

# Best Practices in Hotel Architecture

by Judy A. Siguaw and  
Cathy A. Enz

By making their rooms as home-like as possible, the best hotels are using architecture and design to add value to the guests' experience.

**O**ne attribute that travelers often seek in a hotel is its ability to make the traveler feel comfortable while on a trip. Increasingly, hotels are using residential or home-like style and design to accomplish that task. The extent to which a hotel—both its guest rooms and its public spaces—can make a guest feel comfortably at home has a great influence on the guest's hotel experience.<sup>1</sup> The comprehensive study on best practices in the lodging industry conducted by researchers affiliated with the Cornell

School of Hotel Administration identified a number of hotels as champions in architecture and design (see Exhibit 1).<sup>2</sup> Overwhelmingly, these champions expressed a desire to make their guests feel at home by, as some expressed it, "giving the hotel a residential feel," or, if not specifically using a home-like approach, by designing the hotel to meet the needs of a specific market. Indeed, what better way to welcome guests than by providing a physical environment in which they can feel comfortable, secure, and relaxed—in short, "at home."

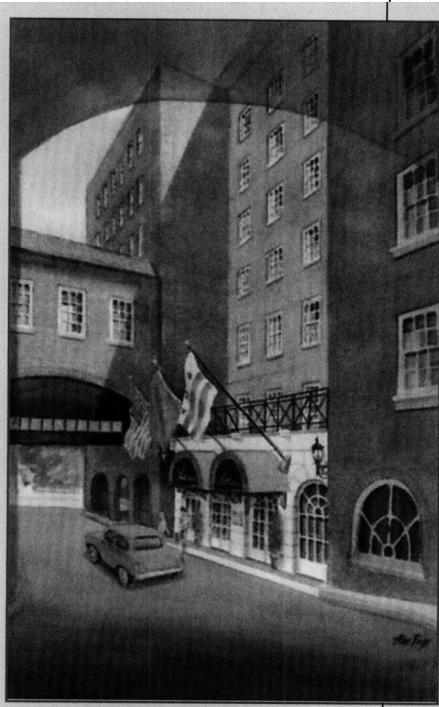
In this paper we examine the champions who have successfully applied design and architecture to enhance the guest's hotel stay. These champions are AmericInn, Candle-

<sup>1</sup> See, in this issue of *Cornell Quarterly*, Laurette Dubé and Leo M. Renaghan, "How Hotel Attributes Deliver the Promised Benefits—Guests' Perspectives on the Lodging Industry's Functional Best Practices (Part II)," pp. 89–95.

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<sup>2</sup> The full study is available in Laurette Dubé, Cathy A. Enz, Leo M. Renaghan, and Judy A. Siguaw, *American Lodging Excellence: The Key to Best Practices in the U.S. Lodging Industry* (Washington, DC: American Express and the American Hotel Foundation, 1999). For a summary of the study methodology, see: Laurette Dubé, Cathy A. Enz, Leo M. Renaghan, and Judy A. Siguaw, "Best Practices in the United States Lodging Industry: Overview, Methods, and Champions," *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (August 1999), pp. 14–27.



The Latham Hotel  
(Washington, D.C.)

**Exhibit 1**

**Overview of hotel-architecture best-practice champions**

| <u>Architecture champions</u>   | <u>Practice initiated, developed</u>                                      | <u>Measure of success</u>  |
|---|---|--|
| AmericInn   | Guest-oriented construction standards                                     | High customer satisfaction with physical product                         |
| Candlewood Hotel Company  | Exceptional design for economy market                                     | Enhanced revenue and occupancy   |
| Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort Lake Buena Vista and<br>Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Main Gate East | Specialized suites enhance vacation experience                            | Increased ADR  |
| Kessler Enterprises ( <i>dba</i> Grand Theme Resorts)   | Develops theme hotels to create integrated theme experience               | Enhanced revenue and ADR   |
| Latham Hotel  | Award-winning guest-room design, with residential atmosphere              | Increased occupancy and ADR, enhanced revenue, finalist for design award |
| Marriott International  | Identifies and designs products for most-viable markets                   | Produces successful new brands   |
| Palisades Executive Conference Center   | Architectural design blends with landscape                                | High customer-satisfaction scores, recipient of company quality awards   |
| Royal Palms Hotel and Casitas   | Promoted hotel use as a showcase house for extensive renovation           | Increased occupancy and ADR  |
| Tishman Hotel Company   | Three divisions of company inter-weave talents during renovation projects | Completed project under budget and on time, increased ADR                |

wood Hotel Company, the co-managed Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort Lake Buena Vista and Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Main Gate East, Kessler Enterprises (which operates Grand Theme Hotels), Latham Hotel, Marriott International, Palisades Executive Conference Center (an IBM conference facility), Royal Palms Hotel and Casitas, and Tishman Hotel Company. We first present the best practices of each architecture and design champion, and then discuss the outcomes of the practices. Lastly, we present the advice and suggestions each champion offers for those who might wish to develop similar best practices.

**Creating a Residential Feel**

Three of our best-practice champions specifically seek to establish a residential feel in their hotel to make the guests feel at home—namely, Candlewood Hotel Company, the

Latham Hotel, and the Royal Palms Hotel and Casitas. Candlewood, for instance, competes in the extended-stay market, and so it offers furnishings rarely found in a hotel room including a reclining lounge chair, a large clock radio with a CD player, a 25-inch television with a VCR, and full-size appliances in the kitchen area.

The mid-scale Latham's guest rooms are designed to provide an upscale, residential feel. Its bathrooms feature Italian marble floors, and their wallpaper is typical of home design. The marble sink has storage underneath, and an adjustable towel warmer holds four towels. The bedrooms have a loveseat with two pillows facing a glass-and-brass table. Although designed for the wear and tear of a hotel, the carpeting is similar to residential styles, and the drapes are of Irish linen. Perhaps the room's most unusual feature, which recalls an earlier

era, is its high-standing bed, replete with a down comforter and a two-step wooden stair. Furthermore, the room is technologically up to date with two data ports, a two-line telephone, a fax, and a printer.

The goal for refurbishing the Royal Palms Hotel and Casitas was not only to create as much of a residential feel as possible, but to maintain the property's historical Spanish-Mediterranean theme. To achieve this end, the owner and the architect took the unusual step of proposing that the hotel become a showcase design project for the American Society of Interior Designers. The ASID took up the challenge, and 20 design teams, each assigned a different section or set of rooms at the estate, worked to develop designs that would achieve the owner's intent. In return for ASID's donated time, the property then conducted a three-week open house and donated the proceeds to

## Exhibit 2

### *Hotel-architecture best-practices cases, descriptions, implementation, contact people*

| <b>Architecture champion,<br/>Title of case</b>  | <b>Description of case</b>   | <b>Method of Implementation</b>   | <b>Contact person</b>   |
|--|--|---|---|
| AmericInn<br><i>Solid Masonry<br/>Construction and Innovative Design</i>   | Uses designs and construction methods atypical for economy segment—solid masonry construction, large guest rooms, and imaginative lobby and pool areas. Masonry construction results in lower maintenance costs than normal. | Standards require: (1) solid concrete construction between wall and pre-cast flooring to eliminate noise transmission, (2) guest-room width of 14 feet, (3) lobby with fireplace and two-story vaulted ceiling, and (4) pool with peaked roof of laminated beams and tongue-and-groove paneling.  | Luke Fowler,<br><i>president and CEO</i><br><br>612-476-9020<br>Fax: 612-476-7601                 |
| Candlewood Hotel Company<br><i>Designing an Extended-stay Hotel for a Single-niche Market</i>  | Focusing on a single niche, the individual business traveler who requires seven or more nights of lodging, designs and equips guest room to give the guest a sense of being at home.   | Large-size rooms contain large desk, reclining lounge chair, 25-inch TV with VCR, clock radio with CD player, two phones with two lines each, voice mail, data outlets, and full-size kitchen appliances. Offers mini convenience store using honor system and other amenities like free laundry.   | Jeffrey Hitz, <i>senior VP of development</i><br><br>316-630-5559<br>Fax: 316-630-5612            |
| Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort Lake Buena Vista and<br>Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites Main Gate East<br><i>Specialized Suites to Meet the Demands of the Vacationing Family</i> | Configured "Kidsuites," a room within a room to provide parents and children with privacy, space, and entertainment.   | Developed, tested, and incorporated concept into 131 rooms. Enlisted core group of corporate sponsors to help develop suite themes. Have continued to develop other types of specialized suites.  | Terry Whaples,<br><i>president and operating partner</i><br><br>407-838-8940<br>Fax: 407-396-8915 |
| Kessler Enterprises<br><i>Development and Concept of the Grand Theme Hotels</i>  | Searches for a location people yearn to visit, then develops a complete sensory and entertaining experience around a theme dictated by the location.   | Researches anticipated location regarding history and any significant events to determine theme of hotel. Conducts analysis to determine appropriate product and pricing level. Architects and designers use this information and ideas from operations, finance, and construction people. Employees add to ambience of hotel. Elements of education, history, personality of the area, and art are intertwined into the hotel. | Richard Kessler,<br><i>president and CEO</i><br><br>407-996-9999<br>Fax: 407-996-9998             |

Continued on next page

the Phoenix Symphony. *Phoenix* magazine promoted the open house by doing a 32-page feature story on the hotel and its designer rooms.

### **Design Standards to Enhance Lodging Experience**

Several design champions use specific construction standards to enhance the emotional experience of their guests. This group comprises AmericInn, Palisades Executive

Conference Center, and Tishman Hotels. AmericInn, for example, wanted to eliminate the ancient problem of noise from adjoining hotel rooms. AmericInn, a limited-service economy property, uses solid concrete construction between walls and pre-cast flooring to reduce or eliminate sound transmission. (The walls are finished with plasterboard, so there is no exposed masonry in the guest room.) In addition, the

guest rooms are 14 feet wide, rather than the more typical 12 feet, to provide greater comfort and value to the guest.

The chain also has distinctive designs for its lobby and pool areas. Unlike a typical economy property, each hotel's lobby has a fireplace and a two-story vaulted ceiling, while each property's pool area is covered by a peaked roof composed of laminated beams with tongue-

***Hotel-architecture best-practices cases, descriptions, implementation, contact people (concluded)***

| <b>Architecture champion,<br/>Title of case</b>  | <b>Description of case</b>   | <b>Method of Implementation</b>  | <b>Contact person</b>  |
|--|--|--|--|
| Latham Hotel<br><i>Midscale Guest Rooms<br/>Designed to Give an<br/>Upscale, Residential<br/>Feel</i>                  | Drawing upon the designs and techniques used in 12 luxury hotels in New York City, the Latham guest rooms were designed with a residential feel.                             | Furnishings are typical of those found in private residences, including love seats, marble-topped desks, and down comforters. As a special touch, the bed is on risers and marble sinks have storage underneath. Every room has a fax machine and printer.   | Dixie Eng, <i>general manager</i><br><br>202-726-5000<br>Fax: 202-337-4250           |
| Marriott International<br><i>Developing Products to<br/>Meet the Needs of<br/>Targeted Market Seg-<br/>ments</i>       | Employing feasibility and trend studies, company identifies market segments. Targets the most viable segments with new products designed around the needs of these segments. | In designing a product, the needs of all three customers—guests, franchisees, and corporate development—are considered. Goal is to provide the customer with a good night's rest, as well as desired amenities, quality check-in, and excellent service. Feedback from the customer is continuously sought and incorporated into design changes. | John Fetty,<br><i>senior design manager</i><br><br>301-380-8793<br>Fax: 301-380-8063 |
| Palisades Executive<br>Conference Center<br><i>Experience Engineering<br/>and Integrative Design</i>                   | Blends architecture with landscaping to avoid damaging viewshed and to enhance guest experience.   | Facility is as unobtrusive as possible. Exterior trim weathers to blend with surroundings; no formal hedges or planting.   | Daniel F. Gassert,<br><i>IBM Manager</i><br><br>914-732-6100<br>Fax: 914-732-6119    |
| Royal Palms Hotel<br>and Casitas<br><i>Restoration and<br/>Redesign of Older<br/>Property for<br/>Residential Feel</i> | Made the hotel's redesign a showcase project for 20 design teams. The design teams donated their time, and the hotel conducted a pre-opening showcase open house.            | Owners contacted the American Society of Interior Designers regarding the showcase concept. The design teams perpetuated the property's Spanish-Mediterranean theme and gave the hotel a residential feel.   | Greg Miller,<br><i>general manager</i><br><br>602-840-3610<br>Fax: 602-840-0233      |
| Tishman Hotel<br>Corporation<br><i>Hotel Renovation:<br/>The Doral Park Avenue<br/>Hotel</i>                           | Draws on expertise from its own estimating, scheduling, contracting, construction management, and operations groups.   | Kept Doral Park Avenue open during renovation by putting just three floors out of service at a time. Renovation resulted in redirection of hotel's market segment.   | Rob Manning,<br><i>project manager</i><br><br>212-399-3600<br>Fax: 212-262-0037      |

*Note:* The case titles correspond to the cases written on each champion in: Laurette Dubé, Cathy A. Enz, Leo M. Renaghan, and Judy A. Siguaw, *American Lodging Excellence: The Key to Best Practices in the U.S. Lodging Industry* (Washington, D.C.: American Express and the American Hotel Foundation, 1999).

and-groove paneling made of cedar or fir.

The design of the Palisades Executive Conference Center, which is used as an IBM training facility, intentionally blurred the separation between the building and its landscaping. The goal was to integrate architectural design with environment to make the facility as unobtrusive as possible. Touches that enhance this effect include the ab-

sence of formal landscaping and the exterior trim's being left unfinished to allow it to weather and thereby blend with the surroundings. Hallways linking function areas with guest rooms have window walls that likewise help with the illusion of merging the property with its environment.

Tishman Hotel Company interweaves the talents, abilities, knowledge, and expertise of its hotel, de-

sign, construction, and mechanical divisions as the company renovates a property. Because it is a hotel-management company, a construction company, and a real-estate concern, Tishman knows what the guest actually requires and expects from the facility, knows the importance of location, and knows how the facility must be designed so that employees can serve guests as they expect. As a result Tishman can

## Tishman Hotel Corporation and the Doral Park Avenue

The Doral Park Avenue was built in 1926 with narrow corridors, limited vertical transportation, and no loading dock. The last renovation of the property had occurred in the mid 1980s. Recently, when the owner decided to undertake a major renovation of the property, Tishman Interiors was contracted to direct the renovation and Tishman Hotel Corporation was contracted to manage the property. The Gettys Group from Chicago was retained to handle interior design. The renovation included mechanical, plumbing, and electrical systems; and some elevator work, a new roof, and guest-room and lobby enhancements, as well as some minor structural work. Because the property remained open during the renovation, three floors at a time were put out of service. Since the hotel has no loading dock, all the loading and unloading had to be done curbside, and the new furniture, fixtures, and equipment had to be delivered between 2:00 AM and 6:00 AM to avoid disrupting guests' regular use of the elevators (and employees' use of the service elevator). Due to the restrictions imposed by ongoing hotel operations, during any given week half the rooms on a floor were stripped of their furnishings. Those were stored in the balance of the rooms on the same floor. The empty rooms then had their carpeting removed, painting done, and new vinyl and carpeting installed. The following week the process was reversed and the same work done on the second half of the rooms. During the third week the new furniture, fixtures, and equipment were put in place. This process required precise timing and teamwork from all involved—housekeeping, movers, liquidators, and trades people. Tishman was up to the challenge and brought the project in under budget and on time.—*J.A.S and C.A.E.*

produce a superior product that is pleasing to the guest and that fits within the owner's strategy. For example, in its renovation of the Doral Park Avenue, Tishman managed to have the renovation project completed under budget and on time (see the box above).

### Creating a Total Vacation Experience

Two of our champions, Kessler Enterprises and the Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort and Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, are resort operators. Therefore, they design their products specifically to enhance their guests' vacation experience. The operator of the two Orlando Holiday Inn properties devised the concept known as Kidsuites, which is essentially a room within a room. The Kidsuite is designed expressly for children, and it allows vacationing parents and accompanying children each to have their own space and some privacy. Kidsuites are, of course, planned so that they comply with building, sprinkler, and life-safety codes. Creative ideas for the Kidsuites are developed from a core

group of corporate sponsors who receive a fixed number of complimentary rooms in exchange. These sponsors also benefit from in-room advertisement, because their logos are used in the suites' décor.

In planning its destination resorts, which do business as Grand Theme Hotels, Kessler Enterprises first searches for just the right location—one that people yearn to visit. The firm conducts a market analysis to determine the price level and product that is appropriate for the area. Then the company develops a theme around the location's history. Architects and designers use the historical theme to develop the facility's form and style by selecting appropriate furnishings, music, and art and by developing all other elements and details with the theme in mind to create a "sense of being" for the guest. Similarly, the hotel's employees, who are chosen to convey the ambience of the hotel, are tastefully costumed to create an unusual and memorable guest experience.

Marriott International's architectural best practice takes the Kessler

approach to a different level. Since the company operates a full spectrum of hotel products, it uses feasibility and trend studies to identify the most viable markets for potential hotel products. Then Marriott constructs a product around the needs of that market. We describe Marriott's product-development mechanism in another article in this series.<sup>3</sup> The immensely popular and successful Courtyard product, for example, is an outgrowth of Marriott's market-oriented hotel-development approach. The company recognized that mid-scale business travelers' needs were not being met by full-service products. In particular, Marriott realized that it could not stretch its mainline chain to many of the suburban sites that were available. Combining those factors with the desire to develop a product that could be constructed in a timely and cost-efficient manner (and thus keep room rates moderate), the company developed what is now known as Courtyard by Marriott. The chain's room amenities are limited to those perceived as most important by the guest, and properties are low-rise because they are intended for suburban sites.

### Outcomes

Consumers appreciate our champions' efforts to create a residential feel within their hotels. Candlewood attributes its rapid franchise growth to its design, which allows franchisees to keep operating costs low and to pass along those savings to the guests in the form of competitive rates. The Latham reports high guest-return rates and substantial increases in ADR and occupancy, with RevPAR increasing by

<sup>3</sup> See, in this issue of *Cornell Quarterly*, Judy A. Siguaw and Cathy A. Enz, "Best Practices in Marketing," p. 42.

double-digit percentages. In addition, the Latham was a finalist for the 1998 *Lodging Hospitality* award for best guest-room design. The winner of that year's award, however, was the Royal Palms Hotel and Casitas. Using the hotel for a showcase house resulted in greater grandeur and elegance than the owners originally visualized. The property also has noted higher occupancy rates and increases in ADR since its renovation.

The champions' streamlined construction methods, which respond to market needs, have also resulted in positive outcomes. AmericInn believes its continued ability to grow and compete in a saturated economy segment is a result of the quality of its physical facility. One point of evidence is that AmericInn receives no guest complaints regarding the physical product. Similarly, Marriott International's development of new products around the needs of targeted market segments continues to ensure that its brands grow steadily and ADR continues to increase. For its part, Palisades Executive Conference Center notes that it has won internal awards for its quality, and guest satisfaction is extremely high, at 99.7 percent. Finally, The Tishman Hotel Corporation's renovations also result in improved financial performance for the property. For example, the renovation of the Doral Park Avenue allowed for significant increases in ADR and a more upscale guest profile.

Enhancing the consumer's vacation experience has greatly remunerated the champions. The two Holiday Inn properties have been able to increase Kidsuites room rates by 50 percent and the investment was returned in no more than six months. As a result of this success, a new hotel is being constructed—Holiday Inn Family Suites Resort—

which will feature seven different types of specialized suites. Finally, Kessler Enterprises reports that its theme hotels have been profitable beyond expectations. The history-theme concept allows Grand Theme Hotels to boost ADR by 10 percent above that of competitors.

### Insights

Our champions offer a number of suggestions for owners and operators who might want to incorporate innovative practices into their hotel architecture and design. They offer two points regarding construction. First, hotels of the future will feature solid masonry construction (often pre-cast concrete), enhanced room size, and in-room kitchens. Second, the best designs will be simple and not too specialized. To enhance responsiveness to the guest, the champions offer this advice:

- (1) To create an outstanding experience for the guest, operators must determine and stay true to their market niche;
- (2) The success of the hotel depends on matching a good design to the market;
- (3) The guest should be the most influential person of all those who have input into the design process;
- (4) Along that line, hotel operators must be aware of what the customer wants and respond quickly with changes; and
- (5) The great experience sought by the vacationing family should not happen only outside the hotel room. As Terry Whaples, president and operating partner of Holiday Inn Family Suites, Inc., notes, resort operators who neglect the chance to think in terms of a total vacation "miss the boat."

Finally, regarding renovations, our champions advise (1) expect the unexpected; (2) understand the

owner's intent; and (3) work closely with the hotel's operating team.

### Building Customer Satisfaction

Although our champions pursued a variety of approaches in architecture and design, we found it noteworthy that the driving factor behind all their efforts was the creation of an experience to achieve customer satisfaction. A focus on pleasing the customer and anticipating and delivering on future needs appears to be the factor that propelled these firms to champion status and that should keep them ahead of the competition. The cookie-cutter nature of so many hotel rooms argues that few companies have actually tried to identify customers' current and future needs and then alter construction plans to account for those needs. This extra effort is what sets our champions apart.

In particular, our champions are to be applauded for their vision in recognizing that the hotel is responsible for creating an extraordinary experience for the guest. These champions recognize that the design of the hotel and the guest room itself is a crucial element in the guest's travel experience. Therefore, the hotel and guest room must become part of the total entertainment and sensory package that the guest is seeking. By creating a memorable experience through careful design the value of the experience lingers and the hotel differentiates itself from the competition.<sup>4</sup> All of the champions featured in our study thoughtfully constructed and designed their hotels to execute a strategy of creating a meaningful guest experience. **CQ**

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the idea of creating greater economic value through market changes from goods and services to experience, see: B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theatre & Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).