*Interviews available upon request*

A piece of the action: SAY Studio advises hoteliers how to stay ahead in 2020

SAY Studio, the Dubai based design firm advises hoteliers on what they can do today to ensure they are prepared for the much-anticipated Dubai EXPO2020 where competition for the 25 million visitors from the 192 participating countries will be rife.

According to Index’s Hotel Markets Report Dubai’s Expo 2020 is expected to generate US$ 44 bn in revenue from tourism by 2020, across the GCC. The overall UAE hotels project value expected to be completed in 2019 is likely to be worth around US$6mn. STR data shows the UAE is expecting an additional 31,517 rooms to enter the market this year.

Matthew Sexton, Managing Director and Partner at SAY Studio says: “To stay ahead in a fast-moving industry like hospitality means never becoming complacent. Today’s trends are tomorrow’s history; the smart thing to do is to constantly evaluate your offering.”

Sexton and American-Emirati Laila Al-Yousuf, Design Director and Partner, highlight the three fundamental focus areas for hoteliers to remain in the running for 2020:

**Customisation**

It’s not just a design change, it’s an operational one as well and we think a technology upgrade is essential in this era of customisation. According to the latest research study: Drivers of Change in Hospitality by InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) and Amadeus, a hyper-personalised room could be one of the big changes out on the hospitality horizon, we think it will signal the beginning of the end for the ‘traditional’ fixed-interior hotel room. Guests can already customize things like what they watch by streaming their own content through the in-room TV or connecting to the speakers via blue-tooth. But what hasn’t happened yet is rooms being designed in such a way that they become flexible, not your static single, double, twin, suite or family room. We envisage a space where gym bunnies are able to swap desks for yoga mats, parents can replace the TV for a play space and business travelers can add in router boosters and VOIP hardware. This requires an interior designer to really look at the future functionality of the existing space and create something that can cater to the maximum possible number of scenarios, all while retaining a sense of luxury.

Referring to the new trend as ‘attribute-based booking’, the report notes consumers are used to buying exactly what they want and need when it comes to music, entertainment, fashion, and travel. Hotel accommodation, which has traditionally been bought in a standard and uniform way, will need to adapt, as 61 per cent of global travelers state a preference for hotels to be priced in a way that allows them to add-on bespoke options.

**Sustainability**

There’s a growing opinion we have reached a tipping point in global sentiment towards environmental action. We in the Middle East are fast catching up with the West in discerning how the choices we make as consumers affect the future health of the planet and it now being a critical concern, for younger generations at least as we’ve seen across recent EU news.

In 2020 with so many visitors from countries already applying the concept of ‘conscious travel’, which revolves around the idea of compassion and social consciousness being part of the travel experience, we need to cater for this type of guest as they will be landing in droves and looking for the same sentiment from their service providers here. Hotels need to be putting their sustainable credentials front and center to match and attract these fast-evolving consumer sentiments.

We have definitely seen more and more clients wanting to incorporate sustainable elements in their interiors and in order to improve efficiency are looking at elements such as mobile shade provision and choosing good quality, stylish and low-impact products. The good news is the range of choice is growing all the time with everything from 100 per cent recycled glass tiles and counter tops to organic carpet tiles, recycled ground-paper-pulp wallpaper, designer seating made from scrap metal and lighting elements created out of salvaged timber.

**Refurbishment**

Regular refurbishments are essential to maintain customer loyalty, market share and room rates. The majority of hotels in the UAE have crossed the seven-year operational threshold and many are in need of refurbishment.

The first thing to update should be the entrance. Focus on creating a unique, dynamic, multi-use space in your lobby. The lobby is your first impression. Your new hotel lobby should provide a multi-use space for several types of guest interaction. Look to design segmented space to provide intimate, casual zones for socialisation as well as comfortable and functional working areas.

Like the commercial sector, biophilic design is also expected to play a crucial role in the overall guest experience. Hoteliers should look to their interior designer to explain the many benefits of biophilic design not only for the guest’s overall experience and the association of biophilia with sustainability, but it’s a fast and efficient tactic to refurbish a space. Biophilic design will help your guests feel connected to the outdoors and nature and you will create a peaceful space that will inspire relaxation while socialising or working. Lighting and furniture are also fantastic ways to quickly and dramatically upgrade your spaces.

Ends

**About SAY Studio**

SAY Studio is a group of creative, passionate and curious designers that aspire to deliver exceptional designs on every project, along with developing long lasting relationships with its clients.

SAY Studio offers design consultancy services across workplace, hospitality, F&B, residential and retail. There is a dedicated team based in Dubai, servicing the UAE.

Aside from being passionate about design, the studio actively pursues opportunities to help improve its community and the people that reside within it. With socially and sustainably responsible initiatives SAY Studio engages in multiple efforts across its projects and global charities to effect positive change.