

FOCUS ON CREATING HOLISTIC EXPERIENCES

THE PANDEMIC HAS TRANSFORMED THE WAY WE LIVE. HOW HAS IT IMPACTED THE WAY WE BUILD AND DESIGN HOTELS? AR. RAHUL KADRI EXPLAINS

BY: **RAHUL KADRI**

THE HOSPITALITY industry has long been synonymous with luxury. And architecture and design forms one of the foremost tools that can foster a sense of luxury. It's no more about aesthetics alone, about ornamentation or rich materials and products. It's about the quality of space — about harnessing light and air and views; about bringing to life meaningful narratives through objects and textures and materials and craftsmanship. It's about creating holistic experiences where people can engage, rejuvenate, and grow. More often than not, the challenge lies in reinterpreting and pushing the boundaries of conventional design to create spaces that have something new to offer.

At IMK Architects, our approach to hospitality design is driven by the need to mould human-centric spaces that respond to society and culture and integrate nature. We seek to create an assemblage of experiences, both personal and collective, that resonate with a destination's aim of being unique and memorable.

Designs take cues from indigenous crafts and building techniques, employing local skill sets and low-maintenance,



sustainable local materials sourced from local vendors to uphold the native culture and identity of the region — to create spaces where people thrive.

For instance, our design for the Club Mahindra Madikeri resort in Coorg takes cues from the local Kodava culture to incorporate traditional wooden structural systems that have



(L-R) Club Mahindra Madikeri Resort, Coorg; Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur; and Club Mahindra Kandaghat Resort, Kandaghat - near Shimla

been left exposed. This contextual response, which integrated structural elements as a part of the interiors, helped us create a suitable architectural language for the resort.

Our work also draws from the theory of biophilia, which seeks to connect buildings and occupants more closely to nature. Maximising daylight, natural ventilation, views of the outdoors, and incorporating green courtyards and water bodies can create a more therapeutic built environment for rejuvenation.

In Coorg, the resort is situated amidst a crescent-shaped ridge with a deep valley in the middle. The 31-acre site is akin to a forest and we designed in a manner that the guests would actually experience being inside this forest. We decided to not build on the ridge, but 5 meters below it, so that the hill would look undisturbed from the main road and guests would feel they are a part of the coffee estate rather than hovering over it.

Taking cues from Bangalore's tryst with nature, The Oberoi Bangalore, completed in 1992, stands as one of our most significant early projects. Built amidst the existing flora of the city, the property's 176 rooms face inwards, oriented towards the central garden to promote rejuvenation and inspire a sense of solitude. Rows of stepped circular balconies span the façade, overflowing with potted plants and flowerbeds. This breaks up the building mass, while extending the garden above the ground plane to the upper floors.

Our current work on the expansion of the Club Mahindra Kandaghat resort near Shimla to accommodate 128 new rooms is based on similar ideas too. Our aim is to integrate Shimla's old-world charm in the architectural language of the resort by



incorporating dormer roofs and warm interior colours that resonate with the palette of the local terrain and nature.

In light of the pandemic, hospitality trends have taken a complete turn. Today, maintaining hygiene and sanitation is of paramount importance. Buildings need to curb the spread of cross-infection and disease transmission by controlling the quality of air, maximising natural

ventilation and minimising contact. This is encouraging hotels to rethink choice of surfaces and materials and to include efficient air-conditioning systems fitted with HEPA filters.

Also, the need for social distancing requires a re-working of spatial requirements such as organising restaurants to have more outdoor seating and ensuring multipurpose public spaces such as lounges, lobbies and other common areas become larger to provide for adaptability and flexibility.

Technology and artificial intelligence are set to have a huge influence over almost every sphere of hospitality operations going forward — from contactless billing, dining, check-in and checkout procedures, to room lighting, air-conditioning, doors and windows that can be controlled through applications on smartphones.

Such innovations in automation and user-centric design will enable more effective control, and will encourage the hospitality industry to consider the future of design through the lens overall well-being.

There is a renewed focus on incorporating green, outdoor spaces and fitness facilities, and on providing environments that focus on enhancing human comfort, rejuvenation, and quality of sleep etc. And quite rightly so.

The focus should always remain on human-centric design — design that prioritises the physiological and emotional health of the people who will engage with it. ■

AUTHOR BIO: *Rahul Kadri, Partner & Principal Architect, IMK Architects*