

# Staying in style

## Hotels, travelers cozy up to functional interior comforts

By Jenn Danko

Whether they are pursuing leisure or business, hotel professionals say that today's travelers seek two common amenities on their global excursions—comfort and convenience.

Often times, the interior design of a space determines if the hotel is meeting clients' on-the-go demands.

"(Travelers) want to transform their lifestyle at home into the lifestyle of the hotel that they choose to

become loyal to," says Thomas Klein, regional vice president, The Americas, and general manager of Chicago's Swissotel (323 East Wacker Drive). "The room has to be a transition from you lifestyle at home to where you are going to be spending your time."

Come this spring, Klein will have good reason to rest easy, as Swissotel Chicago nears completion of its \$19 million room renovation to all 632 guest rooms in its lakeshore locale. With interiors designed by Melanie Swisher of AIOA, upgrades include installation of down-padded beds, 37-inch HD spilt screen

plasma televisions and freestanding glass showers, to name a few.

When put together, all of the interior upgrades hit on the key needs of guests.

"What's important?" asks Klein, looking onto a sprawling view of Navy Pier. An iPod docking station sits on a nearby nightstand while cool, vinyl wall covering catches light from the sun. "There's bed, bathroom, desk and work space."

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Swissotel's renovations, which began in late summer 2007, tap into the vein of current hotel room design trends, including use of clean, simple lines that give the room a residential aesthetic. Klein says the color palette here includes cool washes of sage paired with honey-colored wood and a textured "frog tree" finish on the walls. A sage green headboard creates a soothing aesthetic over the triple-padded bed, snugly tucked with 600 thread-count sheets.

"When you walk in the room, the whole room captures you," Klein says of the standard-sized, 410 square foot spaces. "You are not drawn to one part; you are touching all five sense of a guest's experience."

### Work hard, play hard

Another key element for interior hotel design, including the Swissotel, is the workstation, where Klein says special attention is paid to the design of the desk and lighting used for guests.

"Number one, you have to have an easy, ergonomic chair, and you have to have accessibility to what we call your 'jack pack,' so you can plug in your technology and have one fully integrated work station," he says.

High-speed wireless connections are now the standard in interiors of all new hotel rooms, regardless of business or leisure pursuits. Betsey Moser, interior design project manager for the Denihan Hospitality group, designers for Affinia

Hotels, says the lines between business and leisure travelers are steadily blurring, particularly when it comes to design amenities.

"We believe business and leisure travelers want the same thing," says Moser, who took the lead in coordinating the interior look at the forthcoming Affinia Chicago. Located at 166 East Superior Street in the former Fitzpatrick hotel, Affinia Chicago will open the doors to its first location outside of New York City in April 2008. The hotel completed a \$25 million renovation to all of its 215 guest rooms, along with the lobby, new rooftop bar and 3,000 square feet of meeting space.

Moser says that the new rooms in the Chicago location will cater to the needs of all travelers from the design aspect in 350 square feet.

"We try to design a room that is functional for both types of traveler," Moser says. Often times, even leisure travelers vacation with their laptops and literature and demand a comfortable, spacious work space.

"Other times you have the executive who wants to lounge on the sofa with (his/her) laptop, so it's important to be very residential in our product delivery," Moser says.

Sometimes that residential side includes offering amenities beyond the sleep/work space. Affinia Chicago is taking steps to elevate the interior of its hotel with a separate restaurant and lounge space that taps into emerging design trends.

On the hotel's first floor, diners indulge in the rustic sleekness of the C-House, a 2,500 square foot restaurant bathed in natural tones of wood and accented with a sustainable, terrazzo floor. The seafood restaurant will also feature the popular interior trend of a "show kitchen," or open kitchen placed at the center of the floor. Similar to a sushi bar, guests can watch the executive chef fire up their nightly dishes all while dining in an equally warm space.

"The color of choice for accent here is copper," Moser says of the dining room, which she says takes on the character of a cocoon. The aesthetic mimics the contemporary vibe of Paul Kahan's Avec restaurant in Chicago's River North neighborhood.

"We are trying to evolve beyond stainless steel and play with a selection of neutrals that still pop," Moser says of the decor.

On the 29th floor roof level of Affinia, corks will be equally popping as guests lounge in space that doubles as both an indoor and outdoor bar. Such design trends are something that Affinia Chicago is capitalizing on, especially in relation to its 20- to 30-something demographic.

"I'm fascinated by the green roofs in Chicago, and this feels like a beautiful garden at the top of building," Moser adds.

### The color and the shape

Colors are also livening up the nights and days of hotel guests with respect to

their locale. Affinia Chicago plugs into the design trend of neutral tones while interjecting vibrant colors that pop, including bright orange, velvet pillows accenting all beds. The forthcoming hotel's units in the Aqua of the Lakeshore East development (225 North Columbus Drive) will also adhere to current pale-and-pop color trends.

"What I'm finding in the Chicago market place and in hotels in general, is that the colors are going back to more warm modern earth tones, such as browns, paired with blues," says Michael Phares, director of sales and marketing for Fairmont Chicago.

The national chain will be taking over the 210 rooms in the future development when it plans to open in spring 2009.

In addition to colors, more people are shaping their at-home lifestyles around some current trends in hotel design. Muted woods, versus veneer, are popular accents, along with partitions made from glass and wood that create a perceptual division in a room.

"More people are using renovated hotels as bench marks for what they want to do in their own homes," Phares says.

Larger bathrooms with limestone décor, freestanding showers and compact fluorescent lighting found in hotels also inspire design beyond bedroom basics.

Adds Phares: "People are looking to hotels for ideas in their own homes—not just in décor but from amenities, too." 