to-clean surfaces that immediately signify hygienic safety to guests. “The Amari Vientiane in Laos and the Amari OZO Watergate Hotel in Bangkok are two hotels currently in design by dwp and due for completion in early 2022,” says Wells. “Although the core design concepts were developed pre-pandemic, dwp is now exploring interior concepts relating to cleanliness, hygiene and durability.”



Rooms feature hard-surface floors accented by area rugs, which are easier to clean and disinfect, along with easy-to-clean textiles and finishes. Additionally, recent revisions following the pandemic deemed adornments usually found in hotel rooms, such as bed runners and decorative cushions, unnecessary clutter. All public areas, including lobby, restaurants, executive lounges and pool terraces, are also being reconfigured for safe distancing.

A Different Kind of Welcome

Hotel owners, staff and guests will need to become rapidly accustomed to new and updated operating systems in the post-pandemic world.

As the moment of welcome and point of farewell, the check-in and check-out experiences are conventionally a time for face-to-face interactions.

Post-COVID-19, however, hotel operators will need to adopt a different approach, together with a regulated entry process based on screening, queuing and social distancing. Hilton and [Marriott](#) properties, for example, are already making use of guests' smartphones for check-in, room access, and room service orders – all



without human interaction.

“As a result of a less personalised service, guests may feel a disconnect with the brand and diminished enthusiasm during their stay,” says dwp Director & Global Head of Hospitality, Justin Wells. “To maintain a meaningful connection with guests, hotels will need to ensure that the brand DNA is built into the very fabric of the venue.”

Take the public spaces at the [W Abu Dhabi – Yas Island](#), which were recently refurbished by dwp. The design is driven by a multi-layered narrative that addresses the cultural, social and historical context of Abu Dhabi – from pearl diving to the desert in full bloom – resulting in dynamic, visually impactful spaces that connect with guests to create a truly memorable experience.

In addition to redefining the check-in and check-out experience, some hotels will need to implement time limitations for the use of recreation areas and other public spaces. If social distancing measures continue, this may require a rethink of the layout of these areas to create a number of smaller, more private recreation areas, rather than large, shared facilities.

The Away Spa at the [W Hotel The Palm Dubai](#) by dwp showcases this approach. “The wellness area supports social distancing by offering a number of options and spaces for circulation and occupation pre- and post-wellness treatments,” says Wells. “Similarly, the hotel’s lobby is voluminous with pocketed nooks and semi-private spaces that people can occupy, whilst still being able to visually engage with

the promonading activity.” As such, it represents a model for future hotel lobbies and other public spaces that will require sympathetic social distancing needs.

Brand Positioning

Hotels offer not only a place to stay, but an escape from the everyday – and the DNA of a hotel brand is a complex composition of legacy, positioning, trend, and experience that differentiates a successful hotel from its competition. Take, for example, the [“Signature Rituals” of St. Regis](#) Hotels & Resorts – from Bloody Marys and Afternoon Tea to Midnight Supper – or the defiantly unique design of every single [25Hours Hotel](#). These are the reasons why guests “buy in” to a particular brand.

“The entire context in which we design has shifted and this changes what, how, and why we design from now on,”

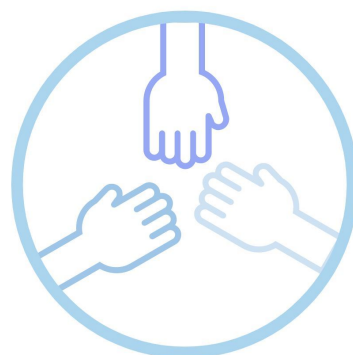
says dwp Global Creative Director, Scott Whittaker. “We have initiated a new program of work that we have named ‘dwp|imagine’ that seeks to keep us forward focussed and innovative in our thinking – and we will adapt to the changing needs of our clients and their project end users. Our cities have challenges of proximity and density to manage pandemics that will change the nature of urban space.

Our dwp designers will learn the lessons of how spaces perform in a pandemic, including a priority being given to the wellbeing of occupants, cleaning regimes,

flexibility and technical performance.”

In a post-COVID-19 era, hotel operators may need to sacrifice elements of brand service offerings to meet new requirements for social distancing and evolving guest demand. This diminished brand positioning has the potential to impact on guest desire for lodging due to an impression that hotels are more homogenised. As service offerings are scaled back, hotels will have to position themselves around targeted, on-brand spatial and visual experiences more than ever.

[Hotel Chadstone, Melbourne](#), for example, is located in the heart of the city’s fashion capital. The interior design by dwp embraces this context to create a wonderland of style and elegance inspired by iconic 20th Century fashion designers and haute couture. By building signature visual experiences – such as a large digital wall in the lobby showing the latest international fashion events – guests are immediately immersed in a world built around the hotel’s brand. “The design concept is inspired by the creative journey of fashion,” says dwp Portfolio Director, James Campbell. “The hotel is a voyage of seamless discoveries through a series of tailor-made experiences that truly engage and connect with guests.”





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Hotel Chadstone Melbourne, MGallery by Sofitel

A New Kind of Luxury

With significantly less travel across the globe predicted in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitality operators will need to focus on true luxury that prioritises quality over “bling” and puts the focus on comfort, safety and sustainability. This new kind of luxury will celebrate privacy, distance, and true seclusion – and hotels focused around villas and homes may become increasingly desirable.

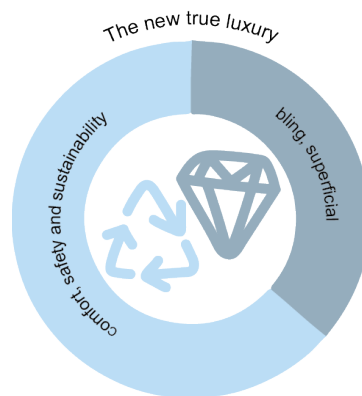
“We believe any superficial brand elements brought in by the large chains over the last 10 years in an attempt to differentiate will disappear as guests are more focused on genuine experience,” says dwp Director & Global Head of Hospitality, Justin Wells. “In

a post-pandemic world, with greater unemployment and income disparity, public displays of excess will be increasingly socially unacceptable. As a result, there will be an increase in private experiences and less focus on so-called ‘Instagrammable’ design.”

As travel becomes more difficult, travellers may choose to stay in the same location longer and move less,



and the residential and in-room experience of a hotel will become increasingly important. Guests will likely spend more time in rooms and use them more like a home or work-from-home office. “Elements such as a great dining table in a room that can be used for in-room dining and remote working will become important as more business is conducted remotely and guests avoid busy hub spaces,” predicts Wells.





— Our Viewpoint

The World of Hospitality after Covid-19

Hotel Chadstone, Melbourne

Flexibility

The hospitality industry has been deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, yet the long-term effects of the crisis are yet to emerge. At dwp, we believe that flexibility is the key to a fast recovery and the ability to deal with any future outlier events.

Public spaces

Particularly F&B spaces – will see immediate changes in the way they function and existing spaces will have to be reimagined to allow for reduced capacity and minimal face-to-face service

Space

The hospitality industry will embrace a new paradigm in which available revenue will be based on new limits regarding maximum

capacity. As a result, space will become much more important in hospitality design.

We will see the rise of “low-touch” experiences in a traditionally haptic industry. This will translate to increased use of automatic doors, sensor-led technologies, smart device apps, and voice command devices. A reduction in face-to-face contact will also affect the check-in experience, making it less personalised.

Brand DNA

Hotels and other hospitality venues will need to find new ways to meaningfully connect with guests and communicate their brand experience in these “low-touch” environments. At dwp, we believe the brand DNA must be built into the fabric of the building itself.



Hygienic

Hospitality venues will need to communicate hygienic safety through visual cues, such as easy-to-clean materials informed by the health sector, and a move toward more minimal interiors.

Spatial and Visual Experiences

As service offerings are scaled back to meet possible new requirements of social distancing and evolving guest expectations, hotels will have to position themselves around spatial and visual experiences more than ever.

Quality, Safety and Sustainability

Hospitality operators will shift their focus to luxury that prioritises quality, safety, and sustainability over previously positioned “Instagrammable” design. At dwp, we believe this will result in increased interest in private hospitality experiences, such as villas, branded residences and day-clubs.

Visit our online [Covid-19 Hotel and Hospitality](#) resources

For more information on how dwp imagines the world of hospitality in a post-COVID-19 world, contact Director & Global Head of Hospitality, Justin Wells – justin.w@dwp.com or Group Creative Director, Scott Whittaker - scott.w@dwp.com