

THE SHIFT

EDITION n. 5

NEW COOL

What does 'cool' look like in 2017?
(Spoiler: it's probably not what you think.)
From social enterprise to 'thinking festivals'
to the mile-high (social) club, we explore the
continued evolution of 'cool' in travel...



IS VANILLA TOURISM
THREATENING
COUNTERCULTURE?

WHO THE ***K IS
GENERATION K?

TRAVELLING
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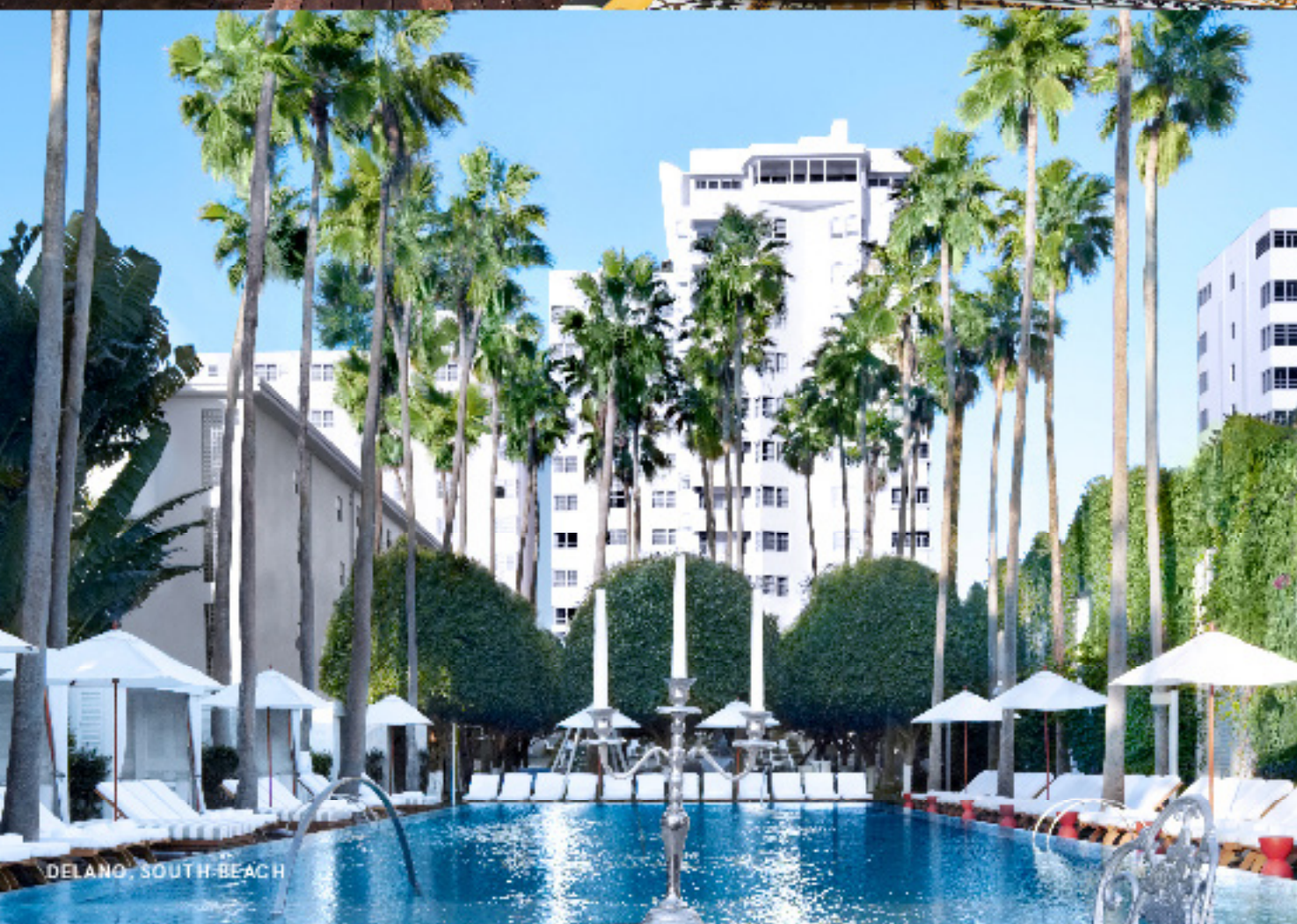
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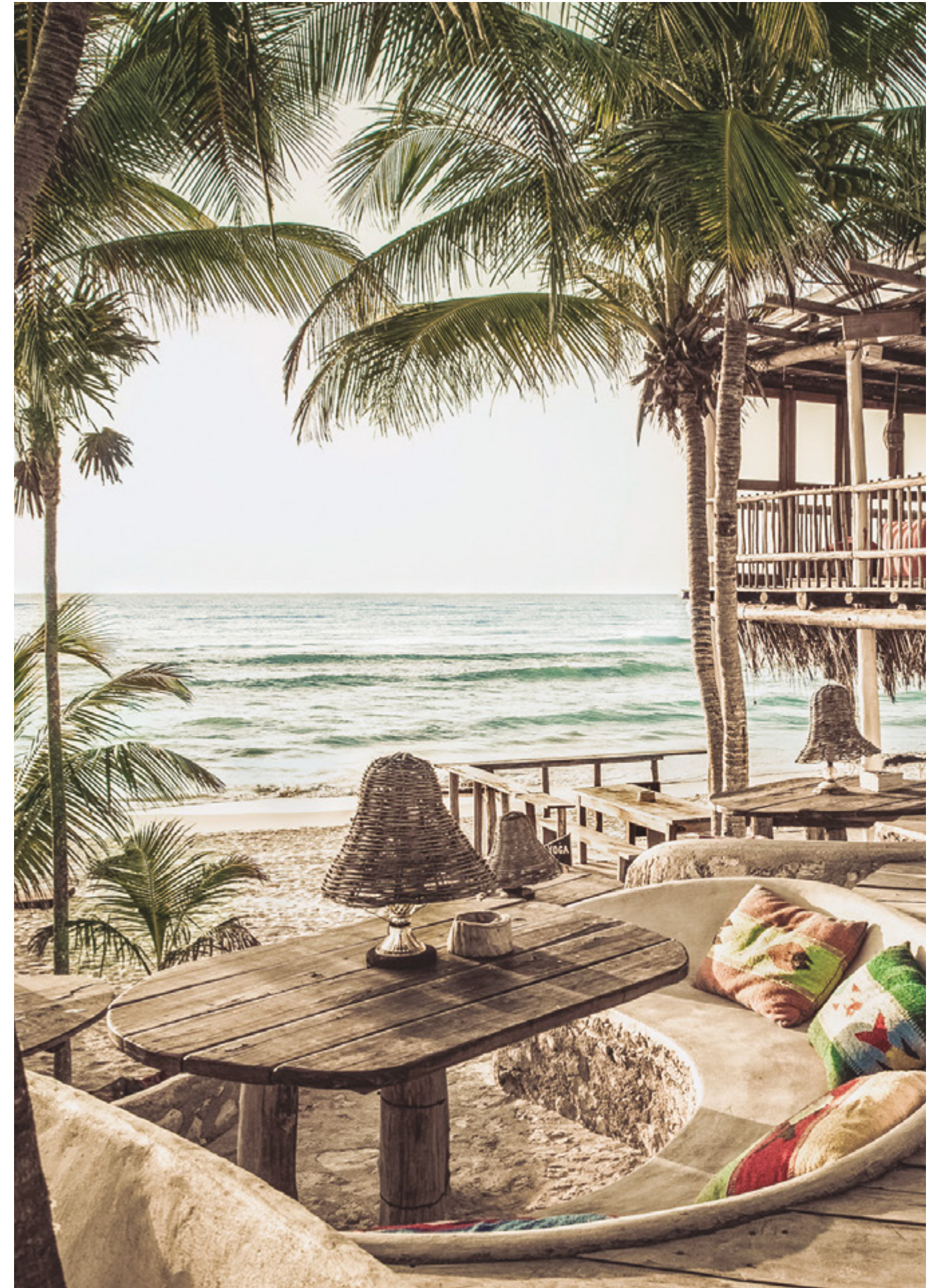
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NEW COOL

Here's a question for you, collective: What does 'cool' mean in 2017?

Ever since Schragger threw down the gauntlet back in 1980 with his nightclub-inspired offering, as an industry we've been obsessed with this elusive quality. What does it look like? Who has it? How do we find it – and keep it?

Once upon a time, we had a clear definition. It was the *louche*, devil-may-care attitude of the chain-smoking, hard-living, rock'n'roll icons of the 20th century. It wore a leather jacket and a sneer; only dated models; and didn't get out of bed for less than \$10,000. Our culture idolised it, and our hotels followed suit; becoming hard-edged places where if you didn't have the look, you weren't worth a look-in.

Today, however, things are a little different. On a post-truth planet where nothing can be taken for granted and a multitude of opinions jostle for prime position, pinning down 'cool' to a singular aesthetic or attitude has become a far more slippery affair.

As James Davidson discovers in *The Birth of the Vanilla Tourist* (p22), cool by committee doesn't really work – if we're all individuals now, what does it mean to rebel? It also doesn't look like one thing, as Emma Love charts in the design trends of #INTERIORPORN (p15). Above all, it definitely doesn't mean not caring – and in 2017, this might just be the crux of cool and where it differs from previous generations.

Because today's consumers and travellers *do* care. They are deeply, unapologetically bothered about doing better – both when it comes to improving themselves and the world around them. Rebels without a cause, they are not – which brings us back around to our original question, and one we've tried to answer in this year's edition of THE SHIFT: what does 'cool' mean in 2017?

For starters, self-optimisation is unequivocally cool. Wellness has passed beyond a buzzword and into the lexicon of the modern traveller, who expects more than just avocado on toast in their quest for peak physical performance – Alice Tate peeks into the latest in the 'sportspitality' revolution on p48. We also want to expand our intellectual horizons by engaging with new technologies, confronting unfamiliar cultures and turning our supposed flaws into strengths: see Ana Andjelic's rumination on the importance of empathy in artificial intelligence (p36); Bex Hughes' thoughtful exploration of the creative culture of Iran (p68); and James Davidson's championing of secondary (or even tertiary) city hubs (p56).

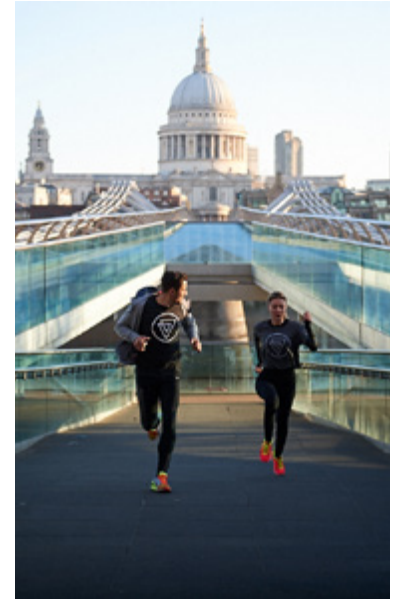
As the line between work and play continues to erode, the pursuit of personal growth inevitably leads to business growth. With some of the most disruptive ideas coming from Silicon Valley or crowd-funded ventures, those with the smarts and foresight to affect real change are becoming 'new rockstars'. In an attempt to identify a few rebel rockstars of our own, we've interviewed the voices behind five travel concepts we think are worth getting excited about – decide for yourself on p26, 40, 52, 65 and 76, and get ready to celebrate this year's REBELS award-winners on Tuesday night.

Naturally, the way we do business has evolved to accommodate this new generation of on-the-go, DIY entrepreneurs – dive into the latest breed of 'thinking festivals' with Olivia Squire on p60, or explore LE's own version at this year's Ministry of Ideas. In this context of the festivalisation of business, it's also cool to be generous and social. Inspiration can come from the next generation, the person next to us on a flight, someone we follow on Instagram, or even our cab driver – see Katie Palmer's take on the impact of the youngest wave of millennials, Generation K (p80); Surf Air's establishment of a "mile-high social club" (p76); Nora Oravec's look at the rise of the micro-influencers; and Ana Andjelic's assessment of the sharing economy within travel (p72).

Above all else, though, it's cool to be kind. As established norms get flipped upside down, consumers are seeking stability and even hope from brands they believe in. Done badly, 'brand activism' can be a recipe for disaster – see Pepsi's decidedly 'Diet Woke' foray into the field via Kendall Jenner – but when executed in an authentic manner, travel brands might just change the world. Serena Guen delves deeper in *Power Trips* (p30); chef Dan Barber explains the power of your plate (p52); Kurt Bredenbeck extols the virtues of the social enterprise hotel (p26); and Harsha Chanrai outlines how pop-up hospitality schools can inject value into the intangible (p40).

In short, cool in 2017 doesn't care about being cool any more – it just cares, full-stop. It redefines 'rebel' as acting for, rather than against; it's a space to find your global tribe; it's a platform for experimentation; and most of all, it moves tirelessly forwards.

So for LE 2017, we invite you to care about our individual and collective futures. And ultimately, how cool is that?.



CONTRIBUTORS

We asked the people behind this year's stories what they think defines a rebel in travel...



**ANA
ANDJELIC**

Ana Andjelic is a strategist, writer and doctor of sociology, whose job is to help global luxury, fashion and lifestyle brands transform into modern businesses. Having appeared on Luxury Women to Watch 2016 and The Guardian's Top Ten Digital Strategists to Watch, she's obsessed with how technology changes the relationship between people and brands.

"Rebellious travel brands are those that live by the values of digital economy: transparency, sustainability, measurability, responsibility and connectivity."



**BEX
HUGHES**

Bex Hughes is currently based in the Middle East. She's a Farsi language graduate and former Artist Manager for the Hay Festival and now works as a freelance writer and research analyst, focusing on Iran and the wider region.

"To me, to be a rebel in travel means pushing the boundaries of personal experience, mindset and comfort - to go adventuring makes our souls a little richer!"



**JAMES
DAVIDSON**

James Davidson is the editor-in-chief of We Heart, an online design and lifestyle magazine that he founded in 2009 as a personal blog and now receives over half a million monthly views.

"It's not good enough to break rules and defy convention. Rebels are those who forge their own path through honesty and integrity and believe in themselves; and if they value their own direction, today's thoughtful travellers will take it with them."



**SERENA
GUEN**

Named the "Mark Zuckerberg of publishing" by Bloomberg and the BBC, Serena Guen founded the award-winning SUITCASE Magazine, recently launching its media agency branch. Her accolades include being named as Forbes 30 under 30 in 2017, 25 under 25 most influential Londoners by the Evening Standard, winning a Woman of the Future Award for media and being shortlisted for the UK's Young Travel Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2016.

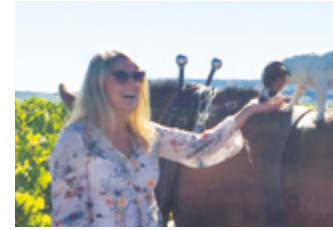
"Being a rebel means learning the rules so you can break them."



**EMMA
LOVE**

A freelance journalist for the last eight years, Emma Love specialises in design, interiors and travel. She is a Contributing Editor at Condé Nast Traveller UK and Elle Decoration magazine UK. So far this year, assignments have included horse riding in the Atacama Desert, interviewing top chef Thomas Keller and writing about contemporary high-end teaware.

"A rebellious traveller is someone who doesn't follow the crowd to the nearest beach but instead goes in search of new, undiscovered destinations."



**JULIANA
SHALLCROSS**

A self-confessed hotel addict, Juliana Shallcross has been reporting on hotels around the world for more than a decade. She was previously the managing editor of HotelChatter.com. A good portion of her job involves sleeping in new hotels, obsessing over technology and keeping tabs on the ever-changing hospitality landscape. She's based in Los Angeles.

"To be a rebel means to understand that you can't be everything to everyone and even to go in search of something that doesn't have mass appeal. Then have the courage to see it through."



**OLIVIA
SQUIRE**

Olivia Squire is a freelance travel writer and Editorial Manager for Beyond Luxury Media, where she oversees THE SHIFT online and this year's THE SHIFT magazine. She loves old buildings, new books, strong drinks and bright lipstick, and is on the constant lookout for hotels that combine all four.

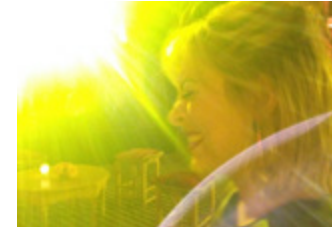
"In travel (as in life), rebels see how it could all go wrong and make The Jump anyway. Probably whilst wearing some really loud accessories."



**NORA
ORAVECZ**

Nora Oravec is best known for her seven books, being Forbes Hungary's most influential blogger 2016, and as a Huffington Post contributor. She has given sold-out talks around the world and is mainly obsessed with helping aspiring entrepreneurs and writers to grow their brands.

"No matter if it's exploring or welcoming travellers, a true rebel does it their own way: with passion, focus and taking care of others."



**KATIE
PALMER**

Katie Palmer is a writer, dog lady and dessert obsessive with a penchant for interviewing fascinating people. Becoming Editorial Manager for Beyond Luxury Media has only exacerbated her already severe wanderlust.

"Whatever their cause, true rebels don't try to be anything other than themselves."



**ALICE
TATE**

Alice Tate is a freelance travel writer, owner of the personal blog Flash Anthology and PR Manager. Her love for travel grew from being dragged around European campsites in a hot, sticky tent with three other siblings. Now, she's the one dragging her partner around the globe - give or take the sticky tent. She lives for the water and is a keen runner, recently collaborating with adidas for the London Marathon.

"Being a rebel in travel means to push forward and do things your way!"

CONTENTS



p15



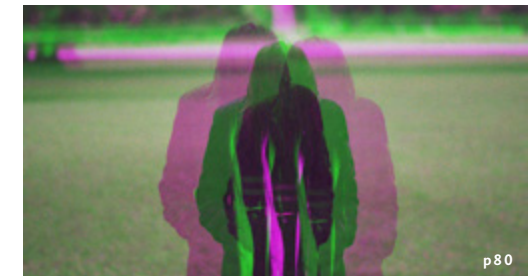
p36



p68



p56



p80

#INTERIORPORN 15

Emma Love trawls the 'gram to bring you 2017's hottest interior design trends

THE BIRTH OF THE VANILLA TOURIST 22

James Davidson laments the homogenisation of travel and dares us to be different

COOL IS DEAD: LONG LIVE COOL 26

REBEL CONCEPTS // Green Rooms' Chairman, Kurt Bredenbeck, tells Olivia Squire why social enterprise will disrupt the future of travel

POWER TRIPS 30

#CookForSyria founder Serena Guen on her realisation that no business or individual is too small to make an impact

IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE THE OMOTENASHI OF THE FUTURE? 36

Ana Andjelic navigates the right way to emulate the Japanese spirit of hospitality with the help of AI

40 INVESTING IN THE INTANGIBLE

REBEL CONCEPTS // SAIRA Hospitality's founder, Harsha Chanrai, tells Olivia Squire why hospitality schools will disrupt the future of travel

44 HOT HOTEL HYGGE FOR 2018

Juliana Shallcross checks in on the hotel contenders serving up hygge good vibes for 2018

48 DO YOU WANT COLLAGEN WITH THAT?

Alice Tate explores the latest in the 'sportspitality' revolution

52 GETTING WASTED NEVER FELT SO GOOD

REBEL CONCEPTS // wastED co-founder Dan Barber tells Olivia Squire why mindful dining will disrupt the future of travel

THE RISE OF THE UNDERDOGS 56

'Secondary cities' from Leeds to Leipzig are having their turn in the spotlight, says James Davidson

BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL 60

Olivia Squire investigates how the latest breed of 'thinking festivals' are merging work and play

SAY NĪ HǎO TO CHINA'S 'NEW HEDONISTS' 65

REBEL CONCEPTS // CHAO co-founder, Maurice Li, tells Katie Palmer how China's homegrown contemporary hotels will disrupt the future of travel

IRAN IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS 68

Bex Hughes discovers a creative, dynamic Iran on the move from foreign stereotypes

SHARING ECONOMY: ENEMY OR ALLY? 72

Ana Andjelic explores how sharing economy upstarts are prompting rebellious travel brands to reinvent themselves

76 JOINING THE MILE-HIGH (SOCIAL) CLUB

REBEL CONCEPTS // Surf Air's Louise O'Riordan tells Katie Palmer why subscription models will disrupt the future of travel

80 GENERATION K

Forget millennials: Katie Palmer investigates why trendsetting brands should get to know Generation K

84 GO MICRO FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

Nora Oravec gives her top tips for finding micro-influencers with maximum reach

86 WELCOME TO THE INDEPENDENTLY MINDED MOVEMENT

Jacob Howie explains the secret ingredients that go into curating SLH's international movement

90 EXHIBITOR PROFILES



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COVER PHOTO BY: CESARIN MATEO FOR MADERAS VILLAGE

“Welcome to LE 2017: one more giant leap towards becoming travel’s festival of creativity.”

Serge Dive, CEO & Founder
 Sarah Ball, COO & Co-Founder
 Cj Holden, Event Director

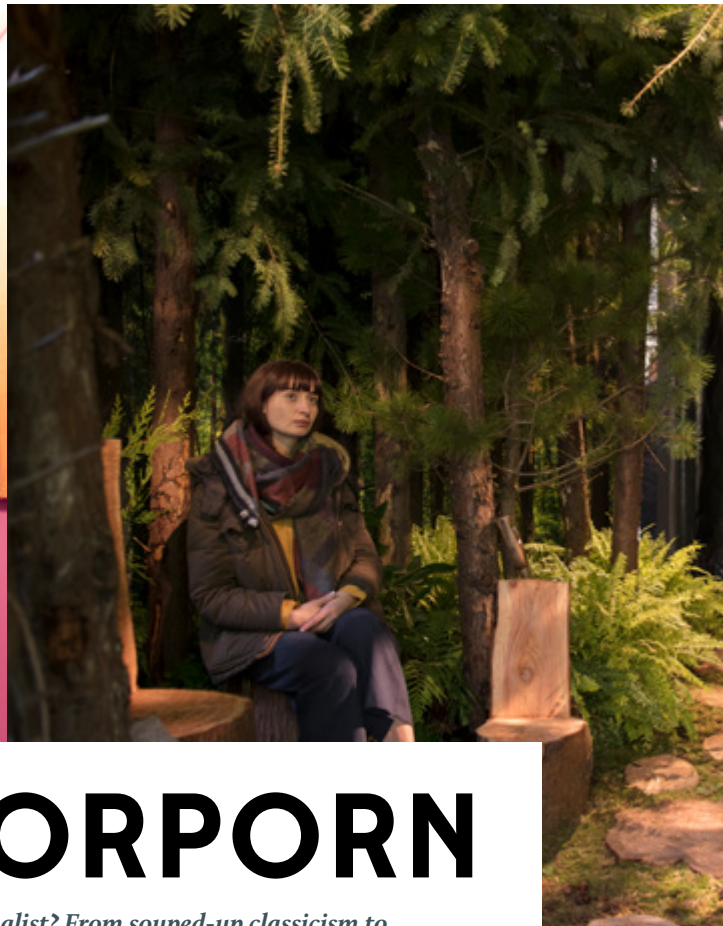
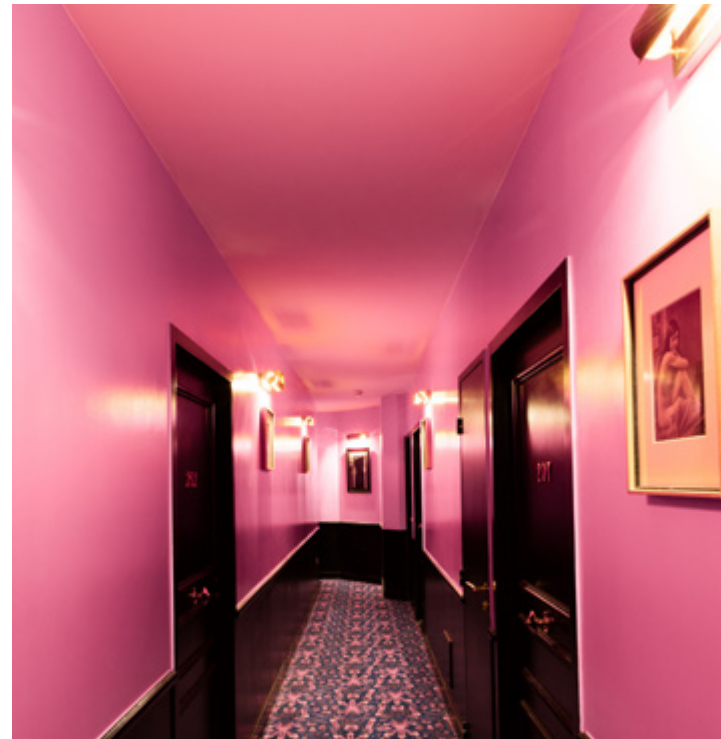


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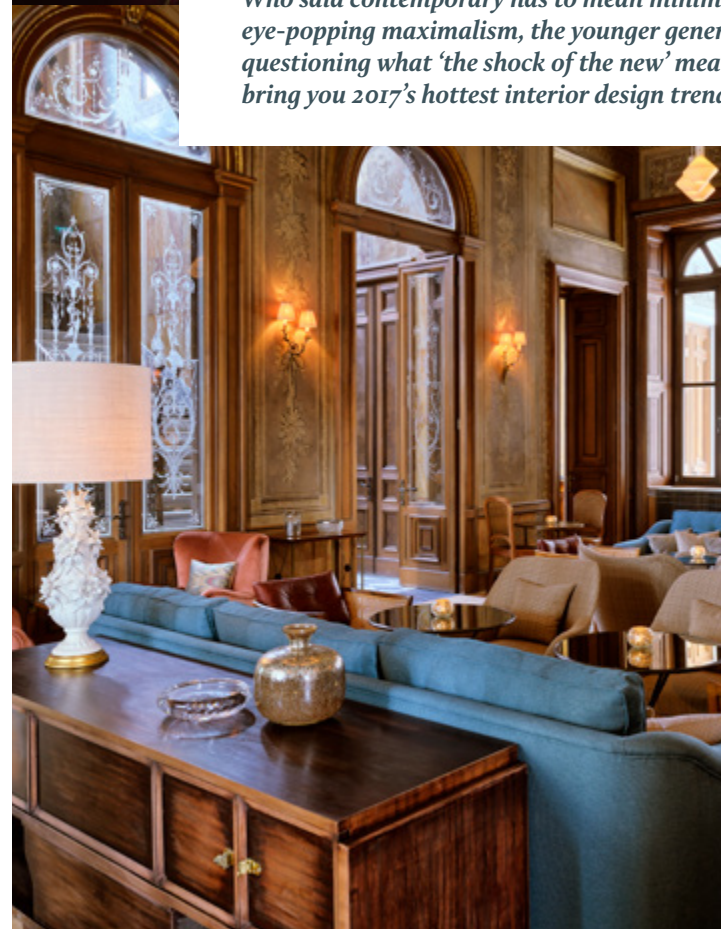
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#INTERIORPORN

Who said contemporary has to mean minimalist? From souped-up classicism to eye-popping maximalism, the younger generation of rebel brands are constantly questioning what 'the shock of the new' means today. Emma Love trawls the 'gram to bring you 2017's hottest interior design trends.





1. Rugs by Gur x Martin Blanchard for Casa Mae

I Want One Of Those

Hoteliers become interior designers (and vice versa)

Once upon a time it was tricky to recreate a hotel look at home. Now, more and more often, you can buy what you see – from lamps and cushions (UXUA in Brazil (4)) to ceramics (Casa Mae in Portugal (1)) made in collaboration with local artisans. Last year, Soho House launched Soho Home and, after their custom furniture and textiles proved popular with guests, Canada’s Fogo Island Inn has set up Fogo Island Shop, selling wares created by locals in collaboration with designers from around the world. That’s not all: interior brands are also turning hoteliers, with LA-based Parachute Home renting out one-bedroom Parachute Hotel; Restoration Hardware set to open its first hotel in New York; and west elm slated to open properties in Detroit, Savannah and Indianapolis in 2018.



2. Blecker Lamp by Soho Home



4. UXUA



3. west elm Hotels



Sky Gardens at PARKROYAL on Pickering [Photo: Patrick Bingham Hall]



1. Vertical garden at Hotel ICON

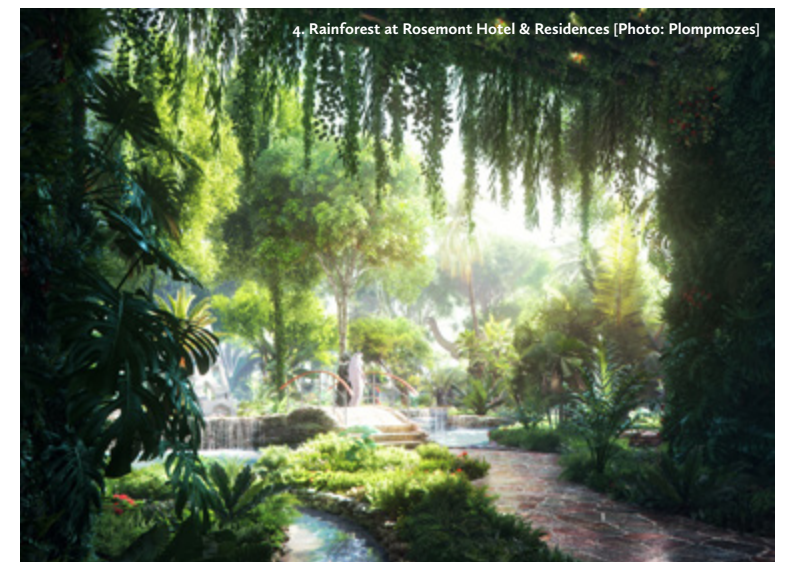
Outside In

Greenery goes wild in the city

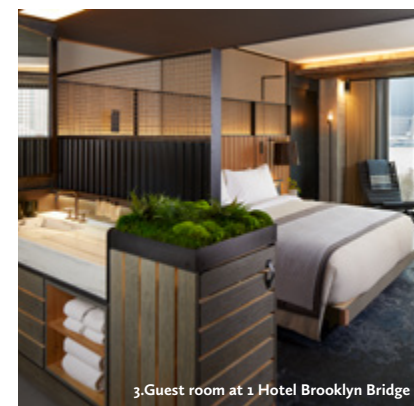
Long before Pantone named ‘Greenery’ as the colour of 2017, hotel owners had realised the soothing benefits of using plants to enhance design, whether in dramatic vertical living walls (1), sky gardens or greenhouse-like foliage trailing from a glass ceiling. Airbnb began the year by transforming a London warehouse into a temporary ‘Outside In’ home filled with ivy (2), conifers and giant cacti; eco-minded brand 1 Hotels has put plants in the rooms of its newest outpost at Brooklyn Bridge (3); and at Rosemont Hotel & Residences in Dubai (4) (expected to open in 2018) there are plans for an artificial rainforest, no less.



2. Airbnb's Outside In House [Photo: Ed Reeve]



4. Rainforest at Rosemont Hotel & Residences [Photo: Plompmozes]



3. Guest room at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge



1. The Beekman



5. Batty Langley's



1. Hotel Not Hotel [Photo: Arnor Coenen]

More Is More

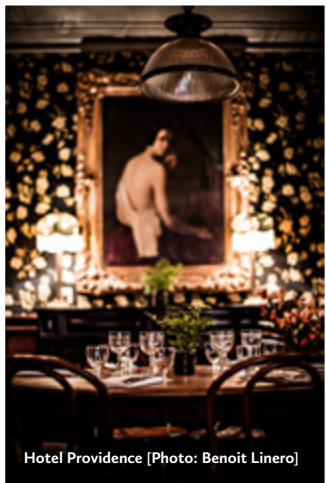
Maximalism (breaks all the) rules

Whether it's leopard print walls, bright paint hues or mixing and matching patterns with a devil-may-care attitude, 2017's boldest hotels are adapting the approach of looking in the mirror... and putting another thing on. In fairytale-inspired 'A House for Essex', by architecture studio FAT and Grayson Perry, tapestries, life-size ceramics and a skull-mosaic floor are a key part of the interiors; while at Hotel Not Hotel in Amsterdam (1), each room is a work of art. Other interpretations include a retro spin, as at The Dwell Hotel in Tennessee (2), and colour-happy textiles at The Whitby in New York (3), Firmdale Hotels' latest offering.

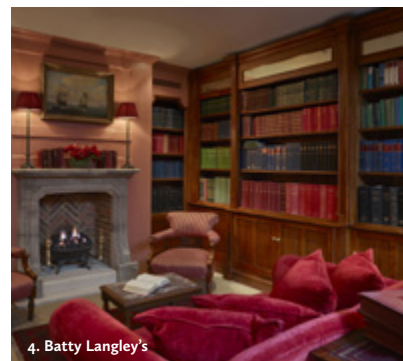
Days Gone By

Nostalgia makes a comeback

When the Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club opened in March, it was with a reimagined take on a glamorous past that once attracted the likes of Sinatra and Churchill. Whether it's a landmark building restored as a hotel (such as The Beekman (1), which has taken up residence in one of New York's first skyscrapers), or a hotel that takes inspiration from history (such as The Tamburlaine in Cambridge (2), which borrows its name and design influences from a Persian emperor in a 16th-century play), the past is so now. Would-be grown-ups take note: this trend's signature marble bathrooms, original frescoes, glass chandeliers and four poster beds will make you instantly more sophisticated - see East London's Batty Langley's (3 - 4) aristocratic glamour for inspiration.



Hotel Providence [Photo: Benoit Linero]



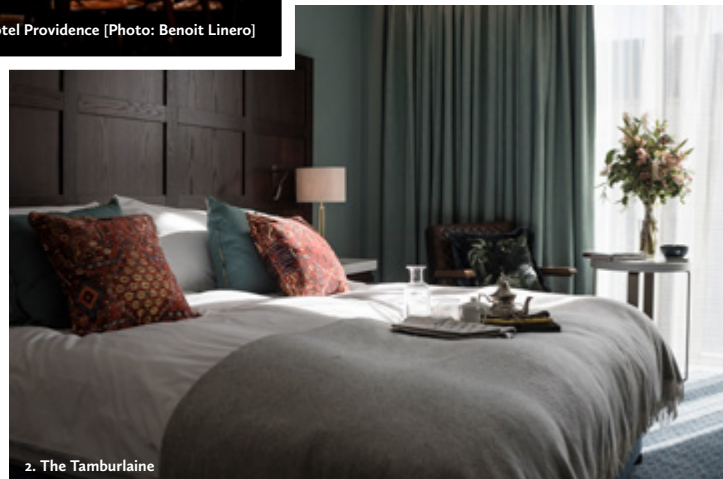
4. Batty Langley's



Hotel de JoBo



2. The Dwell Hotel



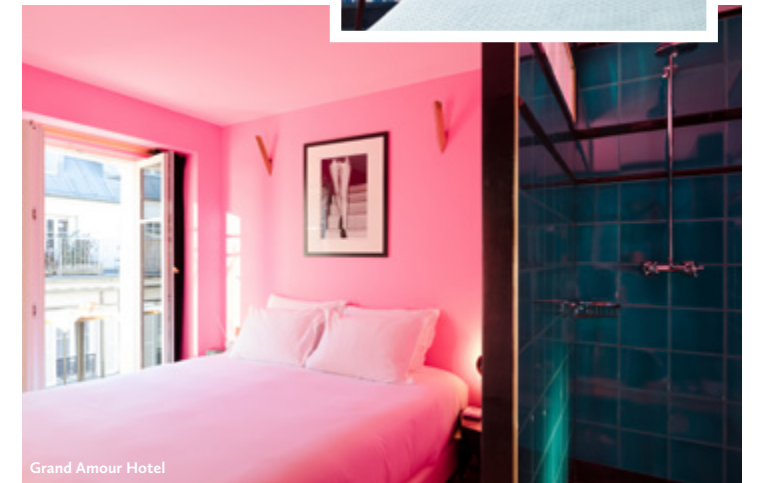
2. The Tamburlaine



The Refuge Dining Room at Principal Manchester



3. The Whitby



Grand Amour Hotel

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THE BIRTH OF THE VANILLA TOURIST (and the Death of Counterculture)

Where have all the individuals gone? James Davidson laments the homogenisation of travel and implores us to dare to be different in the new landscape of bland...



In his long-read essay for online tech magazine The Verge, freelance writer Kyle Chayka quoted the term 'vanilla tourist'. It stems from a former Airbnb 'Superhost' who had given up the game as a result of over-gentrification within the shared economy platform; and it is a fine summary as you will find of what these next 1,500 words are about.

Culture throughout the 21st century — more so its second decade

— has perhaps been defined by one protagonist: the hipster. Coined during the jazz age of the 1920s, it was solidified in the '40s before dropping off the contemporary lexicon somewhere around the time Chuck Berry lewdly thrashed his electric guitar roughly a decade later. Then came The Beatles and psychedelia, and then prog rock and hard rock and punk rock and disco and new wave and the new romantics and so on... By the time I was a spotty

teen in the 1990s, grunge had gripped youth culture and I would spend half a decade looking like I'd been dragged through a hedge backwards, before finding rave and spending the second half of the decade wearing satin and dancing until the following lunchtime.

Out of all of the countless names I was called, hipster was never one. Hipness and hipsterdom, and hipsterism and hipsters had, as far



as I was concerned, fallen off the face of the earth — at least until someone on their way home from an Oliver Twist casting stumbled upon a café serving up flat whites, at which point contemporary culture would change irreversibly. Mumford and Sons; waistcoats; twirly moustaches; steampunk; artisan anything and everything; an unhealthy preoccupation with Victoriana; a fixation with the leftfield elements of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's portfolio; mixology; microbreweries; fixed gear bicycles... A cultural shift that coincided with the rise of social media, going for a coffee would never be the same again.



Now the reason I dredge up my days as a confused, long-haired raver with a Kurt Cobain obsession is thus: with the lack of social media came the lack of social normalisation. Some of my friends were ravers, some skaters, some goths, moshers, or indie kids. Some were what we called 'tidies'. And they were the worst of all. We had to go in search of culture, it was not going to find us; at least not in a long-forgotten seaside town. Which brings me back to Marcus Mumford and his regrettable companions — could they have headlined Glastonbury in the 1990s, without the advent of cultural normalisation?

Fast-forward to 2017, and Kyle Chayka's essay is an invaluable read. If you don't have the time, I've put together a handy abstraction in the form of our favourite contemporary benchmark, the hashtag:

[#coffee](#) [#airbnb](#) [#instagram](#) [#kinfolk](#) [#edisonbulbs](#) [#reclaimedwood](#) [#foundmaterials](#) [#industrial](#) [#gentrification](#) [#globalisation](#)

Now, the wound filament bulbs popularised by Edison Electric Light Company at the turn of the 1990s are given a bad rap, as are salvaged materials. Beards are spared, but we all know that's for not wanting to come across as hackneyed. Whatever the hipster cliché, the message is the same: wherever you are in the world (London, Melbourne, Seoul, Beijing, Manchester), the rise of the



internet and social media means that we are living in an age of global homogenisation. The rise and rise of millennial travel only serves to heighten this soaring threat to individualism.

It goes like this: arrive in a new city, seek out the 'hood deemed hippest, head for a coffee, craft beer, 136-hour cooked wood chip-smoked pulled pork sandwich, or spend a few hours browsing 'concept stores'. Anything feel vaguely familiar? Every venue you step into has been designed by a committee of millions: Pinterest. You're there because Foursquare recommended it to you. You like it. You Instagram it. You share it to Twitter and Facebook; and the online world has another flat-white-on-indie-magazine to cast its likes upon.

Urban Outfitters props up a corner on every recently-gentrified high street; the independent stores are influenced by the desires of local bloggers and Instagrammers (who are influenced by the trends of international bloggers and Instagrammers); the local big name retailers play catch up with the whole cycle; then everyone sleeps, eats, repeats...

And hoteliers know you need somewhere familiar to get your head down — which is why there are countless new brands being cooked up in the marketing departments of hotel giants the world over. What started with brands like Ace, The Standard, and Thompson in the





Which brings me back to the ‘vanilla tourist’, with their 600 shades of beige, and our friend Kurt Cobain, so vocal of corporate influence in music and youth culture. In the early 1990s, shouting about normalisation was the trend; now the normalisation is the trend. Social media has vanilla-washed counterculture. The ‘vanilla tourist’ is merely a side-effect of what is happening the world over: the ‘hipster fonts’ so popular in Brooklyn’s rise from ghetto to Pabst Blue Ribbon-sipping playground for ‘mobile workers’ can be found in the smallest of towns in the smallest of countries, and X Factor contestants look the spitting image of your favourite barista. In fact, are we living in an age where a teen would rather grow up to be an award-winning coffee bartender than a rock star?

States, citizenM and Generator Hostels in Europe, has snowballed in recent years. Where every marketer and their assistant had aped Ian Schrager movements in New York throughout the ‘90s and ‘00s, it’s the laid-back cultural hub that’s now in their sights.

Hilton has Canopy, and Tru for good measure. Marriott has Moxy; Hyatt has Centric; Radisson has Red; and even Best Western are getting in on the act — say hello to Vib, everybody. Who makes up these names, I do not know; but what I do know is that — whether its Moxy or Centric, Canopy or Red — I’ll be able to make a good guess at the phraseology being employed in their marketing materials: “connected traveller”, “local connections”, “cultural programme”, “artisan coffee”, “urban”... Need I go on?

Hotel brands, of course, need to adapt. Airbnb has changed the city accommodation landscape, and the independent brands that pioneered the march for millennials have grown into serious competition. But like the cafés who have looked to Pinterest for their Antipodean aesthetics, and the Instagrammer whose Kinfolk and flat white combo will be the same in

Stockholm, Nashville or Beirut, there is grave danger in normalising counterculture. That’s if counterculture even exists any longer.

In Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*, Brian makes an impassioned plea to his followers: “You’ve got to think for yourselves!” He calls out. “You’re all individuals!” The response? In unison: “Yes! We’re all individuals!” Indeed, where have all the individuals gone?

We live in what marketers refer to as the ‘global village’, and it’s nothing new — the theories of McDonaldisation and Disneyfication (“Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real”, muses French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, “when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyper-real and of simulation”) have been bandied about for decades; since MTV beamed into our living rooms, since Nickelodeon and Disney Channel raised a new breed of cookie-cutter TV-/film-/pop-stars who would make Spice Girls look like Sex Pistols... What is new, though, is our lack of resistance.

“Social media has vanilla-washed counterculture. The ‘vanilla tourist’ is merely a side-effect”

So it makes perfect sense that Hilton’s Canopy and Marriott’s Moxy join the vanilla revolution. They won’t be short of MacBook-wielding fans of Stumptown Coffee attracted by their high-speed WiFi and millennial marketing, but how long before cultural programming becomes the new Corby Trouser Press, and hotel brands are left with a tonne of hotels that are distinguishable only by (silly) name?

Can’t we dream to be different?

Luckily, and as Brian pleaded for, some individuals remain. In Reykjavík, design ho(s)tel ODDSSON is stuffed with rare design classics and a sunrise-coloured electronic

drum-kit. It has a karaoke booth in the middle of its restaurant. Kitsch and antiques and conceptual art roam freely in Paris’s Grand Amour Hotel; and in Canberra, Hotel Hotel is a guiding light for enthusiasts of cutting-edge art and design. Over in Hong Kong, Tuve’s exterior looks like a disused (for decades) car garage, or an art installation. I can’t decide.

In fact, the more you look, the more individuals are at work. Why aren’t we taking inspiration from Grayson Perry, whose astonishing livable artwork *A House for Essex* is so unconventional it should be locked up for discordancy? Why aren’t we embracing Hotel Not Hotel’s two-fingered salute to the concept of rooms and space?

Gladly, there’s a growing appetite for contradiction, too. Ettore Sottsass’s Memphis movement has enjoyed a welcome renaissance of late, the deliberate obtuseness of Postmodernism happily jarring against those pesky Edison lightbulbs, as has opulence and overt maximalism. Is the ‘vanilla tourist’ ready for a change? Perhaps



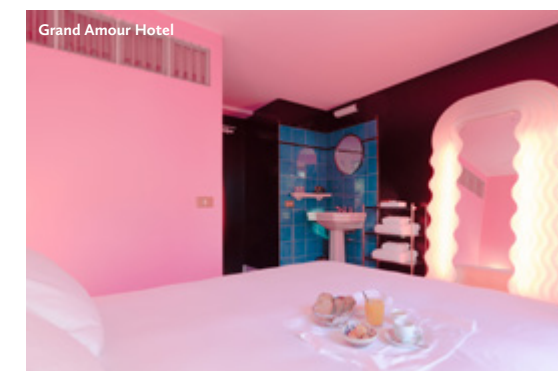
they’re not. But that’s a good thing. Individuality is a dish best served with a side helping of surprise. You know exactly what you’re going to get from your Instagram-ready café — your coffee tastes the same from Barcelona to Beijing — in the same way that you know what you’re going to get from a Holiday Inn, or Best Western. Maybe sometimes a little dissonance wouldn’t be a bad thing.



Monster Salon & Dining Rooms at Hotel Hotel [Photo: Ross Honeysett]



House For Essex



Grand Amour Hotel

Kurt Bredenbeck, Chairman of Green Rooms

REBEL
CONCEPTS//



COOL IS DEAD,
LONG LIVE COOL

A 1930s building in Wood Green has become a very modern, counter-cool conduit for creativity, community and do-it-yourself entrepreneurship. Green Rooms' Chairman, Kurt Bredenbeck, tells Olivia Squire why social enterprise will disrupt the future of travel.

“HOUSEKEEPING!” calls Kurt Bredenbeck, the Chairman of London’s Green Rooms, as he knocks briskly on a bedroom door before striding inside. He wants to show me the furniture he hand-selected for the interior, you see; and doors are very much symbolic at this friendliest of inner-city hotels.

But then, Green Rooms is not your average hotel. In fact, it’s not really even a hotel at all, with an assortment of dorms, shared bathrooms and private rooms nudging it towards the ho(s)tel hybrid that has become popular of late. However, there’s no guarantee that any of these spaces will be accommodating sleepers; we might instead stumble upon a live performance, as the audience for Hotel Europe – a part interactive theatre, part audio installation that took place across five rooms – did back in February. Or perhaps we’ll end up picking up a paintbrush for a life-drawing session, witnessing some experimental stand-up comedy, or taking in a new exhibition.

This is because Green Rooms (named after the artists’ waiting room in a theatre, as well as its location in Wood Green) is the self-proclaimed “first arts hotel in London”, designed as an affordable place of refuge, passage and creation for performers, artists and musicians. With beds ranging from £18 to £85 per night, this is no luxury product; but in its niche crowd curation, strong sense of purpose and fearless attitude, it effortlessly provides the authentic, artistic experience that most ‘lifestyle’ hotels would sacrifice their left wing for.

The collaboration between Bredenbeck, a founder and early-stage investor of One Aldwych and the founder and creator of The Hoxton, and Nick Hartwright, co-founder of social enterprise co-working space The Mill Co. Project,



Outside Green Rooms in Wood Green, London

arose when Hartwright approached Bredenbeck with a lease, funding from the Mayor of London and Haringey Council, and the seed of an idea for an art hotel.

“Initially I thought ‘art hotel – what does that mean?’” laughs Bredenbeck, a jovial Anglophile wearing a tweed suit and American accent. “There are all sorts of ‘art hotels’ with billion-dollar collections on the walls, and most of them are a bit fake, with lots of money thrown at them. Then Nick explained it wasn’t an art hotel, but a hotel for artists – and he really meant performing artists.”

Having always had a penchant for a groundbreaking idea – “I do feel a bit rebellious against the hotel industry, because it’s so dominated by huge monopolies and super-billionaires. I like to do something new” – Bredenbeck joined forces with Hartwright and six months and £700,000 later, Green Rooms was born. Rather charmingly, Hartwright invited theatrical groups to use the site as a performance space during construction, resulting in National Theatre students enacting mini-plays around the builders (and breaking



Nick Hartwright, Founder of Green Rooms

“I DO FEEL A BIT REBELLIOUS AGAINST THE HOTEL INDUSTRY, BECAUSE IT’S SO DOMINATED BY HUGE MONOPOLIES AND SUPER-BILLIONAIRES. I LIKE TO DO SOMETHING NEW”

- KURT BREDENBECK



Drag artist Jonny Woo performs at the hotel's launch night

the lift) two days before launch. "I thought, 'there's no way we can do this' – but I went with it, because we're an art hotel, so it's going to be ingrained right into the dust and plaster", remembers Bredenbeck.

From the six-month local chef's residencies in the kitchen through to the British-made and sourced furniture throughout, this mission to provide a space for creative endeavour and enterprise is embedded in Green Rooms' core. "We're promoting British craft and design", Bredenbeck explains. "All of the furniture is British and hand-selected by me, from these vintage chairs, which come from the Ministry of Defence, to that sofa, which was made by a family workshop in West Wycombe. I'm obsessed with having 'a line of beauty', a thread through everything."

This very "anti-Soho House" philosophy of ongoing co-creation is refreshingly anarchic, with several elements still being fitted during my visit and plans for future residents to contribute one of their artworks. Bredenbeck confirms, "I think handmade is the new luxury. This is a very do-it-yourself, handmade hotel."

However, he's keen to emphasise that being handmade is no excuse for being slovenly: "Part of being a social enterprise is being an enterprise. It needs to work as a hotel product or guests won't come back and you won't make money." He remains convinced that socially responsible products are what modern consumers want, and

that combining good business with doing good will inform the way future industry works.

"It's part of what is and what will be. I think it's a generational thing - all men my age were told to go and work for a management consultancy or investment bank; apart from Barack Obama, they didn't think about working in the community or how you could create a product that people wanted, but also addressed other needs. That's what social enterprise is – a new way of looking at business."

For Bredenbeck, this longing for inclusive business is what drove his previous hotel projects, which also refused to worship at the altar of 'cool' and exclusive. For both One Aldwych and The Hoxton, "I was acting against the rise of the super cool, super up-your-ass 'design hotels' that were so pretentious, a lot of people felt uncomfortable in them. I wanted to occupy a new space in the market that wasn't necessarily for creative people, but was anti-brand, anti-cool, available to everybody."

Citing the transformation of post-Hoxton Shoreditch as evidence of cool gone wrong ("Shoreditch is kind of my fault; I started a nightmare – everything looks the same. It's horrifying!"), he believes that gentrification is only a problem when handled inelegantly. "The big brands just drop in like a spaceship. People don't really know or care where they are; they're not participating. When I build a hotel, people are coming to explore." Rather than focusing on being 'cool', he argues, "You want to make something real. The hotel is a ground-up



A dormitory room complete with bunk beds

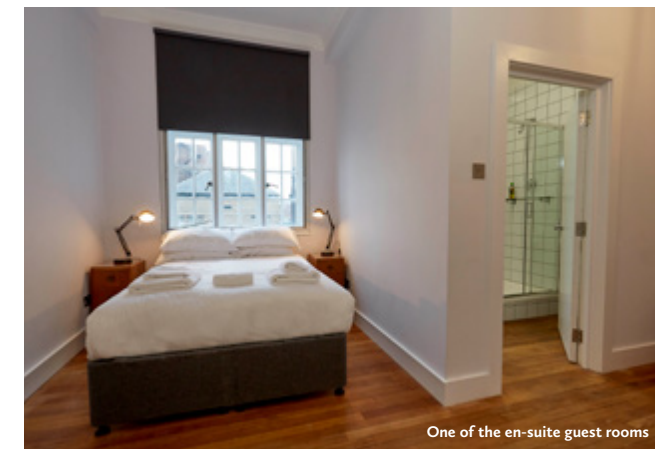


Vintage and handmade furniture in the lobby

business that's supporting people, training people, hiring people: that adds to the economy and the community. For the new generation, that's a very desirable attribute."

Over in the as yet decidedly un-Shoreditch outpost of Wood Green, Green Rooms encapsulates this anti-cool, pro-inclusive spirit, rising phoenix-like from the dust and plaster. "We have multidimensional ambitions for this little thing", Bredenbeck muses. "We're on the cutting edge of town, we're between a hostel and a hotel, and we're the first social enterprise start-up in the hotel business."

For anyone who remains unconvinced that caring is the new 'cool', he remarks, "I'm normally moaning about these things five to ten years before everybody else, but I know eventually everybody will be following me! It's a huge expanding area and it's non-competitive: there's always people to help, there are always needs." Rebels, take note: when it comes to social enterprise, the door is open.



One of the en-suite guest rooms

"YOU WANT TO MAKE SOMETHING REAL. THE HOTEL IS A GROUND-UP BUSINESS THAT ADDS TO THE ECONOMY AND THE COMMUNITY. FOR THE NEW GENERATION, THAT'S A VERY DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTE"

- KURT BREDENBECK



Photo: Meet Me There Eco Lodge in Ghana

POWER TRIPS: CAN TRAVEL CHANGE THE WORLD?

*Social enterprises are emerging as a potent force for empowering consumers, enlivening communities and even changing the world. #CookForSyria founder **Serena Guen** reflects on her realisation that no business or individual is too small to make an impact – and what this means for the travel industry.*

It all started on Instagram. I watched as people took to social media to pronounce their solidarity with Paris and then Istanbul as terror attacks shook these metropolises, remembering the many (often non-Western) places that don't receive such levels of attention. Like a lot of people, I was overcome by a sort of shocked paralysis and felt at a loss as to how I could help.

But last summer a field trip with Unicef kicked me into action, as I realised that no contribution is too small. Flicking through my Instagram feed and seeing hundreds of images of food, it occurred to me that eating is something that unites people; it knows no borders and is something we share globally.

I got in touch with Clerkenwell Boy, one of the UK's leading food Instagrammers, to ask if he would co-host a dinner in aid of Unicef NEXT Generation's Syria appeal. We called on industry friends including Yotam Ottolenghi, Angela Hartnett, Nuno Mendes, Nigella Lawson and Jamie Oliver to help, and within a week we had dozens more chefs contacting us to ask how they could get involved. One Clerkenwell Boy Instagram post later and we received a barrage of emails from the general public asking how they could join in too. Clearly, we had struck a chord in showing 'normal' people how they could make a difference, by finding something that resonated with them and was easy to orchestrate.



Symmetry Breakfast, part of the Cook For Syria cookbook (Photos: Katie Wilson)

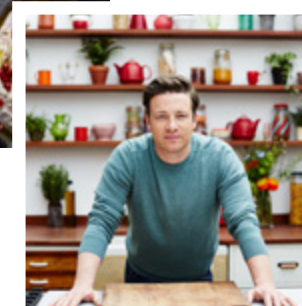
Over the next couple of months, #CookForSyria was born. Following the hugely successful launch dinner, hundreds of restaurants across London put Syrian-inspired dishes on their menus, with proceeds going towards the appeal; meanwhile, many people hosted supper clubs at home using recipes from our microsite, sharing their experiences using the hashtag #CookForSyria. We decided to continue the legacy by launching a cookbook of Syrian recipes from top chefs in time for Christmas: it reached #21 on Amazon's bestseller list within just two weeks of its release.

To date, #CookForSyria has launched in London, Sydney and Melbourne, and by the end of 2017 it will be in Hamburg, Munich, Berlin, Paris, New York, LA, San Francisco – and hopefully further. So far, we have raised over £500,000 for Unicef's Syria Relief appeal, helping children to build a future and ensure that no generation is lost. Equally importantly, we have shared a little bit of Syrian culture, helping to humanise a crisis that was in danger of losing the public's compassion, while showing a different side to a country that has come to be portrayed solely through the media lens of shattered buildings, destruction and despair.

“We have shared a little bit of Syrian culture, helping to humanise a crisis that was in danger of losing the public's compassion”



Jamie Oliver, part of the Cook For Syria cookbook (Photo: ©2016 Jamie Oliver Enterprises Limited)



I often get asked how #CookForSyria “went viral”. There are a few components that contributed to its success – not least that Syrian cuisine, which is at the heart of the country’s very warm culture, is delicious! But I think it’s largely attributable to the fact that we found a common global theme (food) that exists outside the political sphere, and created a simple model that everyone could participate in and could easily be replicated in other cities. Add the wildfire power of social media and Syria’s omnipresence in the news to the mix, and we had all the ingredients to create something big.

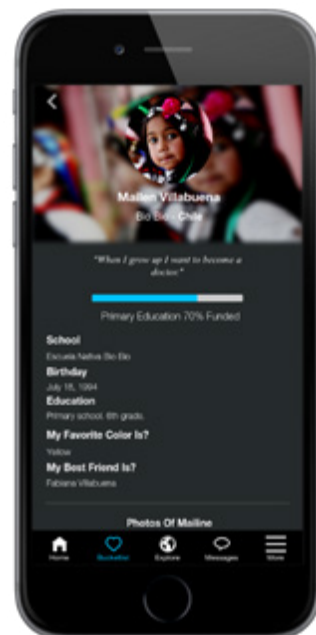
That being said, the challenges of coordinating a successful campaign should not be underestimated; we are so grateful for the tireless work of all our volunteers, and there was definitely a stroke of luck involved. If I’m being honest, I thought I would have to wait until SUITCASE had become a big corporation before we could do something that would actually have any impact. I think this is a common misconception among both individuals and businesses; it’s expensive to donate proceeds to certain causes and you cannot always be sure about where that money is going. But what #CookForSyria shows is that it doesn’t have to be about financial expenditure; it is possible to reallocate resources (the majority of work was done by the SUITCASE team, on work time) and have just as big an effect. When it comes to social responsibility there is no ‘one size fits all’, but many different ways to help.

Social media has made it increasingly difficult to ignore the various crises we face in the 21st century, be they humanitarian or environmental, and is challenging our inertia-inducing feelings of helplessness. We can no longer bury our heads in the sand. As an industry that accounts for 10 per cent of the world’s GDP, it makes sense that the travel sector is trailblazing the way for businesses to contribute to global change (and with 88 per cent of Americans agreeing that companies have the power to influence social change in a recent SONAR survey, this amounts to powerful branding as well as good business). It began with ecotourism and sustainability, but we are now seeing an increasing trend for companies to integrate social enterprises (often with added political edge) into their core operational structure, rather than tacking it on as an afterthought – and where companies lead, consumers follow.

Airbnb is a good example of a leading corporation that is bringing social responsibility to the fore with initiatives such as its “Disasters Response Page”, which helps displaced families to find accommodation following human/natural disasters. It also provided relief for those caught up in Trump’s travel ban. By waiving service fees and allowing hosts to list properties for free, much like #CookForSyria, Airbnb offers a direct way for people to help who may not have otherwise known how – and at little or no financial cost. They are currently covering

47 global emergencies and have over 3000 active listings, while campaigns such as #OneLessStranger saw them give away \$1 million to users to spend on small acts of kindness – such as buying seeds to plant in community gardens or buying food for those in need.

More recently, Airbnb’s “social impact experiences” connect guests and hosts around the world with causes they care about: that may be booking yourself into a DJ session in LA, with proceeds going to help families impacted by incarceration; or learning traditional cooking methods in Nairobi, with funds going to a women’s empowerment charity. In a similar vein, Enso Expeditions encourages people to change the way they travel by offering experiences hosted by local individuals and tour operators that they know will directly contribute to a good cause. They place particular emphasis on children and education – in other words, the future. It’s clever marketing that simultaneously helps to bridge the gap between capital and community: brand activism in both senses.



“When it comes to social responsibility there is no ‘one size fits all’, but many different ways to help”



This approach is trickling down to smaller businesses, too. Meet Me There Eco Lodge in Ghana is a not-for-profit hotel supporting an NGO called Dream Big Ghana, which provides sanitation and healthcare in the surrounding villages. Closer to home, Good Hotel is an initiative that recently relocated from Amsterdam to London, taking people out of long-term unemployment by training them up and employing them, before reinvesting all profit back into their continued education and welfare. Similarly, Fogo Island Inn in Canada has been widely written about as a “100 per cent social business” supporting the continued cultural and economic prosperity of a community that once faced extinction following the collapse of the traditional fishing industry, by teaching islanders how to adapt their skills to cope with modernisation as well as creating more jobs. Their operational philosophy as a charitable foundation is spot on.

On a different note, Green Rooms is a hotel that has just opened in my hometown of London and is billed as “the UK’s first arts hotel, a social enterprise that offers affordable accommodation in a beautiful setting that inspires creativity” – pertinent given the governmental cuts to arts funding and demonstrating yet another form

of social welfare within the travel industry [read more on p26]. Many other businesses are contributing in smaller yet equally significant ways, with gestures such as US group 1 Hotels donating minibar profits to charities like Action Against Hunger just one example of socially minded enterprise. It is this diversity within social-savvy business initiatives, and the various levels of commitment available, that will hopefully lead to brand activism and socially orientated policies being written into the blueprint of companies large and small.

What matters more than ever today is to remember that no action is too small; having an impact doesn’t have to involve either raising or spending millions. And it is the responsibility of businesses to lead by example, empowering people by giving them not only the opportunity, but also the mindset to help, in the hope that they will carry the torch into their own lives, and therefore the future.

Meet Serena Guen at the SUITCASE LOUNGE at this year’s Ministry of Ideas

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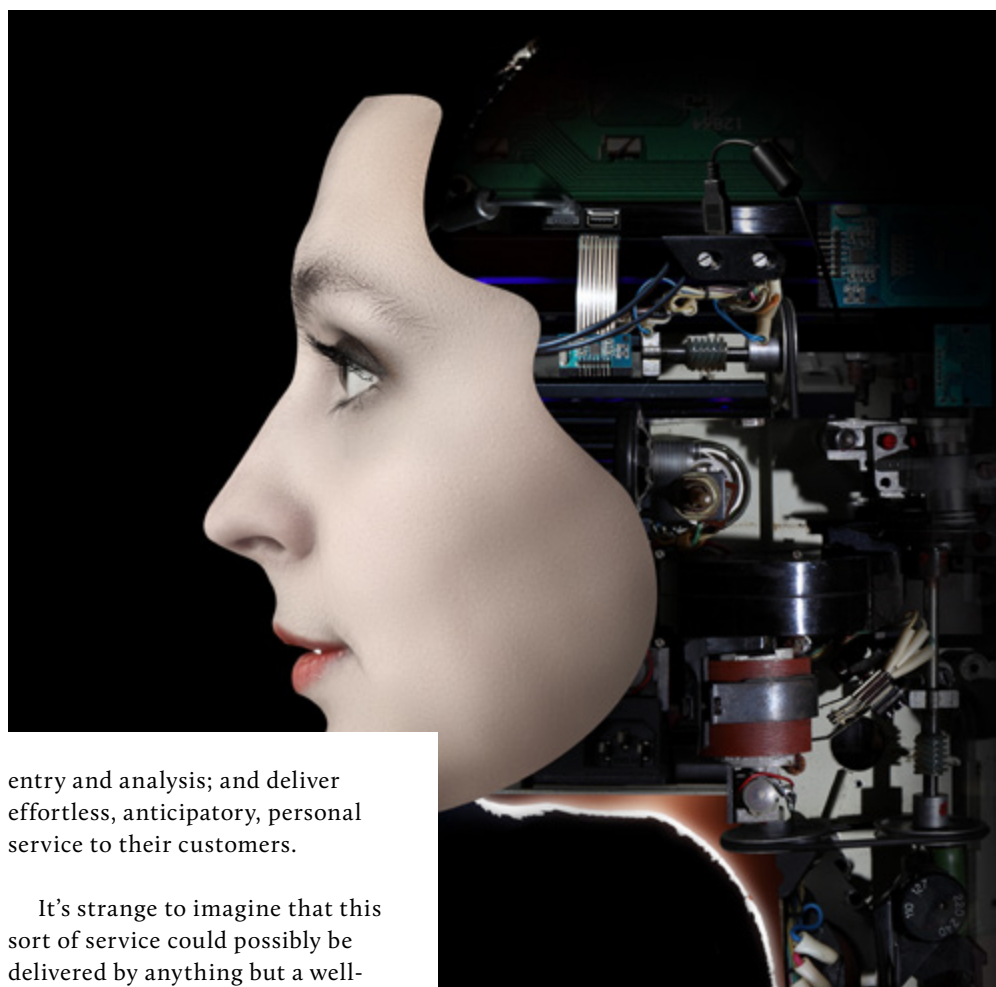
The National YoungArts Foundation identifies and nurtures the most accomplished young artists in the visual, literary, design and performing arts and assists them at critical junctures in their educational and professional development. YoungArts aspires to create a community of alumni that provides a lifetime of encouragement, opportunity and support youngarts.org

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Is Artificial Intelligence the Omotenashi of the Future?

From virtual chatbots programmed to surprise and delight to sci-fi novelties working the lobby, Ana Andjelic navigates the right (and wrong) way to emulate the Japanese spirit of hospitality and service with the help of AI.



Exceptional personal service has always distinguished great hospitality brands from merely good ones. Studies show that customers satisfied with service not only buy more, more often; they also spread the word to their friends. Today social media, virtual assistants and instant messaging make intuitive, quick and seamless personal service more important than ever – the challenge is how to scale it.

Enter artificial intelligence (AI). Smart companies are already experimenting with AI to gather intelligence about their guests; manage their revenue and predictive maintenance; automate their data

entry and analysis; and deliver effortless, anticipatory, personal service to their customers.

It's strange to imagine that this sort of service could possibly be delivered by anything but a well-trained human. After all, the gold standard of great hospitality is the Japanese principle of omotenashi – being intuitive, effortless and flexible – and intuition, empathy and flexibility are uniquely human characteristics. Customers, guests, clients – however you call them – are unpredictable, emotionally nuanced and complex, so they require equally emotionally complex beings to understand them.



AI is used to deliver more seamless, intuitive service at Danny Meyer's restaurants

“The gold standard of great hospitality is the Japanese principle of omotenashi – being intuitive, effortless and flexible – and intuition, empathy and flexibility are uniquely human characteristics”

Yet, left to our own emotional and cognitive devices, humans in the hospitality and service industries can only do so much. Artificial intelligence helps us become superhumans, enabling us to crunch limitless data in a matter of seconds; combine disparate and complex information sources; and connect the dots in order to recognise patterns in ways previously unheard of.

The end game of using AI in hospitality should not be to remove humans from the equation. The role of AI, argues Danny Meyer – the famous restaurateur behind Union Square Hospitality Group and author of customer-care playbook, *Setting the Table* – is to “empower human beings who actually have a beating heart and who are caring people to achieve a greater degree of hospitality.”

Meyer knows what he's talking about. At his restaurant at New York City's Union Square, his managers and sommeliers are using AI to deliver more seamless, intuitive service. “A gentle ping could go from the manager to the front desk to tell them that table 62 is ready”, he explains. “Or, when a waiter places an order for a bottle of wine, the sommelier (who's wearing an Apple watch) gets a ping and can bring that

bottle straightaway. Our system can be alerted that table 42 has just paid their bill, and then ping the coat checker to have their coats ready for them at the front door. The bottom line of all this is, can we give back the gift of time?”

Consensus among those working with AI is that its role is to amplify and augment, rather than replace humans. MIT Media Lab's Director, Joi Ito, believes that “humans are really good at things computers are not” – and vice-versa. Finding, organising and recognising patterns and providing accurate data are AI's strengths. A clever combination of the two gives hospitality an immense opportunity to provide fast, consistent, seamless and personal service at scale.

Like most technology, AI is most effective when it's invisible; when guests witness evidence of AI at work, the execution is flawed. That 70 per cent of interactions with Facebook M, the social media platform's virtual assistant, end in a communication breakdown or a request for human intervention only goes to illustrate the level of risk. But Facebook is not alone in this: Forrester Research claims that most bots currently in use are not ready to deal with the complexities of human conversation, requiring human oversight in order to succeed.

If you've ever seen Terminator, you'll be inclined to agree that putting ourselves entirely in the hands of robots is probably not a good idea. Plus, it's expensive. In reality, AI conversations only make sense if they feel more, not less, natural (read: human) than scrolling through an FAQ sheet; this requires a combination of humans and technologies such as natural language processing, artificial intelligence and machine learning. When deciding how to invest in AI, a good rule of thumb is to ask whether the technology can provide information or a way of operating that a human cannot.



For example, Yumeko, of Henn-na hotel in Japan, is a human-like robot accompanied by two velociraptor dinosaurs at the check-in counter. Her job is to greet Henn-na guests; but while Yumeko may look like a human, she's missing the human touch and is more likely to attract tech geeks than luxury-seekers. Similarly, Virginia's Hilton McLean IBM Watson-powered robot, Connie, informs guests on local tourist attractions, makes restaurant recommendations and offers the lowdown on hotel features and amenities; yet once the novelty of interacting with a robot wears off, Hilton will be forced to deal with the actual hospitality value that Connie brings to its guests – questionable, to say the least.

Meanwhile, travel company Thompson is also working with IBM's Watson on a smart chatbot for its customers' holiday searches. The plan is to utilise AI to increase loyalty by helping hoteliers learn more about their guests, in order to better serve them and drive repeat visits. Similarly, Dorchester Collection partnered with RicheyTX to develop Metis, an AI platform that, by crunching countless data, helped this hotel chain discover that breakfast is more than a mere expectation for its guests: it's something they place huge importance on. In response, Dorchester Collection invested more in personalising and augmenting the breakfast experience – proving that good use of AI is seamless, effortless, adaptable and adds value to the human experience.

Kayak co-founder Paul English launched travel planning app Lola in 2016, combining a live staff of travel agents with AI-augmented chat functionality. “We’re trying to create superhuman travel consultants who are AI-powered and can handle more trips per hour than a regular travel agent can”, explains English. Lola combines human strengths with machine learning algorithms that teach its AI to give ever more relevant answers in the future.

Along similar lines, personal travel assistant, concierge and bot Mezi, which raised \$9 million in 2016, uses AI to comb through a number of search engines for travel information, customising and prioritising suggestions based on past searches, known user preferences, conversational tone and other online habits. Manually entered, the sort of database Mezi uses could only feature a single-digit number of preferences per guest. Automatically entered and managed, the number of preferences is infinite.

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel company created its Mystique system exactly to that end: “Whenever we discover or are alerted to a guest's preferences, we put them into Mystique, and Mystique talks to all the properties within Ritz-Carlton. As a guest, you can go from Ritz-Carlton to Ritz-Carlton around the world and we'll know – and be able to deliver – what you like”, notes Diana Oreck, Vice President of The Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center. “We use Mystique to increase a guest's sense of wonder, with little things delivered unexpectedly”, she adds.

“We’re trying to create superhuman travel consultants who are AI-powered and can handle more trips per hour than a regular travel agent can”

PAUL ENGLISH - CO-FOUNDER, KAYAK AND FOUNDER, LOLA



Alongside voice-activated rooms, Aloft Cupertino is planning to implement smart mirrors, smart carpets and AI-powered thermostat systems

Consistency of service and personalisation are examples of AI done right. Seamlessness is another. Marriott's “Project Jetson” is piloting Siri-activated rooms, where guests can programme everything from the lights to the thermostat and sound system from their smartphone; and Aloft Cupertino is planning to implement smart mirrors, smart carpets and AI-powered thermostat systems. Henn-na hotel in Japan allows guests to open doors using facial recognition software and control lights via verbal cues; the Hyatt Regency Riverfront in Jacksonville, Florida, uses AI to better generate staffing schedules and forecast guests' needs; while its advantages at the Pan Pacific in San Francisco include highly accurate restaurant, room service and banquet forecasting, as well as the maintenance of appropriate staffing levels.

In hospitality, the human touch makes us feel special and taken care of. We remember times when we were surprised and delighted by thoughtful, empathetic and anticipatory service. We tell others about it. We keep coming back to places where we experienced it. The omotenashi of the future is a combination of AI and humans, each doing what they do best. AI is all about fast, accurate and predictive data. Humans are about the empathetic and intuitive interpersonal contact. Working together, they are able to deliver the best possible service at scale.

Discover more about this topic at the talk *THE EMPATHY (R)EVOLUTION: CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IN THE WAKE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE*, live at this year's Ministry of Ideas

Harsha Chanrai, Founder of SAIRA Hospitality



REBEL
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INVESTING IN THE INTANGIBLE

What price would you pay to have access to a renewing pool of engaged, loyal and talented staff? SAIRA Hospitality's founder, Harsha Chanrai, tells Olivia Squire why hospitality schools will disrupt the future of travel.



SAIRA graduates receiving their qualifications

Harsha Chanrai credits her family with giving her the “philanthropic gene”. Growing up, they worked closely with charitable causes, inculcating a young Chanrai with the notion that “people don’t necessarily think that they alone can make a change, but I saw that one person really can have an impact – and it can be life-changing.” Coupled with a passion for the luxury travel industry that saw her later work for Six Senses in Bangkok and Singapore, it’s perhaps unsurprising that when entering a competition at Cornell Hospitality School in 2014, Chanrai’s aim was to bridge the gap between these two worlds.

“A lot of people think you’ve got to grow old, make money and then give it back – but that’s the old-fashioned way of thinking and it takes too long,” she says. Inspired by non-profits that trained locals for roles in hospitality she saw whilst in Angkor Wat, she devised the concept for SAIRA Hospitality: a pop-up hospitality school for less privileged locals living in thriving hotel markets.

Unlike these Cambodian non-profits, however, and driven by her awareness that “you can’t rely on donations if you quickly want to make a significant difference”, at SAIRA hotels invest in the programme in exchange for a bespoke curriculum and pool of talent to recruit from, subverting the traditional routes of hiring expats or poaching from other properties. After

winning the Cornell competition, Chanrai launched a successful pilot in downtown Los Angeles in late 2015 and has since graduated 42 local students from a nine-week school in Todos Santos, Mexico, in partnership with Bunkhouse Hotels. During the latter, every student completed the programme and Bunkhouse benefited from 100 per cent ROI, hiring all 25 of the students they wanted.

However in the nature of all true pioneers, getting this concept into the mainstream has meant struggling against entrenched perceptions. “Hospitality isn’t the most forward-thinking industry,” Chanrai admits, “so when introducing a new idea like this it can be hard to see the benefit, which is intangible. However, 70 per cent of a guest’s experience is emotional and intangible, so sometimes it’s worth investing in that”. SAIRA’s challenge lies in convincing hotel owners to “embrace community for the sake of their own ROI” and understand the value in making a positive impact.

“SEVENTY PER CENT OF A GUEST’S EXPERIENCE IS EMOTIONAL AND INTANGIBLE, SO SOMETIMES IT’S WORTH INVESTING IN THAT”

- HARSHA CHANRAI

This approach is particularly relevant to new launches: as Chanrai explains, “when you move into a new neighbourhood you introduce yourself, and hotels need to do that – not just to local businesses, but to local people.” Thanks to a tailored programme for the property and destination, taking into account cultural norms, brand vision and standard orientation procedures, by opening date graduates are already imbued with the hotel’s character and guests’ needs – a powerful incentive for prospective brands (in Todos Santos, for example, bespoke training in the US market and F&B meant that Bunkhouse was able to hire the 25 staff they needed from the SAIRA graduate programme prior to opening).

The pitch to students has a more immediate appeal. Chanrai is insistent that “it’s not enough to just want a job: I eventually want graduates to become general managers... I really need to know before they are selected that they have a ‘hospitality gene’, a desire to serve.” This means undergoing three-to-four interviews prior to selection, weekly assessments during the programme, and training on “intangible service qualities” such as empathy, reliability, responsiveness and assurance - after all, “service is an intangible industry.”

Creating a real community is also pivotal, with everything from winery tours to rooftop yoga sessions included on the curriculum. Chanrai remarks, “One of the most interesting takeaways was that the out-of-class activities are sometimes the most important.” The result is that people who had perhaps previously never stepped foot inside a hotel feel part of something, liberated to find not only employment, but also a sense of purpose.

SAIRA’s next stop will be a permanent school in Turks & Caicos, opening this year. A non-profit joint venture with a local hotel owner,

it arose in response to a growing demand for staff in a booming tourist destination. In addition to more pop-ups in emerging markets, Chanrai also has plans to tweak the concept to make it viable in densities like New York or London, whereby “hotels could pay an annual membership fee to dip into the SAIRA pool in that city, rather than going on Craigslist or poaching talent from other properties.”

When I ask if she thinks herself a rebel, Chanrai laughs: “I don’t know about a rebel! However, I do definitely want to disrupt the way hospitality is run. Mandela said, ‘Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.’ Turnover is one of the largest challenges for hotels, so through education, I’d like to prove that you can greatly reduce turnover. So would I describe myself as thinking out of the box? To make a change, I think you have to.”

One thing she does firmly believe is that “hospitality should embrace the idea that it’s ‘cool’ to be humanitarian. It’s the world’s biggest industry; we have to lead the way and recognise the impact we have.

Mindfulness, watching your words and decisions, is growing enormously – but people have to realise that this isn’t just personal, but applies to how you do business.”

On whether the birth of similar concepts like Good Hotel and Salt School herald a new dawn for talent in hospitality, Chanrai muses, “I think that every hotel should be connected to a school, whether it’s SAIRA or similar. I hope the concept catches on. It’s non-profit, it’s not competition. The more people we help, the better.” Just as she inherited that ‘philanthropy gene’ from her parents, this reluctant rebel is aiming to pass on the same spirit of selflessness to the rest of the industry: an intangible investment in the future of hospitality that we should all get behind.

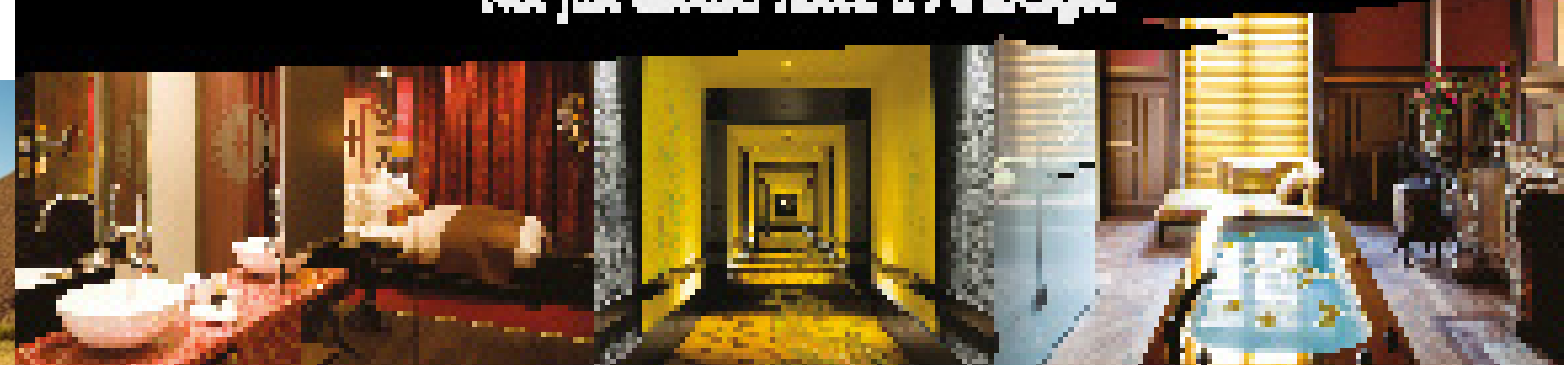
“HOSPITALITY SHOULD EMBRACE THE IDEA THAT IT’S ‘COOL’ TO BE HUMANITARIAN”

- HARSHA CHANRAI

Photo: SAIRA yoga sessions



Not just another hotel. It's a lifestyle.



THE HOTEL COLLECTION

HOT HOTEL HYGGE FOR 2018

*Next year's hottest openings are already giving us that warm glow inside. **Juliana Shallcross** checks in on the hotel contenders serving up hygge good vibes for 2018, wherever they are in the world.*

For longer than just a brief moment this past winter, the Danish art of 'hygge' captivated people around the world – even those in warmer climes.

On social media, hygge meant showing off cosy indoor spaces: havens from the winter weather complete with fur rugs, knitted slippers, fluffy blankets and roaring fireplaces (or at least a few pine-scented candles). In real life, hygge meant finding small ways to brighten up the dreary winter routine and push away any dark thoughts about the future of the world, which has looked pretty bleak in recent months.

So can you really blame us for coming up with our own hotel-centric take on hygge to lift our dark thoughts about a world full of homogenised and corporatised hotel stays?

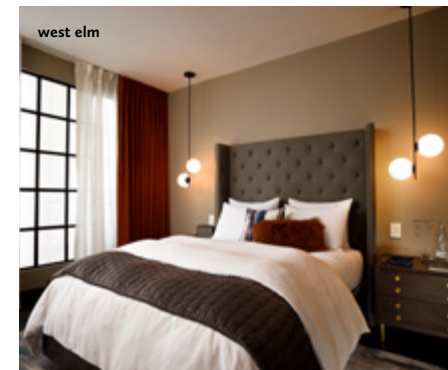
In January, we published a comprehensive list of all the exciting new hotels opening in 2017 on THE SHIFT online. But there are always a few 'woke' hotels that stand out from the rest, whether for a stunning look, original concept, exotic location, or entirely new brand. Below, we've rounded up the ones whose mere existence and ideation have warmed our souls – and will hopefully warm our bodies from late 2017 through to 2018.



MOB HOTELS

Created by Cyril Aouizerate, the visionary behind Mama Shelter Hotels, MOB Hotels is meant to be an "urban motel," where guests can socialise, relax and work all in one spot. On paper, that may not sound very different from the, er, M.O. of most hotels, but MOB is genuinely focused on creating a meaningful, evolving community out of its hotels. Indeed, the hotel's mission statement says they don't want to create a chain, but rather an "ethical cooperative movement that will regularly welcome new players."

Like Mama Shelter, the rooms are small but the amenities go big, including a bed worthy of a luxury hotel and blazing fast WiFi. A casual restaurant downstairs will serve fresh and organic fare, such as homemade bread and several different kinds of pizzas. The lobby will also offer co-working spaces for start-up companies. One MOB is already open in Paris in Les Pulces, with eight more planned in the next five years in Europe and the US.



WEST ELM HOTELS

There has long been talk of furniture and design companies branching off from their day jobs and having a go at the hotel business, but the first company to actually put forth a development plan was west elm. The US-based home furnishings retailer announced in October that they would open five west elm hotels by 2018 in smaller but culturally relevant US cities like Savannah, Indianapolis and Detroit.

Much like the styles found at west elm stores, the boutique-sized hotels (150-200 rooms) will feature a contemporary but comfortable interior design that's accented by locally handpicked furnishings. Each hotel is meant to have the "intimate, independent spirit of a neighbourhood inn." The man tasked with bringing this to life is David Bowd of the bespoke Salt Hotels, who will focus on delighting west elm guests with his signature brand of whole-hearted hospitality. And no, you cannot buy the furniture from your hotel stay; but you can shop a hotel-inspired collection at a west elm store.



DUXTON CLUB SINGAPORE

Harpreet and Satinder Garcha, the hotelier duo behind contemporary art hotel *hôtel vagabond* in Singapore, are going luxe with the Duxton Club in Singapore's Tanjong Pagar neighbourhood, with a little help from some very influential friends.

Already a part of Marriott's Luxury Collection, the Duxton Club will have nearly 200 guest rooms spread throughout two pre-war colonial shophouse buildings, not quite attached to each other but definitely within walking distance. The Duxton House will have 50 boldly designed guest rooms by interior designer/hotelier Anouska Hempel, who will fill the spaces with luxe and glamorous details. Duxton House will also have a restaurant, signature bar, and private cigar room.

A mere 600 feet away will be the Duxton Terrace, which will house 138 guest rooms in several three- and four-storey colonial-era buildings dating back to 1929. Here, renowned architect and designer Jacques Garcia (who, in addition to *hôtel vagabond*, has worked on The Louvre and The Palace of Versailles) will restore the building to its 20th century grandeur. No less than five food and beverage outlets, including a poolside bar, will be at Duxton Terrace, alongside an exclusive members-only club. Whetting our appetite for 2018, Duxton House is expected to open this fall.





Wild Coast Tented Lodge

WILD COAST TENTED LODGE

The name of this property alone sends tingles through our spine. Further details such as its location at the edge of Yala National Park in Sri Lanka; 28 air-conditioned cocoons with chandeliers and private plunge pools; and a Sanctuary Spa, have us clearing our schedule for its October 2017 opening, checking flights and planning our trip wardrobe.

There's even more to get excited about with news of an outdoor viewing deck from which you can observe the Indian Ocean and the wildlife of the park, known as a hotspot for leopards along with elephants, sloth bears, birdlife and amphibians. A bamboo bar and restaurant on site serves a daily changing menu, while a "picnic tea" will be served on safari drives into the park.

The lodge is actually run by Resplendent Ceylon, a subsidiary of the Sri Lankan tea company Dilmah Tea, whose mission is to give travellers an authentic yet sustainable look at Sri Lanka's history, culture and nature.



Wild Coast Tented Lodge



Wild Coast Tented Lodge

ROSEWOOD MIRAMAR

BEACH MONTECITO

Sometimes, all you need to feel warm and fuzzy inside is a little throwback, which is what folks visiting Los Angeles in 2018 will get with this new beach resort. Rosewood Hotels & Resorts are set to open their third luxury property in California, on the site of the old Miramar Beach Hotel near Santa Barbara, in the ritzy town of Montecito.

The property, which is now under construction, will feature 161 guestrooms, all built as either one-storey cottages or smaller bungalows. There will also be an oceanfront restaurant and bar, two swimming pools, a Sense spa, fitness centre, a screening room, and a beach club. And about that beach: guests who book the oceanfront rooms will be able to open their doors and walk directly out on to the sand – a common wow factor on tropical islands but a real rarity for Southern California.

The resort will be a not-so-subtle nod to America's golden age of seaside resorts, but fortunately Rosewood, with their sophisticated and modern luxury approach, will be in charge of all the important details. Also adding to the throwback feel? The Amtrak Surf liner train that runs through the property. (Yes, we're thinking what you're thinking: the soundproofing better be good.)



Rosewood Miramar Beach



Rosewood Miramar Beach

DO YOU WANT COLLAGEN WITH THAT?

From wellbeing walls to fitness festivals, matcha lattes to collagen smoothies: the travel industry is adapting fast to the demands of the new health-conscious consumer. Alice Tate explores the latest in the 'sportspitality' revolution.



Remember when hotels having Avocado on toast on their breakfast menus was novel? Oh, how things change. We're now living in a world where the everyday consumer is looking for much more. Demand is changing; innovation is fast and well-documented across social media; and fitness and nutrition are definite lifestyle choices – and ones that consumers aren't willing to sacrifice whilst travelling.

As wellbeing continues its march (or should we say jog) to centre stage in our lifestyles, wellness festivals are becoming all the rage. Balance Festival, Be:Fit and Exhale Festival are just a few of the contenders in the

UK alone; meanwhile Obonjan, the 10-week-long island retreat in Croatia and the 'it' festival of 2017, runs under the tagline "tune in, explore, restore", with wellbeing (from yoga to holistic massages, sound healing and more) a key part of the concept.

Restival is yet another example of the festivalisation of fitness; this fusion of "the best of festivals and retreats with... beautifully curated, intimate wellness travel experiences" had its first outing in Morocco and subsequent editions in Arizona and Osea Island.

So how can hotels respond? Answer: they start their own

festivals. Take The Hoxton's Fresh and Fit Fest, for example: an annual all-day event that runs across both the brand's London hotels and is jam-packed with of-the-moment classes from the likes of Gymbox, Frame and BOOM Cycle; talks from nutrition pioneers including Deliciously Ella, Zanna van Dijk and Clean Eating Alice; kitchen demonstrations; and samplings and tastings, with a load of fitness influencers also added to the mix to create more buzz. The strategy makes sense: the hotel has the space, so why not use it to not only offer more to your guests, but also to the local community.

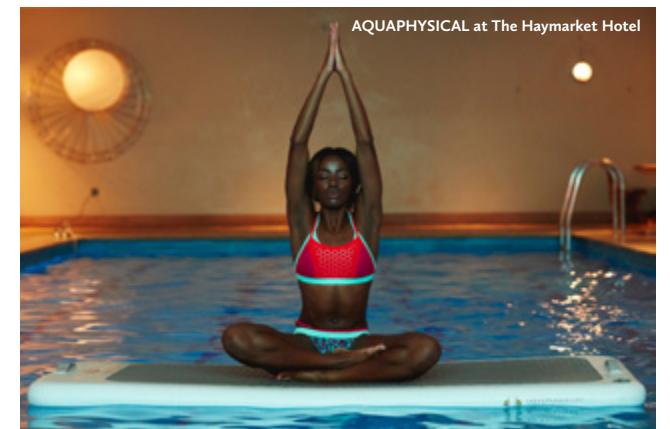
"Demand is changing; innovation is fast and well-documented; and fitness and nutrition are definite lifestyle choices that consumers aren't willing to sacrifice whilst travelling"

Another way that hotels are really starting to focus on wellness is through specifically designed packages. Take Cambridge's The Varsity Hotel & Spa as an example: the hotel launched Bend and Brunch in January, a wellness package for both hotel guests and locals that pairs a yoga session at the hotel's Glassworks Health Club with a nutritious brunch at the its panoramic bar and brasserie, SIX. Then there are those that bring in buzzy new classes – take London's Haymarket Hotel, which recently introduced FLOATFIT Yoga in collaboration with AQUAPHYSICAL, a vinyasa class on water that develops strength, balance and mindfulness.

High-end hotels are increasingly beginning to adopt the idea of 'sportspitality', taking things a step further by infusing hospitality with wellness through both experiences and interiors: in other words, your bedroom becomes a private gym. The 'Vitality Room', a collaboration between Swissôtel and Wallpaper* magazine, well illustrates this idea – and perhaps the future. Along with a soft, muted colour palette and discreet technology, there's a 'wellbeing wall' with cables and weights that offers personalised workouts through a cyber trainer; a minibar stocked with mineral waters and health drinks; and a lighting system that adjusts and regulates melatonin levels and helps travellers get over jet lag.



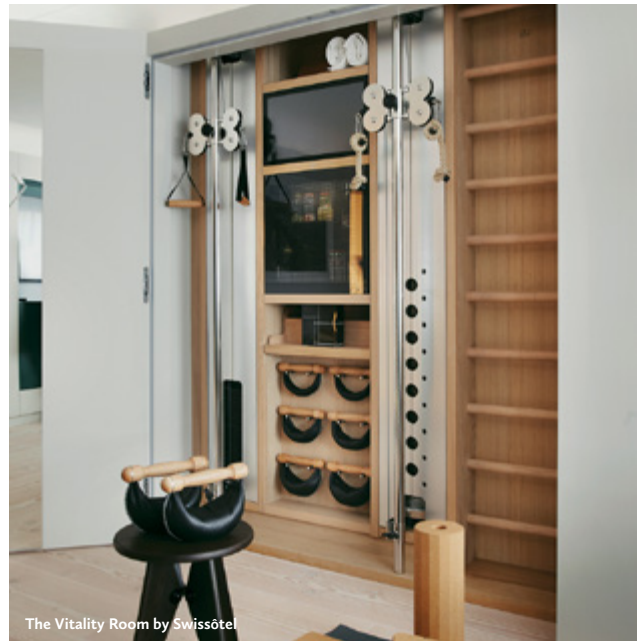
Balance Festival



There's no doubt that for a growing number of hotels, gyms and high-tech spas are fast becoming a key selling point. For many travellers nowadays, it's a dealbreaker: they're looking for hotels that blur the lines between the various elements of their lifestyles. 1 Hotel South Beach last year launched their Spartan Gym, a 14,000-square-foot space inspired by obstacle races and with different areas for "athleticism, endurance and strength"; meanwhile, when launching The Curtain in Shoreditch, founder Michael Achenbaum called upon star personal trainer Jon Squirrel to bring his cult Vault Gym in-house.

So it makes sense that Equinox, the high-end gym giant, is branching out into hotels to become a 360-degree fitness and wellbeing lifestyle company. Having asked their members (high-flying, affluent, fitness-led individuals), 95 per cent of whom expressed keen interest in staying in an Equinox hotel, the brand is now set to open their first site in 2018 in New York City's Hudson Yards development. Aside from the natty tagline 'Where the science of fitness meets the art of





travel', there aren't a lot of details revealed as yet; however, we do know that there will be indoor and outdoor fitness spaces, multiple pools, office space, luxury condos, and premium guestrooms – and a long list of eager fitness-obsessed guests, no doubt.

With the increase in food tourism, lots of city hotels are finding themselves in direct competition with cafés and restaurants. Their response? 'Destination' bars and restaurants that locals choose to eat in as well as guests. Take The Hoxton, Holborn as a prime example, which works with Soho House for their popular restaurant, Hubbard and Bell, that's bustling from breakfast until dinner. In terms of a breakfast offering, people want more than eggs benny and a latte these days. They might want almond milk in their latte – actually, make that a matcha latte – then gluten-free toast, extra protein, and, oh, all vegan too. I'm being a little churlish but you get the gist... Hotel restaurants need to be hot on their feet, looking to forward-thinking eateries for inspiration.

One such dining destination that instantly springs to mind is Grind, which has fast expanded to a portfolio of nine London sites since 2011. Take their breakfast menu at Clerkenwell Grind: customers can choose from gluten-free porridge, an açai berry bowl, sweet potato harissa cakes, or a raw breakfast salad with quinoa and matcha. Grind has had a knock-on effect in the local area: The Hoxton, Shoreditch (whose restaurant is again operated by Soho House) offers a protein bowl for brekkie – that's poached salmon, avocado, pickled red

onions and lentils – whilst at The London EDITION, guests can choose from an orange-soaked oats and almond chia pot and roasted sweet potato, halloumi and pine nut pesto on toast.

This healthy-minded approach is limited not just to food, but is affecting what we drink too. Matcha is the flavour of the day, gingerly starting to make its way on to London menus a good while after its boom in the States. Meanwhile, I've no doubt that Instagram-friendly turmeric lattes and beetroot lattes will be on room service menus soon enough...

A few years back, you'd have been laughed at for hitting the gym and going back to your hotel and asking for a protein shake, but now, in response to clear demand, they're making their way on to menus, from matcha protein smoothies to collagen boosts, such as Soho House's House Press 'Glow' Juice, featuring pomegranate, red grape, guava, ginger, lime, rose, and collagen.

Moving on from breakfast, healthy fast food is a focus – dishes without chemicals, sugar, nor soy. For the health-conscious traveller, there's big demand: when you're tired and have been travelling or working for hours, you just want to call down, in your slippers, for a burger and fries, without having to sacrifice your diet. Cue rosemary-seasoned sweet potato wedges and quinoa vegetable patties popping up on many a hotel menu. Some hotels are going one step further, like the COMO Metropolitan, which offers COMO Shambhala Cuisine across their breakfast, in-room and lobby lounge menus.



This is a menu designed to maximise personal performance by increasing concentration and energy levels, using local product and focusing on ingredients that are rich in living enzymes, vitamins and minerals.

Though booze is big business for hotel bars, they're also adapting to a change in demand and introducing low-calorie alcohol (such as Skinny Prosecco), as well as more no-alcohol beers – Shoreditch House includes BrewDog's Nanny State on its drinks menu, for example. This is sure to be a growing trend, and one where we can look to Scandinavia for guidance – go to any hotel in Sweden and there'll be an array of different low- and no-alcohol beers on the restaurant menu, plus no-alcohol wines.

There's no doubt wellness, nutrition and fitness are real drivers of change in the hospitality industry, now more than ever. And as those industries themselves evolve at speed – new vegan proteins and ayurvedic eating are just two of the buzz phrases hitting the food industry at the moment – we can expect to see the hospitality industry following suit. Are we already in the era of sportspitality? Let's just say a cross trainer in the basement definitely isn't going to cut it any more...

Discover more about this topic at the talk *WHEN YOUR YOGA PANTS ARE SMARTER THAN YOU: HOW WEARABLE TECH IS DEFINING WELLNESS*, live at this year's Ministry of Ideas

“New vegan proteins and ayurvedic eating are just two of the buzz phrases hitting the food industry at the moment”



Green Goddess Soup, part of COMO Metropolitan's Shambhala Cuisine



Dan Barber at wastED London [Photo: Richard Boll]

REBEL
CONCEPTS//

GETTING WASTED NEVER FELT SO GOOD

*Farm-to-table, nose-to-tail, or trash-to-treasure? Whatever you call it, a new vanguard of chefs are educating diners about the provenance of their plates by upcycling waste into wonder. Blue Hill head chef and wastED co-founder **Dan Barber** tells **Olivia Squire** why mindful dining will disrupt the future of travel.*

This year's most innovative food and beverage 'trend' isn't actually new at all; in fact, it's about the oldest way of eating there is. However, in a world of eternal summertime and abundance, where being in season is more likely to signal following the latest foodie fad than living off the land, we've simply forgotten about it. And Dan Barber is on a mission to erase our collective amnesia.

Anyone who's avidly watched the Netflix documentary *Chef's Table* might recognise Barber as the progressive voice behind Blue Hill, a New York City restaurant that had its moment of reckoning back in 2000 in the form of several surplus crates of asparagus. Incited to fury by the potential wastage, Barber decreed that every item on the menu that night would contain the vegetable, even down to the ice cream; lo and behold, following a fortuitous visit by critic Jonathan Gold, he was heralded as the leader of the new 'farm-to-table' movement. The opening of companion restaurant Blue Hill at Stone Barns in 2004, a farm 30 miles north of the city, consolidated Barber and co.'s reputation for cooking with a conscience.

Back to the present day, and 'farm-to-table' has become such an ingrained part of food culture that it's even passed into parody (see sketch show *Portlandia*'s sublime satire of a hipster's journey to the cult-like Alike Farms as evidence). However, in his continued ascendance to ethical eating guru, Barber is pushing the philosophy to new levels by embracing the concept of transforming 'waste' products into high-end (and high-price, with small plates starting at £15) dishes fit for Michelin-star menus.

Initially conceived as a pop-up in New York City in 2015, wastED (the 'ED' stands for 'education') is a "community of chefs, farmers, fishermen, distributors, processors, designers and retailers...creating



The kitchen at wastED London [Photo: Gareth Davies]

something delicious out of the ignored or un-coveted and inspiring new applications in our food system." In February of this year, it moved to the rooftop at London's Selfridges for its first transatlantic outing, inviting chefs including Alain Ducasse, Raymond Blanc, Jason Atherton and Gordon Ramsay into the kitchen alongside Barber.

Scanning the menu, we were greeted with a litany of decidedly un-chef-y descriptions: rejected, pockmarked, broken, forgotten, stale, ugly, failed. However, the genius of wastED lies in its ability to elevate such ingredients to the status of table heroes, each announced with reverence by servers – and each unfailingly delicious. We feasted on thought-provoking reinventions of fish and chips (fish bones and skin), cheeseburgers (juice pulp patties with bacon runoff ketchup) and kedgeree (an entire cod's head accompanied by broken rice, spelt bran and trial rye).

Barber is adamant that, as we did, people react with curiosity and then delight to this initially confronting terminology and technique. "Our concept of luxury is shifting," he asserts. "It's indicative of a changing



@annainwonderground

"OUR CONCEPT OF LUXURY IS SHIFTING... THERE'S AN APPETITE NOT JUST FOR NEW INGREDIENTS, BUT ALSO FOR THE STORIES BEHIND THEM"

- DAN BARBER

food culture, where there's an appetite not just for new ingredients, but also for the stories behind them."

Indeed, wastED is part of an accelerating global shift towards the repurposing of waste ingredients in food and beverage, with Barber emphasising, "Cooking with the whole animal isn't a new idea, of course. At wastED, we partnered with over 20 guest chefs, and they're doing this kind of work every day." From the aquaponic greenhouse used by San Francisco's The Perennial to Oslo's HIMKOK concept bar, which grows cocktail ingredients in hydroponic turbines; from star bartender Ryan Chetiyawardana's 'closed-loop cocktails' in London to the revolutionary The Silo in Brighton, described by Barber as "an experiment station for zero-waste cooking": chefs worldwide are responding to consumer demand for guilt-free, conversation-starting cooking that places value on impact as well as taste.

This reinvention of the role of chefs from back-of-house artists to front-of-stage activists is an accidental rebellion, arising from the creative challenges presented by this new way of thinking. Barber explains, "The world's best chefs aren't glorifying steak and foie gras on their menus anymore, in part because those things just aren't that interesting to cook. Instead, they're exploring the diversity of vegetables and grains and celebrating ingredients that are unique to their place. That's really opened the door for conversations like this."

In an article for *The Guardian*, food critic Jay Rayner asks, "Why should we now be so fascinated by the lives of cooks? Partly it's because, in an increasingly urbanised age, they are our last genuine artisans. They take raw materials and manipulate them directly for us, which almost nobody else does." The work of Barber and his counterparts can be seen within this context, whereby modern luxury has come to represent

the handmade, creative and, ultimately, meaningful. As Barber remarks, "Chefs have the power and the platform to innovate in ways that are often adopted by other cooks and eaters...it's impossible to separate the education from the experience of eating. It's a lot easier to win minds and effect change in the context of a delicious plate of food."

This attitude, marrying the traditional hedonism and pleasure inherent in the act of eating with our contemporary preoccupation with mindful business, resonates with the current definition of luxury - wouldn't it be wonderful to imagine that by adopting more sustainable agricultural and dining habits, we could both enjoy food that tastes better, and reverse climate change? With current agricultural processes accounting for up to 50 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, this isn't just a far-flung dream: Barber explains that to reach this goal, "We're going to have to draw on culinary traditions and classic techniques, but in a thoroughly modern context. That's true in both the kitchen and the field."

Achieving such grand ambitions requires the high degree of determination common among all rebels; indeed, when questioned about what being a rebel means

to him, Barber is quick to assert, "Courage and self-sufficiency." One also suspects that a certain degree of humility and self-sacrifice is involved; rather unusually, when it comes to the future, Barber hopes that his concept won't exist. That's because if all goes according to plan, it won't have to: "I have no idea what comes next. If we do our jobs right, there won't be any need for wastED; these ingredients will just be expected parts of our everyday eating." So forget trends: Barber is looking to transcend them altogether. If your ultimate goal is to make the avant-garde mainstream, maybe being forgotten is the ultimate reward.

Discover more about the latest food trends at the talk *HOW TO SUBVERT STEREOTYPES AND CAUSE CONVERSATIONS WITH FOOD*, live at this year's *Ministry of Ideas*



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The Rise of the Underdogs

As globetrotters step up their search for the road less Instagrammed, 'secondary cities' from Leeds to Leipzig are having their turn in the spotlight, says James Davidson.



Pittsburgh; Leipzig; Bordeaux; Leeds; Cincinnati; Bristol; Eindhoven; Baltimore; Adelaide. No matter how well travelled you may be, bar a personal connection to one of the aforementioned, the average Joe would struggle to muster up a list of more than two or three attractions each boasts. We've come to know these places as 'secondary cities'. Truth is that many of them are third, fourth (or lower) when placed on the same bill as a New York or a London; but is it fair to judge a city on the number of forests that need be pulped to produce its guidebook?

As the mobility of the creative class increases and savvy travellers seek new experiences, previously overlooked cities are thriving in their relative obscurity. A MacBook-wielding creative from the west coast of the US will likely know very little about Leeds, but that doesn't mean a few days spent there wouldn't be an enlightening experience.

"It is the most influential art school in Europe since the Bauhaus", artist Patrick Heron would proclaim in 1971 of the Leeds College of Art – the school where Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth started their illustrious careers in the 1920s. Today there are cultural enterprises, creative co-working spaces, and social projects forged by the arts; there are independent design stores, craft breweries, and public art initiatives by the bucketload.

Opened last summer, Art Hostel has been conceived by community arts organisation East Street Arts, and adds some creative grit to an accommodation scene familiar with cosy boutique spots. Art Hostel is far from luxury, but staying in any of its individually artist-designed rooms will put back into the community and help stoke the fire that's already burning under the city's thriving DIY art scene.



Some 4,000 miles away in the United States' 30th most populous city, art is at the core of another fascinating accommodation project – albeit a tad more luxurious. With Bilbao's Guggenheim Museum as inspiration for how art can revitalise an underdog, wealthy art collectors Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown set about fusing art museum and hotel in the city they called home: Louisville, Kentucky. Unlikely the first city to slip off the tongue of a hot-decking millennial. Something about the unlikely pairing was right, though, the power couple's 21c Museum Hotel chain now taking in Cincinnati, Bentonville, Durham, Lexington, Oklahoma City and Nashville (hotels in Kansas City, Indianapolis and Miami are underway).

"There are a lot of cities in the country without a great hotel and they happen to be in secondary cities. It's sort of an untapped segment of the industry", Wilson explained to *The New York Times*. "We are about revitalising city centres. We thought if we were able to be successful in downtown and make the city centre more interesting to live and work in, we'd be preventing sprawl". The esteem of 21c's host cities may be on the up (Brooklyn and Los Angeles have been touted alongside planned Miami, and soon-to-open Nashville), but there's no doubting the impact that the duo have had on some of those less fashionable destinations; there's a buzz about 'second cities' that just won't seem to go away.

A report from 2012 noted that 48 per cent of the workforce in Durham, North Carolina, was made up of the creative class. Already the site of a 21c, the city's former Home Savings Bank – a resplendent mid-century architectural wonder – has recently been converted by LA design studio Commune (who are behind countless hip hotspots that include Ace Hotel DTLA and the brand's Panama City bolthole, American Trade Hotel) into The Durham Hotel: a millennial-minded stopover that ticks boxes like



indie vinyl, design magazines, coffee programme, yoga, and raw bar.

These shining lights attracting creative nomads to lesser-known cities are not rarities, mind. Ace Hotel recently took over a century-old former YMCA building in the heart of Pittsburgh, and hot new brand The Pendry followed its San Diego debut with a major restoration project on Baltimore's historic Recreation Pier, the Maryland city in the midst of shaking off the frightening image that *The Wire* (and plenty of real-life crime) bestowed upon it. Founded by Mario Tricoci and Kevin Robinson, Aparium Hotel Group is a brand marching design-led offerings into cities like Milwaukee and Minneapolis; with the latter also seeing Radisson's new Red brand open its second property geared up to the 'millennial mindset'.

Like Leeds, though, Minneapolis is a quietly brooding hotbed of arts and creativity. Americans probably know it, some savvy Londoners might, but how many international travellers are fully versed in the hipster credentials of a Minneapolis; Charleston; Sacramento; or Portland Maine? And herein lies the appeal of

"As the mobility of the creative class increases and savvy travellers seek new experiences, previously overlooked cities are thriving in their relative obscurity"



Hewing Hotel

secondary cities – for globetrotters increasingly in search of new experiences, cityscapes that none of their pals have yet Instagrammed, the lure of new scenes and cultures is impossible to resist.

Of course, it's not just homegrown scenes that are putting once unfashionable cities on the travelling creative class's radar – it seems like not a week can pass where you haven't stumbled over a think-piece penned by a teary creative saying their final goodbye to New York or London; pastures new (and cheaper) awaiting those who've decided they want to be able to swing a cat. "There's no joy left in this city", laments Allison Robicelli, co-owner of Brooklyn bakery Robicelli's. "This is not the New York I grew up in. I finally started to realise...I'm going to be working 90 hours a week for the rest of my life just to get my bills paid."

Which is why she and her husband Matt are taking their highly regarded dishes, like social media hit Nutelasagna and buffalo chicken wing cupcakes, down to Baltimore. Our friend Minneapolis, too, welcomes another culinary force who cut his teeth in the Big Apple – former executive chef of esteemed Café Boulud, Gavin Kaysen, returning home to open Spoon & Stable: the first restaurant in the Minnesota city ever to be nominated

in the James Beard Foundation Awards' Best New Restaurant category. If something is keeping you in New York, chances are you might find it somewhere else you least expected.

Back in Britain, Leeds is being joined by Bristol in rivalling London's traditional alternatives Manchester and Brighton – the South West home of Banksy, trip-hop and drum 'n' bass and a breeding ground of sustainable startups, community art projects, and forward-thinking food and drink; it recently trumped cities like Reykjavík, Paris, and Barcelona in a ranking of 'Most Inspiring Cities'. Across the border in Scotland, Aberdeen and Dundee are putting up a creative front to Edinburgh and Glasgow's long-standing pre-eminence.

In fact, second-tier cities the world over are asserting their own singular dominance. Adelaide has beautifully designed culinary hotspots to rival Melbourne; Leipzig (or Hypezig as the press have dubbed it) has Berlin on the ropes with its party scene and artists flocking to cheap studios; Bordeaux (named number one on Lonely Planet's top cities for 2017 list) is proving there's plenty more than its namesake to raise a glass to; Medellín is coming out of Bogotá and Pablo Escobar's shadows; and Malaga's pop-up Pompidou gallery is reaffirming the birthplace

of Picasso as one of Spain's most important art destinations. In the Netherlands, home of a world-class design academy and the annual Dutch Design Week, Eindhoven is a cradle of contemporary creativity and a worthy contender to the two famous 'Dams; whilst Porto continually proves that London or Berlin's priced-out creatives should think twice before heading down to its country's revered capital.

Those arty types packing their hand-crafted artisanal bags in Shoreditch or Williamsburg might be motivated by a better quality of life, but those who haven't already spent time in a metropolitan underdog will be in for a nice surprise. It's the reason design-minded hoteliers are unafraid of setting up shop in a city that's reluctant to roll off the tongue, and the reason creative scenes are thriving in cities once dubbed 'sleeping giants'. Identity. Working-class roots, ascending above adversity, a tough skin developed in the shadows of better-known neighbours...so called second-tiered (and third-, fourth- or more-) cities have a well-rounded character inimitable by their famous friends and foes. Tread easily, respect their heritage. The rise of the secondary cities may be upon us, but nobody needs a new primary.



Piece by Jody, part of Bristol-based street art festival Upfest [Photo: Plaster]



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Business as Unusual



Maderas Village [Photo: Emily Winiker]

*Bleisure is bludgeoned, TED is dead and Burning Man is in the ashes. **Olivia Squire** investigates how the latest breed of 'thinking festivals' are taking the merging of work and play a step further by going under the radar.*

'Bleisure': always an awkward portmanteau, and one that feels increasingly unwieldy and old-fashioned in a culture where the lines between work and play are so blurred, we no longer require a boardroom buzzword to describe them. For better or worse, this is the way we live now: constantly connected, constantly switched on, and constantly looking for the next opportunity to expand our social and cultural capital.

The traditional office appears to be in decline, with freelance and flexible working patterns, nomadic technology and the omnipresence of affordable WiFi liberating workers from their cubicles. Similarly, the ability of business centres

and their modern counterpart, the 'co-working space', to satisfy our cravings for connection and inspiration is being questioned.

Despite the unstoppable rise of co-working and co-living companies with zippy, cult-like names (see: WeWork, ideaPod, StayAwhile, OpenDoor), all declaring their mission to bring together people and ideas, more often than not these spaces are eerily reminiscent of the offices we're trying to escape (albeit with better coffee and more Edison lightbulbs). As writer James Davidson remarked in a recent article on the topic for THE SHIFT online, "Are we in danger of the 'business centre' simply being rebranded 'co-working space'?"

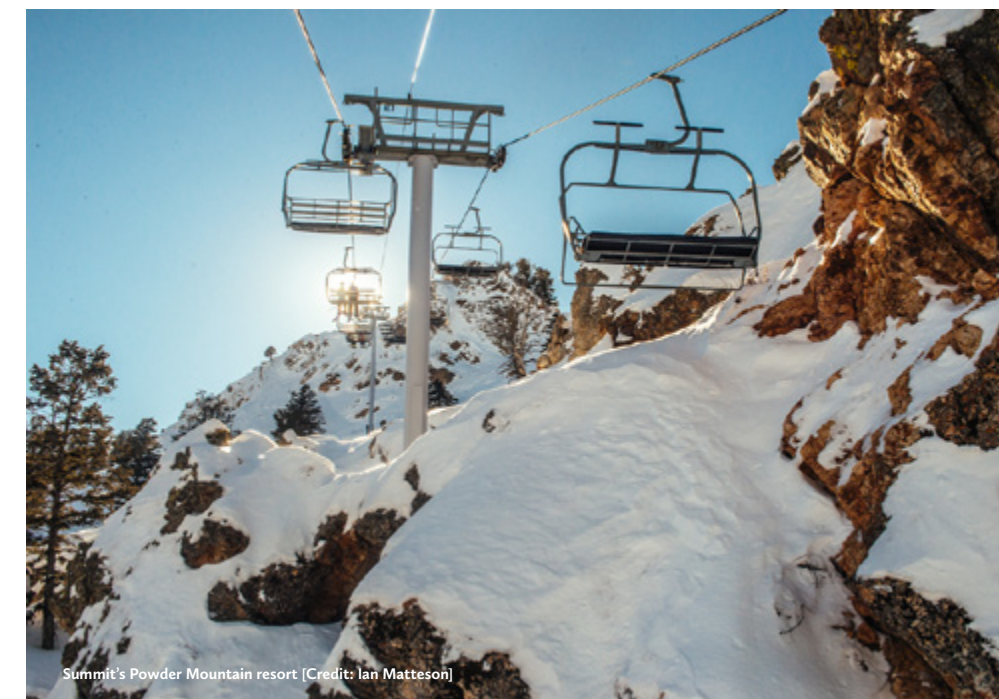
Hotels have been admirably quick to respond to the change in market demand for more casual lifestyle 'hubs' to work from: just think of the open lobby concept that has dominated hotel design in recent years. However, these spaces are hardly the utopian hotbed for creative exchange they purport to be – yes, the lobby of the Ace might be packed with trendy young things beaver away at the next big industry 'disruptor', but how many of them are interacting with each other as opposed to tapping away at their laptop, headphones on and coffee refill in hand? As Sam Gelin, the founder of New York's MADE Hotels, asserts, "When you're stuck behind your laptop, you lose that element of social interactivity" – it's no coincidence that members' club giant Soho House is reportedly considering banning laptops from certain areas of its properties.

Crucially, it's this longing for community that unites modern workers and travellers. Contrary to the much-lauded ability of the internet to transcend boundaries and start conversations, online culture can also have the opposite effect, segregating people into impenetrable social networks and notorious 'filter bubbles' of similar, rather than contrasting, ideas. When we travel, whether for work, play, or both, we want the refreshing shock of new horizons, conflicting characters, and previously unheard beliefs. We want to be elevated, connected, inspired and taught – and this is something that a well-lit communal table and charging station simply cannot achieve.

Travel brands and beyond are looking to tech pioneers and start-up superstars to solve this tension, with the sharing economy emerging as a potential antidote to the shortcomings of online culture. In the same way that many of today's most disruptive models have redefined the meaning of ownership when it comes to tangible assets like cars or apartments [see Ana Andjelic's

article on p36 for more], the latest sharing economy mavericks are building platforms to share intangible assets such as ideas and insight. Enter the new generation of 'thinking festivals', or 'un-conferences': exclusive, curated and frequently invite-only events where the emphasis is as much on what you put in as what you get out.

From Summit to Stream, Google Camp to Founders Forum: these festivals offer discerning luxury-seekers experiences that can't be bought, only earned: your personal currency, defined by the way you think, is what gets you there. Founders, activists, philosophers, artists and business leaders collide and swap insights in a free-form, unpredictable series of events ranging from cookouts to spin classes; kitesurfing to karaoke; debates to campfire chats. In a world where exclusivity and self optimisation (the pursuit of becoming the best self you can be) are the new hallmarks of luxury, these curated communities – where only the most inspiring and inspired mingle on yachts, up mountains or in the desert – are tapping into the desire to be more, rather than simply have more. Louise O'Riordan, VP Brand Partnerships & Events at membership-based private airline Surf Air [read our interview on p76], comments, "A whole different world opened up for me when I started going [to Summit]. They are masters of curating a great community, and also using those get-togethers to promote social change and get things achieved."



Summit's Powder Mountain resort [Credit: Ian Matteson]

Increasingly, these communities are becoming harder to access, aping the underground, secretive vibe of the 90s rave scene; as Tiffanie Darke, the author of the book *Now We Are Forty, Whatever Happened To Generation X?* explains, “It’s no coincidence that many of today’s tech titans and captains of industry hail from Generation X – the generation that graduated in the early days of rave, a world before digital, when secret gatherings in fields and warehouses took place entirely illegally and away from the gaze of the police and the public.” Speaking to the trend for pop-up, ephemeral experiences, the appeal of over-exposed events like TED or Burning Man is waning in favour of under-the-radar, offline gatherings, where streaming the experience on social media is seen as somewhat distasteful. Examples include Voices, a cross-pollination of fashion and global issues hosted by Imran Amed of The Business of Fashion at Soho Farmhouse; MaiTai, venture capitalist Bill Tai’s kitesurfing festival for 100 attendees, where Twitter was allegedly kick-started; or Google Camp, the invite-only gathering where attendees as diverse as Pharrell Williams and Malala Yousafzai chased the Sicilian sunset last year.



Maderas Village [Photo: Nicole Hill]



Maderas Village [Photo: Jacob Pritchard]

“Connected communities, peer-to-peer learning, immersive experiences, exclusivity, group holidays, personal growth: these movements define what luxury means to the contemporary traveller”

So why should travel brands care about these esoteric events? In short, because they are channelling several of the trends defining the way we travel today. Connected communities, peer-to-peer learning, immersive experiences, exclusivity, group holidays, personal growth: together, these movements define what luxury means to the contemporary traveller, particularly in relation to the merging of business and pleasure. In their increasingly multidimensional role as curator, life guru, activist and matchmaker, travel brands have an unprecedented opportunity to leverage their curated communities, transform their spaces and enable their guests to become the best they can be.

Moreover, the boundary between travel experience and un-conference is becoming increasingly hard to define. Summit, the godfather of the ‘un-conference’ movement, recently acquired its own ski village, Powder Mountain: “a year-round destination for an ongoing programme of events and activities – a home to the emergent culture of creativity and collaboration exemplified by the Summit community.” The founders of Habitas, a “global cultural community” with an annual event dedicated to adventure, wellness and more, have this year set up a permanent home in Tulum, with purpose-built accommodation they describe as “a wilderness tamed and moulded for our community.”

Over in Nicaragua, Maderas Village’s cultivated community of “movers and shakers, creative professionals, students, travellers, business savants, entrepreneurs, and everyone else in between” acts as a beachy retreat for urban workers – “a jungle Summit” (New York Times) or “hipster think tank” (Condé Nast Traveler). Meanwhile, travel brands both urban and rural are engineering their own culturally-minded festivals – see CHAO Clubhouse, a members-only social club and hotel in Beijing that hosts regular ‘Masters’ Forums’ on topics as diverse as the future of

homes or the meaning of the quality of life [see our interview with founder Maurice Li on p65]; or El Cosmico’s Trans-Pecos Festival of Music + Love, a hippie-inspired gathering in the Texan desert run by Bunkhouse Hotels.

Whether you’re a city slicker looking to engage urban professionals beyond just giving them a space to rest their laptop or a rural retreat with acres going to waste, the lesson is clear: bleisure as we know it may be over, but the opportunity to inspire real personal and business growth is just beginning.

Discover more at the talk *CLIQUE OVER CLICKS: THE IMPORTANCE OF OFFLINE COMMUNITIES IN AN ONLINE CULTURE*, live at this year’s Ministry of Ideas



Art installation at El Cosmico’s Trans-Pecos Festival [Photo: Stevan Alcalá]



Performance at El Cosmico’s Trans-Pecos Festival 2015 [Photo: Nick Simonite]



REBEL
CONCEPTS//

SAY NĪ HẢO TO CHINA'S 'NEW HEDONISTS'

Creative Class 2.0 is here: China's 'new hedonists' are sophisticated self-optimisers, both at home and away. Beijing-based CHAO co-founder, Maurice Li, tells Katie Palmer how this psychographic is prompting China's homegrown contemporary hotels to disrupt the future of travel.

Maurice Li clearly got the post-demographic-consumerism memo. When it comes to CHAO, the Beijing-based hotel and workspace he co-founded and opened in July last year, he's ignoring age brackets in favour of psychographics. "We affectionately label [our customers] as 'the new hedonists': this group of people are international-minded, individualistic and diverse, unconventional and ambitious, creative and positive in their outlook. They share very similar aspirations and demand more quality in their lifestyle." Sound familiar? You might know them as the creative class.

The creative class isn't strictly a new concept in China; in fact, a 2007 Fast Company article entitled 'China's New Creative Class' introduced the concept way back, profiling nine innovators leading the way for the country's emerging "dynamic business-savvy generation". Since then, hospitality behemoths such as Hyatt, Aman, Starwood and Marriott have moved east, sensing an opportunity to colonise the fastest-growing travel market in the world.

Consider Li's 'new hedonists' as the creative class version 2.0. That China's creative class is less established than in the West has been their advantage: while the Western faction blazed a trail with a trial-and-error, party-and-latte approach, the new hedonists are refining the blueprint, emerging with a more sophisticated set of values and ideals. In response, China's homegrown contemporary travel offerings have been forced to be more innovative from the beginning.

The result is that while Western high-end contemporary brands were applying their tried-and-tested formulas on Eastern soil (albeit with locally inspired tweaks), Li was busy reimagining what the new hedonist actually wants. "We saw an emerging group of people who are redefining what it means to live 'the good life'... CHAO was created to allow this group of people the opportunity to

come together and share ideas, to build things together, to help each other's development, to contribute to meaningful social causes and to enjoy a quality lifestyle."

As such, CHAO was created as much for locals as travellers – which distinguishes it not only from other hotels in Beijing, but also from the original instigators of the contemporary travel movement (many of which confusedly prioritised style over substance). "We believe that a hotel should facilitate social connections; we provide our house guests with a temporary subscription to our Clubhouse membership so they can engage in cultural events, learn new things and make meaningful connections with our local community of members. This helps create more social and professional opportunities, and this is why we very much look at ourselves as a platform more than a traditional 'hotel'", explains Li.

Proving he's well aware that self-optimisation (becoming the best person you can be) is the new badge of luxury, with CHAO Clubhouse Li is tapping into the trend for creating informal, informative, inspiring spaces, events and channels that blend work and play, putting the consumer in control of their own personal and professional journey [read more on page 60]. Like Summit, Stream, Google Camp or Founders Forum, CHAO aims to bring together a community who can, according to Li, "work free and live full, connect with like-minded people, all the while enjoying their life responsibly and positively."

"While Western high-end contemporary brands were applying their tried-and-tested formulas on Eastern soil, Li was busy reimagining what the new hedonist actually wants"



But, unlike Stream and the rest, ideas and connections aren't CHAO's only currency: the brand also deals in cold, hard practicalities – the less glamorous “Move Fast with Stable Infra” that even Mark Zuckerberg had to face up to eventually. Thanks to its Work Club, CHAO is unique in embodying not only a high-end travel offering, but also a fully functional co-working space – which makes a lot of sense when you hear that Li's influences include citizenM and Mandarin Oriental, alongside co-working space WeWork, creative business development agency Generator and global content platform Monocle.

“Creative and talented people who are independent often lack the energy and infrastructure that larger companies have to complete basic administrative functions; we believe they should rather focus their energy and efforts on creating their best work, while we help them handle all the rest”, says Li, by way of explanation. “Additionally, we want to offer a better lifestyle to these entrepreneurs and workers: we offer them hotel-standard services – from a fully equipped gym, housekeeping and 24-hour security, to courses and community events. Finally, we also want to discover and support talented people and teams in the Work Club that we can collaborate and create interesting projects with.”

Despite its membership-by-recommendation model – which, after all, is an important component for any offering purporting to be exclusive – it's this two-way exchange of ideas and services that makes CHAO feel altogether more forward-thinking than other outwardly similar concepts in the industry (though Li is keen to point out that they don't look at other brands as competitors, at least in the traditional sense). “Being entrepreneurs ourselves...”, he casually riffs, yet I get the feeling he's making a point: beyond curating an aesthetic environment and intellectual context that encourages

others to thrive, then disappearing into the woodwork like elves, job done, CHAO actively participates in its own community.

It's true that, as a recently formed, innovative company, the CHAO team has a wealth of valuable insights and skills that could well empower other start-ups. “We made a conscious decision to do everything in-house, because we thought that was the only way to properly manifest our vision”, recalls Li. “It also allowed us to utilise all of our individual expertise as a collective whole – from the development of the business model, branding concept, interior design, construction to management processes and operation teams, all the way to media content and events programming.”

Refreshingly, though, he admits that the process of finding team members, suppliers and partners on the same wavelength who could positively contribute was a challenge. “We also made things difficult for ourselves because we're always finding new ways to challenge the industry conventions and standard practices”, he continues.

So what does it mean to Li to be a rebel? “It's constantly swimming uphill. We are an independent Chinese brand in the lifestyle and hospitality industry – a unicorn, more than a rebel, if you will. High-end travel is filled with established practices and it's hard to disrupt this massive industry and the related supply chains; but it has been a very fun process to constantly reimagine and question how things ‘should’ be done, in order to create a more contemporary and relevant experience for our guests and members.”

When I ask what ideas Li predicts will shape the future of hospitality, what's interesting is that for him travel done well means feeling at home. “Experiencing a destination as a true local is becoming the ultimate luxury experience – whether that

involves connecting with a local community of people, or getting access to events and venues that are hard to discover”, he explains. “I think more people will continue to choose independent and boutique products that can provide them with this new type of luxury.”

Back in that 2007 Fast Company article outing the Chinese creative class, Philip Dodd, founder of creative consulting agency Made in China, made a prediction of his own: “The last 20 years have been about the West moving East. But the next 20 years will be about the East moving West.” High-end hoteliers, take note: there's a new type of luxury in town and, if Maurice Li's efforts are anything to go by, China's contemporary travel scene is one to watch.



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IRAN IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

*As it becomes more important than ever for travel to push the boundaries of experience, **Bex Hughes** discovers a creative, dynamic Iran on the move from foreign stereotypes and economic and political restrictions.*



'Head Or Tail' by Ebrahimamin Eskandari
[Photo: Aaran Gallery]

When Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi received the second Oscar of his career in February, his response was a thoughtful, measured middle finger to the Trump administration. He'd decided in advance to boycott the ceremony, in response to the The Donald's executive travel ban on refugees and citizens from several predominantly Muslim countries, including Syria, Yemen and Iran. In his stead were two American-Iranians, US immigrants with dizzying qualifications: Anousheh Ansari,

the first self-funded woman and Iranian to travel into space, and Firouz Naderi, a former NASA scientist and Mars exploration project manager. Explaining the symbolism of their presence, Naderi said their professions gave them an appropriate perspective; "if you go away from the Earth and look back at the Earth you don't see any of the borders and the lines, you just see the whole beautiful Earth." It was an elegant incitement to open minds and bridge boundaries in a time of uncertainty.

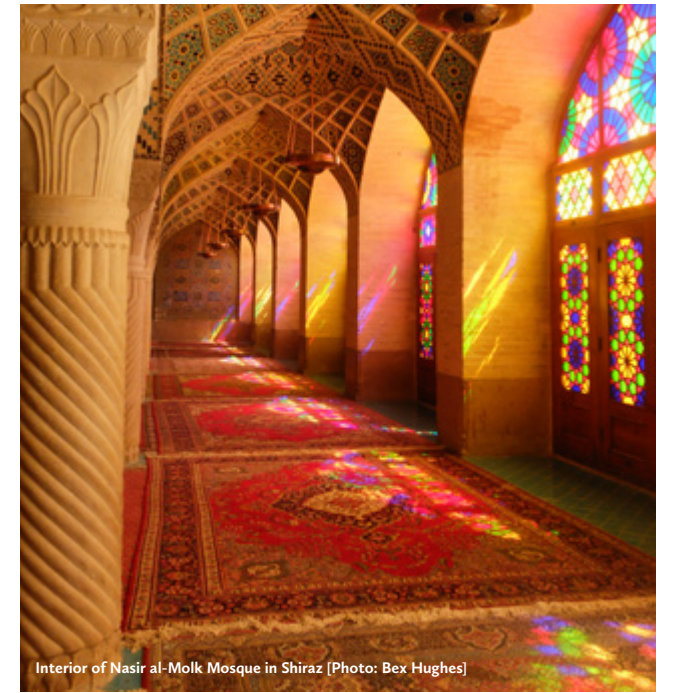
After nearly 40 years of strained international relations, the 2016 Iran nuclear deal marked a triumphant step in diplomacy and skilful détente. It seemed, finally, that this mysterious – sometime notorious – country might finally be fully open to foreign business and travel. And the world would benefit: the Middle East's second largest economy is rich in natural resources, historical treasures and ancient culture. There are still catches – restrictions on UK, US and Canadian visitors, as well as deep suspicion of potential spies

and subversives. To state your occupation as 'journalist' on a visa application is a no-no, for example. But, to insert my own catchy version of a worn-out expression: Mutual-Respect-and-Peaceful-World-Cooperation wasn't built in a day...

As the new US president closes borders and threatens to back-pedal reconciliation, it's more important than ever to push the boundaries of travel, experience and exchange of ideas. Intrepid travellers willing to set aside preconceptions will discover a creative, dynamic Iran on the move from foreign stereotypes and economic and political restrictions. It's also a deeply hospitable country, young (60 per cent of the population is under 30) and highly educated, with impressive rates of university education amongst both men and women. This new, post-revolution generation is urbanised, tech-savvy and world-wise, beneficiaries of the internet's boundary-breaking exchange of ideas – and easily able to overcome the regime's cyber filters.

Travelling around Iran I've been surprised by the number of young people keen to distance themselves from the politicisation of their parents' generation. They want to tap into Iran's capacity as an emerging market. I've heard plans for hotels, app start-ups, coffee shops (coffee culture is no joke in Iran's urban centres), festivals, and smoothie and burger bars. Yet in many ways Iran's young head stands on old shoulders – millennia old, to be precise.

Iranians of all ages sing the praises of traditional food, teahouses, carpet making, music and the beauty of Ta'zieh, ancient passion plays that chronicle the 680AD



Interior of Nasir al-Molk Mosque in Shiraz [Photo: Bex Hughes]

martyrdom of the Shi'a Imam Husayn, still performed today. An enduring pride in Iran's classical literature – often irreverent, erotic and hedonistic – also says much for the fierce strength of pre-Islamic Republic cultural identity. The authors – Ferdowsi, Hafez, Sa'adi, Rumi – live on in lush shrines, street names and statues, reaching through the centuries to defy the regime's conservatives. Iranian children still learn their works by heart; Hafez's Divan is used for fortune telling at family celebrations. Ferdowsi's Shahnameh – a 10th century epic chronicling the mythical and historical creation of the pre-Islamic Persian Empire – is a storytelling staple in homes, its tales of magic, romance and derring-do at odds with government criteria for 'acceptable' literature.



Rooftops in Yazd [Photo: Bex Hughes]

"IF YOU GO AWAY FROM THE EARTH AND LOOK BACK AT THE EARTH YOU DON'T SEE ANY OF THE BORDERS AND THE LINES, YOU JUST SEE THE WHOLE BEAUTIFUL EARTH"

- FIROUZ NADERI

'America The Beautiful' [Photo: Aaran Gallery]



Iran's contemporary creators and producers also know a thing or two about navigating boundaries. Penalties for offending or subverting the Islamic Republic's hardline authorities can be severe, so to operate and publicly air work requires determination and imagination. Public funding for the arts is low and a poor economy has hindered private grants. Yet despite – or perhaps because of – this, the resulting culture is a subtle reworking of the restrictions: rich in talent, and celebrating heritage, defiance and national pride.

Iranian cinema, grande dame of the contemporary arts, has particular international reach, with Farhadi, Panahi, Kiarostami and Makhmalbaf amongst its most famous practitioners. Their films hang on distinct philosophical themes of dark tragedy or black humour, examining the absurdities of human existence and life in Iran in all its messy contradictions. One example is Jafar Panahi's 2011 'This Is Not A Film', a rough assemblage of footage of the director's time under house arrest, awaiting the result of an appeal against a jail sentence and filmmaking ban. In a stranger-than-fiction twist, the USB containing the film was – allegedly – smuggled out of Iran in a cake before previewing at Cannes.

Elsewhere in the art world the effects of the deal promise to project Iran's shining stars on to an international stage. Some have already broken through, such as the award-winning Magnum photographer Newsha Tavakolian (famous for her frontline war coverage and artwork addressing western media stereotypes and the status of women in Iran) and Farhad Moshiri, a Pop-Art influenced mixed-medium creative who in 2007 became the first Middle Eastern artist to sell a piece of work for more than \$1m. Gallery culture is strong in Iran, with pioneers such as Nazila Noebashari's Aaran Gallery and Hengameh Moammeri's Homa Gallery in Tehran frequently showcasing cultural boundary-bending exhibitions. Gallerists and artists from Tehran to Shiraz told me that competition for exhibition space and promotion was fierce, particularly since the increase in visits of groups of foreign buyers for galleries in Europe and the US.



Poster for Jafar Panahi's 'This Is Not A Film'

Iran's fashion industry is on a similar trajectory. Considering the government's strict 'Islamic' dress prescriptions, you'd be forgiven for thinking fashion culture might sit on the back burner. Not a chance. There's certainly an appetite for typical 'high-end' international fashion – Roberto Cavalli opened a Tehran boutique in February 2016 and affluent north Tehran's leafy streets are runways for imported designer brands. But there's also an exciting new generation of native designers, carefully adhering to regime dictation whilst creating unusual, attractive and subtly subversive clothing that appeals to Iran's young demographic. Reza Nadimi, who describes his designs as "middle-east goth", produces surreal, monochrome, clean-cut creations that would look at home on the streets of Paris or Stockholm. Anousheh Assefi's Anar Design focuses on colourful, patterned

“Ignore that chest-beating and fake news – it's time to forget about macro-politics and take an intrepid jump into a dazzling, approachable culture”

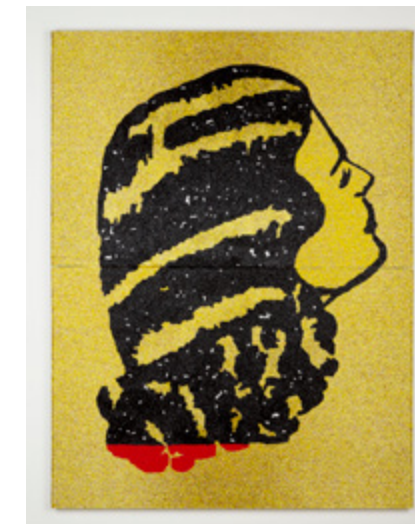


Design by Reza Nadimi

variations on the manteau – a loose robe worn by Iranian women as an alternative to the cloak-like chador. She incorporates vintage prints and pre-Islamic artwork into her designs, an ironic twist on the staid, dark stereotype of everyday fashion in Iran.

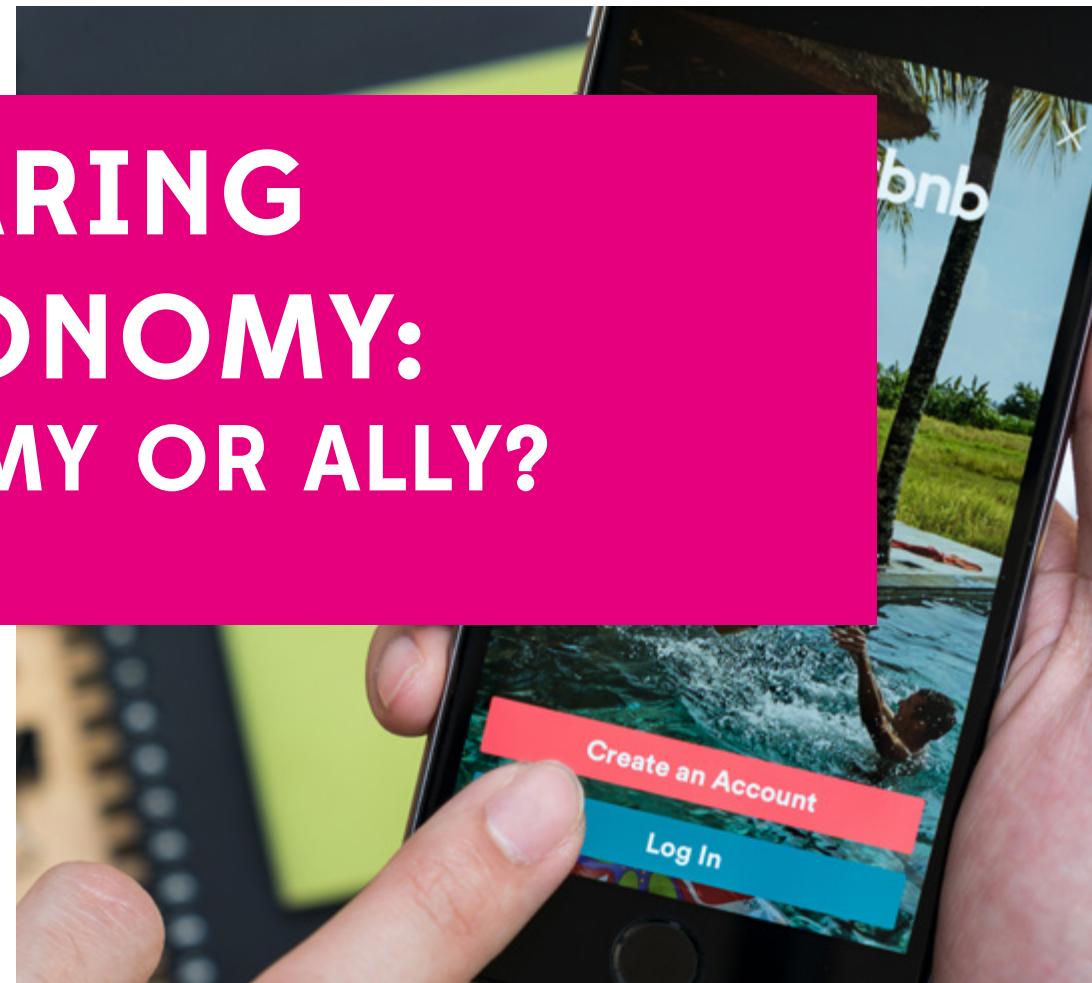
To be blunt, matters of isolation and economy mean Iran has a dated tourism infrastructure. There are of course exceptions – such as the magnificent Zein-o-Din Caravanserai in Yazd's desert or the lavish Abbasi Hotel in Isfahan, a 300-year-old complex of lush gardens, restaurants and luxury suites – and warming international relations have signalled heavy private and government investment in hotels and other infrastructure. The extravagant Haft Khan complex in Isfahan, built by a millionaire pistachio merchant, features seven floors of restaurants and coffee shops, a showcase of traditional and modern architecture and culinary excellence. Development of Kish Island, in the Persian Gulf, aims to create a luxurious resort destination and an attractive free-trade zone. With 5.2 million visitors in 2016 and more expected this year, Iran is relying on tourism to become a mainstay of the economy.

In any case, from the jaw-dropping 6th century BC-built expanse of Persepolis to Tehran's 2014 cutting-edge Tabi'at Bridge, from the Caspian Sea to the deserts of the south, Iran's jewels are compensation for any outdated plumbing or lack of beach resorts. To travel to this country in the initial wave of visitors post-deal and pre-development is an extraordinary experience. Ignore that chest-beating and fake news – it's time to forget about macro-politics and take an intrepid jump into a dazzling, approachable culture.



Farhad Moshiri, "Portrait of Thermometer" 2013 [Photo: © Claire Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin gallery]

SHARING ECONOMY: ENEMY OR ALLY?



Ana Andjelic explores how, far from being the enemy of high-end hospitality, the sharing economy's tech upstarts are prompting the next generation of rebellious travel brands to reinvent themselves and emerge stronger than ever.

One potentially exasperating side effect of on-demand car services is strangers randomly entering curbside vehicles. What's potentially even more exasperating is that these would-be riders are often unperturbed, demanding (according to one New York driver who's fallen victim more than once), "Are you Uber? Well can you just be: can we go?"

Blame the rising trust in strangers. The sharing economy blurs the lines between economic and social transactions and generates behavioural changes that in turn shape how we define a desirable travel experience, a pleasant taxicab ride, or a fulfilling leisure activity.

With the rise of the sharing economy, it turns out that we appreciate – or, at least, are not vehemently against – random encounters with others. When Uber and Lyft decided not to install a glass pane separating drivers and riders in traditional taxis, they created an invitation to turn an anonymous economic exchange into a social relationship. Uber Pool and Lyft Line took this socio-economic infrastructure a step further, allowing us to trade our anonymity for a personal connection. These connections are regularly fleeting, but occasionally they turn into a romantic relationship, a professional collaboration, or even a friendship.

Social engagement has a positive impact on human experience. We're in for a potential surprise and delight every time we enter a new Airbnb apartment to discover that our hosts have left us a welcome note, a bottle of wine, or breakfast. Simple, human gestures that we experience in the physical world make us feel special. They make us feel closer to other human beings. In the direct antithesis to the feelings of removal created by the internet, we bask in the empathy of our hosts, drivers or concierges.

Our desire to be more connected to the world around us transforms our expectations of travel and hospitality experiences. We want them to bring us closer to the people and activities from local communities we visit. This added cultural and emotional texture makes our travel better – but it also makes us, and the local communities, better off.

One hospitality success story is Casa Bonay in Barcelona, which has embedded itself in the existing socio-economic and cultural life of its locale – rather than disrupting its neighborhood, the Casa has become a community hub, providing everything from jobs to a meeting place where residents and travellers interact. Similarly, ARRIVE creates a self-contained neighbourhood that invites locals to participate; MADE and The Curtain encourage guests to mingle with like-minded people from near and far in new formats; while Locke Living – "a design-led aparthotel for those who want to challenge the status quo" – immerses guests in a destination by creating hybrid spaces where they can meet, play, work and thrive with local people and travellers alike.

All these brands are intricately woven into the fabric of their setting, aiming to create offline communities not unlike those created in the online world. "When I left Facebook, I got really interested in the idea of building physical



social spaces where people can interact and have shared experiences, along the same lines of what happens online", explains ARRIVE founder, Ezra Callahan.

Shared experiences bond us more with other people than shared consumption, claims a Fast Company article entitled 'The science of why you should spend your money on experiences, not things'. Joseph Pine, author of *The Experience Economy*, agrees: "When we buy experiences, those purchases make us happier than when we buy things." He cites the 2014 Boston Consulting Group report that revealed that of the \$1.8 trillion spent on "luxuries" in 2013, nearly \$1 trillion, or 55 per cent, was spent

"Our desire to be more connected to the world around us transforms our expectations of travel and hospitality experiences"

on luxury experiences. Unique experiences make us unique – far more than owning material goods does.

Experiences not only bring us more happiness than possessions, research claims; they also make others more interested in what we have to say. Simply put, our friends would rather hear about the ice marathon we ran in Alaska than an update on our latest pair of Louboutins. The things we do shape who



we are, the lifestyle we lead and the choices we make. They are our personal *Weltanschauung*, or world view.

For the generations who grew up before Facebook and Snapchat, fashion was a kind of social elixir. “In the past, teenagers used fashion brands as a kind of social signal”, writes Helena Pike for *Business of Fashion*. But today’s next generation of affluent travellers live on social media, where currency is built on experiences. Macie Merriman, executive director of growth strategy and retail innovation at Ernst & Young, notes, “[Young affluents] don’t want to buy stuff. They’re buying an experience and the product they get is kind of a bonus.”

Janine Yorio – founder and CEO of on-demand hospitality startup StayAwhile, which combines a membership model with the homey feel of Airbnb and the reliability and convenience of hotels – noticed that what was missing from the hospitality landscape was “a solution that addresses the way that people are starting to live, which is a combination of very minimalist and also hyper-mobile. People

aren’t interested in amassing china collections the way they once were when they got married, or in having this very precious lifestyle. Instead, they want to pare it down and they want to be in lots of different places. Airbnb has really spoken to that demographic because it has allowed people to stay longer by giving them lower-cost alternatives to hotels. They can have this more immersive travel experience where, instead of going on a bus tour in ten European cities, they can go and live in Rome for a week. It’s an entirely different way of living and travelling.”

The modern desire for a dynamic, flexible way of living applies also to work, as epitomised by Roam, a global network of co-living and -working spaces, or wecoco and Remote Year, two remote-working collectives that tour the planet, setting up base in a destination for a temporary period. These brands are responding to the next generation of travellers for whom the notion of ‘home’ is becoming more fluid, just as the lines between their work and personal lives are blurring. The shared experiences they offer are unique each time, according to the cultures in which they immerse

themselves and the connections they facilitate between different members – it’s this sort of uninhibited, connected experience that young affluents seek.

By understanding why different ultra-high-net-worth audience segments are attracted to the sharing economy, luxury hotels can unlock the opportunity to cater to them all. “The future of travel and hospitality is having this network of spaces that really function as people’s second homes around the world. It makes a lifestyle that was once accessible to the elite much more accessible to the mainstream”, explains Yorio. “New Yorkers have been living between Miami, the Hamptons and New York City – those who have money have been doing it for hundreds of years; but through sharing economy models we can make this much more accessible to a much broader segment of a population. People want to be able to move around and not be pinned down to their apartment in Bushwick, but rather have access to these different spaces.”

The main promise of the sharing economy for travel and hospitality isn’t frugality: it’s pushing the boundaries of consumers’ expectations of what good service and experience are. The seamlessness, convenience, flexibility and social serendipity that Uber or onefinestay provide is something that new affluents have now also come to expect from legacy travel and hospitality brands. Thus, business models and revenue streams that are emerging to meet these various needs revolve around offering products on-demand as a service (versus just selling them); partnerships and tie-ups; motivating a marketplace; and new service value-adds.

The good news is that technology upstarts (such as Uber, Airbnb and even Facebook) give existing hospitality brands a roadmap for how to use the sharing economy to rethink their own businesses and adapt to become stronger

than ever. Of course, hospitality’s strategy of taking direction from successful practices outside its own industry isn’t new. Since the dawn of contemporary travel, hotels have looked to nightclubs for inspiration – think Morgans and their Studio 54 lobby references. In contrast, today’s lobbies are all about vibrant, multi-purpose, easily adaptable spaces made for sharing ideas, not WiFi connections – something that future-facing hospitality brands have borrowed from the sharing economy.

These travel rebels are providing the manual for the next generation of high-end hospitality brands to learn from and apply to their own business models. Forget Six Sigmas, Five Ps and other disciplined, inflexible approaches to strategy. In a volatile environment, it’s more important to have the agility necessary for incremental growth, a laser traveller-focus and the ability to view business from a

problem-solving perspective. As digital-first companies grow and move up the value chain, their definitions of quality and value become the norm. With no barriers of entry left, big brands have an exciting journey ahead in adopting them.



Casa Bonay [Photo: Nacho Alegre]

“THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY IS HAVING THIS NETWORK OF SPACES THAT REALLY FUNCTION AS PEOPLE’S SECOND HOMES AROUND THE WORLD”

- JANINE YORIO,
FOUNDER & CEO, STAYAWHILE



Communal ping-ping tables at ARRIVE Palm Springs [Photo: Foxes and Wolves]



Kitchen table-style seating invites conversation at MADE Hotel

Louise O’Riordan, VP Brand Partnerships and Events at Surf Air



REBEL CONCEPTS//

JOINING THE MILE-HIGH (SOCIAL) CLUB

What do Netflix and the mile-high club have in common? Not what you’d think. Surf Air’s VP Brand Partnerships and Events, Louise O’Riordan, tells Katie Palmer why subscription models will disrupt the future of travel.

There’s no getting around it: Netflix has irreversibly entered the collective consciousness – and not just as a euphemism for casual hook-ups. With subscription models for reading, eating, drinking, exercising, fashion, beauty, hygiene, crafts – even sex toys (*cough* Netflix and chill *cough*) – ‘Netflixification’ is catering to our every want and need. And travel is no exception: just as you can spot a movie or music buff by their monthly direct debits (though why you have access to their banking information is a question best left for the lawsuit...), thanks to membership-based private airline, Surf Air, the same can also be said for regular jet setters.

“I think it just reflects the fact that everyone is craving, in a way, a simpler life”, says Louise O’Riordan, Surf Air’s VP Brand Partnerships and Events. The aeronaut’s answer to Netflix, Surf Air subscribers pay one monthly fee to fly as often as they like (currently just in and around California, on one of over 90 daily scheduled flights). “Convenience and seamless travel is something we’re certainly all about”, she goes on.

Convenience is one of the many benefits of the subscription model: whether it’s movies and music or cross-state travel, subscribers pay for the privilege of constant access – whenever, wherever. But, more than that, explains O’Riordan, Surf Air aims to make members’ lives easier by “giving them back some time.” Not only is the in-app booking “as easy, if not quicker” than Uber, the service also operates from private terminals and thus travellers need only arrive for their flight 15 minutes before take-off – a lifetime saved compared with the endless purgatory of airports. Plus, the short lead-time on booking (typically a day or two before a flight, but technically possible anywhere up to 15 minutes before take-off) and flexible cancellation policy is designed with real lives in mind. “We understand that, well, meetings change”, affirms O’Riordan.

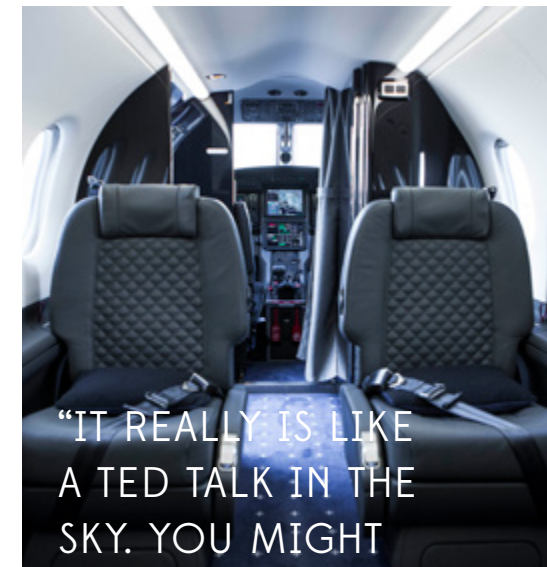


Surf Air planes

For typical Surf Air customers – high-flying (excuse the pun) tech and entertainment execs zipping from Silicon Valley to Beach on VIB (Very Important Business) – time is money, so these perks represent a very real financial benefit. Of course, the \$1,950 monthly fee (plus initiation fee of \$1,000) isn’t cheap, but it’s surprisingly justifiable when you consider the average price of a flight across California and the man-hours saved in comparison – more so still if you account for the time the same journey would take by car.

Which brings us to another big win for Netflix-of-the-skies: suddenly a several-hundred-mile commute is no longer madness, but totally feasible – meaning that the catchment area for prospective employees gets a whole lot bigger. “We’re connecting people, first of all physically, around California. We’re making it possible for somebody, for example, to decide to live where they really want to live and commute into work”, says O’Riordan.

Throwing an unlimited flight subscription into an employment package won’t do your company image any harm, either. Initially, she tells me, the personal benefits weren’t that obvious to everyone



“IT REALLY IS LIKE A TED TALK IN THE SKY. YOU MIGHT BE SITTING BESIDE SOMEBODY WHO’S AN ENGINEER FOR SPACEX... I CONSISTENTLY MEET INNOVATORS AND ENTREPRENEURS WHO ARE DOING VERY COOL THINGS.”

- LOUISE O’RIORDAN

– “Trying to get people over that mental block, that even though they got it through work or they bought it for work, trying to get them to start using it [for leisure] took a little time” – but as the line between work and leisure becomes ever more blurred and the concept of ‘home’ is increasingly fluid, the most forward-thinking employers offer better perks than just health insurance and a great pension scheme: they offer a lifestyle.

Indeed, more than just a means of getting from A to B, Surf Air is a sort of mile-high social club. “It really is like a TED Talk in the sky. You might be sitting beside somebody who’s an engineer for SpaceX or somebody who’s doing a lot of work in the charity sector. I consistently meet innovators and entrepreneurs who are doing very cool things”, divulges O’Riordan.

And that’s no accident. Having the freedom to design their own planes, Surf Air has switched up the seating configuration so that passengers at the front of the plane face each other (though O’Riordan is quick to establish that there are more traditional spots at the back for those who “want the quiet seat”). “We’re trying, as a company, to encourage innovation”, she explains. “Some people, just by habit, end up taking the same time flights every week, so they do end up building up these relationships with people naturally.”

But in addition to chance meetings in transit, O’Riordan’s role involves organising events where members have the opportunity to meet other Surfers who might not be on their regular route. “I can only go on what people tell me, and that’s really that the whole community aspect is something that a lot of people didn’t even think of when they joined, but has turned out to be really important.” Especially so for some, it would seem: “We’ve had a marriage out of Surf Air!” (Fittingly, it transpires, the couple in question tied the knot on a Surf Air plane.)

Perhaps some of their clients didn’t initially consider the networking potential of Surf Air, but for O’Riordan and her team the community and membership side of the business has been an key value proposition from the word go. Previously Global Brand Director for Quintessentially, she’s well versed in the benefits of being part of an exclusive ‘club’, suggesting that what draws people to both brands is “the desire to feel instantly connected and tapped into the community when you travel somewhere... along with convenience and time-saving. Plus, you trust the choices. You’ve joined through a filter.”

Already boasting an impressive 3,300 members, O’Riordan has even bigger dreams for the future of Surf Air. “I really see this brand being global. There isn’t anywhere in the world that doesn’t have business travellers commuting from one destination to another.” And with an interstate licence recently approved, which means they can start travelling beyond California – first with a daily service to Vegas, “which will be a big market for us”, then repeating the business model within Texas – and a European launch coming up in June – starting with London-Cannes and London-Ibiza, followed by London-Geneva and London-Zurich or

London-Paris – those dreams are far from fantasy.

When I ask whether O’Riordan considers Surf Air a travel industry ‘rebel’, she’s wary: “rebel seems strong to me because we haven’t really come up against that much resistance.” (They have, however, been banned from advertising in airports, which whiffs of a struggle with the establishment.) “I definitely think it’s been a disrupter, because we’re taking people off commercial travel. It’s not like most of our members are coming down from having their own planes”, she concedes. Despite her protestations, many of the brands O’Riordan does consider rebels – those she claims “paved the way” for SurfAir – are similarly engaged in democratising services once largely reserved only for the super-rich, such as private drivers, or second homes.

Though modesty prevents her from categorising Surf Air alongside the likes of Uber or Airbnb, O’Riordan does admit that they are united by an underdog spirit. “People don’t make it very easy for you when you’re doing something new. But at the end of the day, once the powers-that-be realise that this is working and that there is a demand, they just have to play ball.” Sounds like rebellious talk to me.



Louise O’Riordan with fellow Surfers at a Surf Air members’ event

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Who the ***K is Generation K?

*There's a new buzzword in town. Forget millennials: **Katie Palmer** investigates why trendsetting brands should get to know Generation K – and discovers that age isn't everything.*



'Millennial' is a phrase thrown about by marketers with a frequency and abandon reminiscent of Trump's penchant for 'China' (and if you've seen the memes, you'll know that's a lot). Like POTUS' C-word, any mention of millennials is a sure-fire to make certain brands sit up and listen; but whether or not the speaker fully understands the subject at hand is another matter.

For one thing, depending on the definition you choose to believe, anyone between the ages of 13 and 41 – born between 1976 and 2004 – could be considered a millennial. Within that bracket, researchers have identified further sub-groups: Generation X, who most agree are born between the early '60s and early '80s; Generation Y, born roughly between the early '80s to mid-'90s; and Generation Z, those fresh out of the crib since 1995.

It's partly on account of the latter moniker sounding more than a little apocalyptic (cheers Brad Pitt) that academic and author Noreen Hertz came up with a more optimistic label for these consumers: thus, Generation K was born. 'K' stands for Katniss Everdeen, the long-suffering, sombre-faced heroine of the hit novel and movie franchise, *The Hunger Games*. According to Hertz, "Like Katniss, [Generation K] feel the world they inhabit is one of perpetual struggle – dystopian, unequal and harsh."

"Our would-be Katnisses are characterised foremost by profound anxiety and mistrust; they worry about financial security and inevitable debt, terrorism, inequality, the capacity of the government and traditional institutions to do the right thing..."



Despite having one foot still in the millennial camp, even the eldest of Generation K are a breed apart from the optimistic, entitled and overly confident dreamers that represent the 'typical' millennial cohort. Our would-be Katnisses are characterised foremost by profound anxiety and mistrust; they worry about financial security and inevitable debt, terrorism, inequality, the capacity of the government and traditional institutions to do the right thing – you name it.

Yet in the wake of 'post-truth' becoming Oxford Dictionaries' 2016 International Word of the Year, clearly Generation K isn't alone in feeling more than a little disillusioned by the state of the world right now. So, with different demographics increasingly borrowing from one another's character profiles, where does that leave marketers? Does 'millennial' have any meaning? Moreover, is it even relevant to continue defining consumers according to their D.O.B.?

Hark back to the LE 2014 Leadership Lab and you might remember consumer psychologist Adam Ferrier concluding that 'psychographics' – the study and classification of people according to their attitudes and aspirations – are the future; in the 2015 book, *Trend-Driven Innovation*, authors Henry Mason, David Mattin, Maxwell Luthy and Delia Dumitrescu refer to this concept as "hyper-demographic targeting". They do admit that demographics "can still play a meaningful role in setting focus", but argue that we're living in an age of "post-demographic consumerism" – which is to say that "the world is now too complex, ideas too available, people too networked, and society too fluid for expectations to remain the preserve of any single demographic for long."



But don't empty your Amazon basket of *The Hunger Games* trilogy just yet. According to Mason and co., even in a post-demographic marketplace young people will remain the most common early adopters, setting the pace for innovations to be accepted by and reshape the expectations of other demographics. "One way to keep up? Shift your focus to traditional demographic groups you'd never considered before, both as a source of inspiration and as target customers", they urge.

In theory, by understanding Generation K high-end hospitality brands can predict the future behaviour of their supposed 'usual' high-net-worth target market; but think again before you write off under-21s as customers in their own right. A recent VICE report on 'The 14-Year-Olds Spending Thousands On Streetwear' suggests that assuming young people are on pocket-money budgets may be short-sighted, and explores how social media and the micro-economy – sites like Instagram and Grailed, a high-end eBay – are proliferating the trend for teens tapping into luxury.

Indeed, according to Adam Mack, chief strategy officer, EMEA at PR firm Weber Shandwick, Generation K has a spending power of €150 billion per year in Europe, The Middle East and Africa; while author of *How Cool Brands Stay Hot: Branding to Generations Y and Z*, Joeri Van den Bergh, paints a similar picture over the pond: "Numbering more than two billion globally and with a spending power of more than \$44 billion in the USA alone, they're the biggest, richest, most independent generation so far."

To understand why the youngest millennials think and act the way they do, you need only consider the context in which they've grown up. For one thing, this generation doesn't remember a time before technology; but they are also shaped by the global economic turndown and the rising threat of terrorism. Perhaps due to their increased awareness of global issues resulting from hyperconnectivity, Hertz reports that teens today volunteer, campaign and donate far more than previous generations. They care deeply about the environment and climate change, and 70 per cent cite inequality as a concern.

Hence the rise of brand activism, as marketers attempt to tap into the increasing cognisance of consumers. Truly visionary, benevolent brands who use their product as a platform to create change can go some way to provide the meaning and purpose that Gen K so badly craves; but overly keen hospitality brands take note: you need only talk to Pepsi to discover the terrible consequences of underestimating the intelligence of your customer.

Speaking of mass corporations: according to Hertz, Generation K doesn't trust them, or establishment institutions, as far as they can fling them, slating both as "exploitative", "selfish" and "greedy". Perhaps the hospitality industry is already on to this: "The big hotel chains are in the business of pretending they aren't big chains", observes Pauline Frommer, editorial director for travel guide company Frommer's. "They want you to think they are boutiques. This dizzying array of brand names is a good way for them to hide."

However, "For a generation that is all too attuned to spin, Photoshopping and sponsored content, authenticity is particularly prized", explains Hertz. While Frommer suggests that "The vast majority of the public is not going to keep track" of which brands belong to who, our young Katnisses are cut from a different cloth. Savvy organisations, large and small, will prioritise transparency and trust-building, rather than trying to trick their customers.

The same goes for the hotel experience. It's all too easy to follow a tested formula for 'authenticity' – cue exposed brickwork/beams/pipes designed to say 'we have nothing to hide', faux-friendly service and questionable cultural programming that leaves real-life locals squirming in their up-cycled mid-century chairs. But to succeed under the knowing gaze of Gen K it's advisable to put some real thought into what 'authentic' really means for a particular building, area or community.

Despite being constantly connected and valuing their technology as a core part of their identity, Hertz claims Generation K is intrinsically lonely and 80 per cent would rather hang out with friends face-to-face – "Physical interaction comes at a premium in this digital world", she points out. Immediately, it's not hard to imagine how hotels could accommodate both needs with, say, own-technology integration in guest rooms, juxtaposed with technology-free zones that encourage real, human interaction downstairs.

Those zones might come in handy, too, for all the co-creation our young millennials tend towards. "Producing something themselves has value for this generation", says Hertz. "It resonates with their desire to be self-sufficient, and to have physical experiences in a digital world – as well as their desire to have agency and impact." High-end hoteliers should make like Starbucks (now that's a sentence you won't often hear), who she claims have cornered the market with their 'secret menu' that allows customers to create any non-alcoholic concoction they can imagine (and has the handy side-benefit of being extremely Instagrammable).

Which brings us to another differentiating characteristic of Gen K: Hertz paints a picture of a hardworking, sober bunch who drink less, take fewer drugs and are more career-focused than the psychedelics-loving children of the 60s and 70s, the pill-popping ravers of the 80s and 90s, or the house-heads of the early noughties. Hoteliers

still clinging to Schragger's Studio 54-influenced model that gave rise to the contemporary travel scene should diversify their offering if they want to avoid ostracising an increasingly influential crowd of teetotalers.

As Serge Dive, Founder of Beyond Luxury Media, observes, "Hotels should be the first to integrate emerging trends into their offering – in an age where people are more aware of caring for their health, why are minibars still full of alcohol and chocolate? Offer green juices and body-hacking food supplements instead. And don't think you can put some machines in a room and call it a 'fitness centre' – today's consumer demands fun, immersive classes that make them feel part of a fitness community."

Right about now, hoteliers will either be feeling utterly terrified, or as excited as the shock victor of an unprecedented election. Either way, as Hertz puts it, "If you want to plan for the success of your business over the next two decades, you need to deeply understand this generation – and understand how profoundly different they are to previous ones." Armed with insights on Generation K and the understanding that these values, attitudes and behaviours have far-reaching ramifications for cross-demographic consumer behaviour, brands can not only adapt to appeal to an entirely new, sophisticated and moneyed customer base; they can also develop their offering to become a leader, rather than follower of trends. Failing that, at least they'll have a brand new buzzword to sling about the boardroom.



GO MICRO FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT



Amra Beganovich, one half of the Clubfashionista blog

*It's time to stop complaining about influencer marketing and play the (Insta) game, says **Nora Oravec**. Here are her top tips for finding micro-influencers with maximum reach.*

Recently, I've heard lots of people complaining about influencer marketing, using the same tired excuses. "It doesn't work!" or "I'm just throwing money out the window!", they sigh melodramatically, whilst sadly swiping through their un-liked posts.

What most of them fail to consider, however, is that the blame for their lack of success might be (whisper it) down to them, rather than the ineffectiveness of influencer marketing at large. Most likely, they haven't done their research correctly; haven't been patient enough; or, above all, didn't have a clue how to communicate with the influencers they approached.

The rise of influencers has created a bit of confusion. Many agencies and brands have tried to work with influencers in the same way they

work with celebrities, which is a misguided approach. Celebrities can post about anything; however, influencers are not in a position to do the same. After working hard to build their following, they need to stay true to their content and their followers. If an influencer cannot authentically relate to a brand, they will – and should – say no to a potential partnership.

In 2016, social media changed (again). We started to see increasing numbers of accounts with tens of thousands of followers around the world, and with them the continued rise of digital nomads and bloggers. Alongside a few failed campaigns using celebrity influencers, this change in the market has helped 'micro' (read: non-celebrity, more targeted) influencers to grow their personal passions into businesses. It has also opened up new opportunities for brands, who have begun to ask themselves, "What if we spent the same amount of money, but were able to distribute our content across multiple platforms simultaneously?"

If you think this ascent in the power of micro-influencers hasn't affected superstar influencers, you're wrong. Even these established names have to face up to the fact

that, if they continue to grow in size, they're risking even their long-term collaborations. Earlier this year, I interviewed Elma Beganovich, who used to run the famous fashion blog Clubfashionista with her sister. Despite having over two million followers, they had outgrown their following and had to say goodbye to many of their sponsors. Think about it: 100k+ followers means that an influencer can charge thousands per picture, but not necessarily be affordable to many brands. Elma and her sister Amra ultimately started their own social media agency in order to keep many of their start-up and mid-sized clients.

So what does this change in the influencer marketing space mean for you? In short, it signals that this really is the year of the micro-influencers – and in order to win at this new form of marketing, it's essential that you learn how to connect with them in the most effective way possible.

1. DO YOUR RESEARCH

The biggest mistake you can make is to send the same email to every influencer. Outreach is a long process, and you need to tailor your communications to the person with whom you are communicating.

First off, clearly define your goals when embarking on an influencer campaign. Do you need better quality pictures for social media; or are you looking for more reach or followers? Do you want to sell something; or promote a specific product or service? Once you have this box ticked, create a persona. Write down the ideal characteristics of the influencer you're searching for: gender, age, location, type, number of followers, and so on.

Then, get researching potential candidates on platforms such as Digital Ninja and BuzzSumo to gain insight about their past work and level of influence. Once you've found

a couple of influencers who fit the persona you've defined, you can go on Instagram and start following them. Once you do this, Instagram will suggest similar accounts and you can widen your list of possible people to work with. Another way is to go through the 'following' list of influencer marketing agencies and platforms on Instagram, who should be following most of their influencers already!

Finally, don't contact your chosen influencer right away. Spend a couple of weeks just following them, trying to understand who they are, what their goals are, and what they do. Take notes recording your insights. How many followers do they have? Do they have real comments or only fakes? What about their engagement? What kind of sponsor deals have they had in the past? Two good tools to use for this are Insight Pool and Demographics Pro, both excellent for understanding statistics and audience.

2. SIZE DOESN'T MATTER (MUCH)

By now you're probably saying, "But my boss wants to see numbers!" While this is understandable, there are so many more factors to take into consideration when it comes to influencers.

Let's take London as an example. In London, the term 'micro-influencer' represents someone with at least 20k followers – that's a lot of people who might purchase your product or service as a result of their recommendation. Furthermore, these people are more authentically connected to their followers simply by nature of being a smaller account. In contrast, superstar accounts tend to be less personal and therefore less relatable – plus, it's hard to know who the millions that are following them really are. Their content is just not as targeted as that of a micro-influencer.

If your target market is London, try to find a niche influencer in the city who has a hardcore fanbase. If they are the administrator or organiser of closed Facebook groups and Meetups, even better! It's always telling to see an influencer's reaction when I ask them what would happen if we organised an event in their city with them. How many people would show up? The most attendance comes for the household names and the micro-influencers, not those with 200k followers. You want to work with the girl who lives next door to her followers: she has real reach.

3. TAKE THE TIME TO GET PERSONAL

Write a personal email. Tell the influencer how long you've been following their journey and how amazing you find their work. Specifically mention your favourite outfit they wore; article they wrote; workshop they did; or a place where you have both travelled, and why the content they created around it was so inspiring for you.

Then, dive deeper! If you can think of any way you can support the influencer, offer your help. Taking the time to look through their content and finding specific ways that you can collaborate will be a powerful incentive for that influencer.

Start with these basics, and whenever you can, go with the profiles that have real stories and reach behind them and whose image and identity aligns with that of your company. Build long-term relationships with your influencers, support them in every possible way, and you'll see that you won't even have to ask them to post about you: they'll do it anyway.

Discover more about this topic at the talk EVERYBODY'S FAMOUS: WHY IT'S TIME TO RETHINK YOUR INFLUENCER STRATEGY (AGAIN), live at this year's Ministry of Ideas

WELCOME TO THE INDEPENDENTLY MINDED MOVEMENT

Small Luxury Hotels of the World's diverse range of hotels are united by their independently minded attitude. Jacob Howie explains the secret ingredients that go into curating this international movement.

THIS ARTICLE WAS BROUGHT TO YOU BY SMALL LUXURY HOTELS OF THE WORLD

Like all styles and fashions, the luxury travel industry evolves. What was once the latest fad is now left for dust, making way for the newer, fresher interpretation of what it means to experience luxury. From gold trimmings to fine dining, the taste of the savvy traveller changes, but there is a clear rule that supersedes any trend: independence.

That's where luxury hotel brand Small Luxury Hotels of the World has found its widespread niche – in offering luxury seekers an eclectic portfolio of luxury hotels around the world that provide an independently minded authenticity. "It can be hard to define luxury, as it means different things to different people," says SLH CEO Filip Boyen. "To some, luxury is extravagance or the latest styles or the best brands; but after really looking into our brand and the people we work with to create unforgettable experiences, luxury all boils down to one thing: choice."

No words could be truer in today's travel climate. Gone are the days where a 10-night stay in a generic hotel would suffice. The cookie-cutter travel experience of a package deal seems somewhat naff to those seeking true, personalised luxury, and SLH has carved out a unique brand of hotels that ensures each traveller can be provided with the luxury of choice. "We offer over 500 hotels in more than 80 countries," says Boyen. "While that's a choice of locations and countries, the real choice begins when you're on property. Our hotels are independently owned and operated, so a small detail that makes the world of difference is easily executed, as the staff are really entrenched in the ethos that small hotels really do deliver bigger experiences."

The SLH portfolio is truly impressive, with a dizzying range of exceptional hotels that would leave even the most dubious traveller with severe wanderlust. Here are some of the secret ingredients to what makes the team at SLH the mavericks of the independently minded movement.



THE MORE YOU STAY, THE BETTER IT GETS

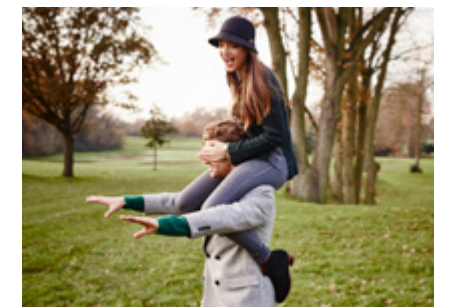
Most people have a wallet full of loyalty cards that largely go unused, each one promising to deliver the world when they barely offer a penny's difference. SLH's newly re-branded Invited loyalty programme has one simple rule – the more you stay, the better it gets. "Simplicity is the key to Invited. We have simply listened to what our members want from a loyalty programme and we are providing it," says Amanda Auld, Director of Loyalty. "It gets better with each stay because we take note of your preferences to provide you with an even more personalised experience. We have created a programme that builds a relationship with members rather than treating them all as a big, faceless group of 'followers'."

The heart of Invited is the individual traveller. The benefits are separated into three tiers – Invited, Inspired and Indulged – with each taking the loyalty offerings up a notch. While all of the exclusive privileges given to Invited members are designed to make each stay more comfortable, SLH actively seeks personal preferences from each member. "We provide you with your preferences, such as your favourite room type, early check-in, late check-out and a sumptuous breakfast, as well as a range of opportunities for our members to receive complimentary room nights. We'll also add surprise special touches along the way to make everyone feel truly Invited."

QUALITY IS KEY

Quality is always a non-negotiable expectation in luxury travel, but no other brand has mastered the craft quite like SLH. Rather than relying on an initial once-over when obtaining a new hotel, SLH has enforced a strict quality assurance programme that sees mystery inspectors frequently visiting the hotels to ensure standards are consistently high. After their stay, they report back to the team with a zero-bars-held policy. The brand has managed to evolve its quality assurance programme with the independently minded movement. "It has changed a great deal for us in the last two years, and we've had to re-focus our inspection procedures to be able to capture what an independently minded product is all about," says SLH's Director of Quality Assurance, Silje White.

But how do they do this? Well, the answer is simple. The mystery inspectors explore not only what's inside the hotel, but also what opportunities lie beyond the hotel's four walls. On top of this, the programme focuses on aspects such as personal engagement by hotel staff and how authentic and local the experience feels. Sure, you'll see flawless floral arrangements and the floors will be sparkling with cleanliness, but this model goes above and beyond by really breaking down to the heart of a hotel, and how it uses that heart to deliver an independently minded experience that leaves competitors in the dust.



A ZEST FOR INDEPENDENCE

“Without an innovative, forward-thinking development team, we couldn’t go to the places we want to go. It’s as simple as that,” says Boyen. But what is it about development that can really change SLH? Well, it’s everything – the hotels are what make the brand come to life. Browsing through their offerings, it’s clear to see every effort has been made to capture the most independently minded properties in the world. We’re talking historic palatial retreats owned by the same family for generations. Cutting-edge modern design in a vineyard setting. Quirky city centre hotels with more “je ne sais quoi” than you could throw a stick at. And a number of traditional properties with a flair for the finer things.

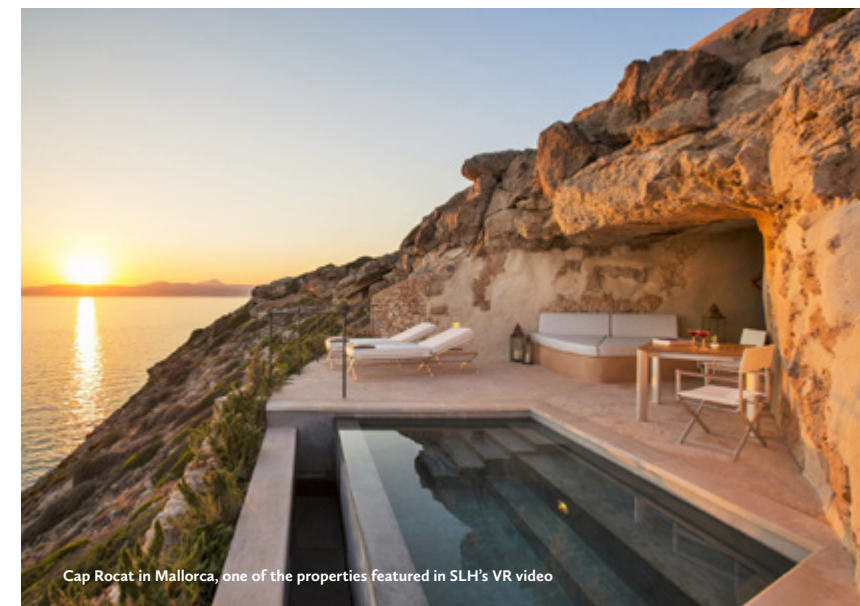
“We’re not signing bricks and mortar into SLH – hoteliers and owners are at the heart of our brand. We are a growing family of individuals, of kindred-spirits,” says SLH’s Director of Development, Daniel Luddington. This could be the most potent ingredient to the success of SLH’s new vision, as it captures the essence of the new brand ethos: a community of independent minds with a zest for life. With each year comes the addition of boundary-shattering properties that further establish the brand as a force to be reckoned with.



VIRTUALLY INDEPENDENT

This evolution has been happening since the brand’s inception, but with internal changes shaking the company up in recent years, the independently minded movement is now in full swing. To capture the sentiment of the movement, SLH has created an immersive virtual reality experience to bring the brand to life for hotel staff, industry partners and customers. SLH’s Brand and Marketing Vice President Tim Davis says this was the clear way forward. “We know we’re independently minded as we work with these vibrant hotels every day, so we can see how these luxury properties really provide a tailor-made version of luxury. We just wanted to ensure we could immerse everyone involved, to wake them up to the reality that the heyday of run-of-the-mill experiences is over and the independently minded movement is where the industry is going.”

The video was filmed at key SLH hotels – the theatrical country house of Dar Ahlam in Morocco, the chic city centre retreat of Nimb in Copenhagen, and around the exclusive resort of Mallorca’s Cap Rocat. “Within these three distinctive, varied properties is the heart of SLH – a completely independently minded hotel with a common thread of excellence. Our brand’s style is consistently inconsistent, but you will find a welcomed assurance that each and every property will provide those special touches created specifically for you,” says Davis. The virtual reality piece has been designed to give the viewers an immersive experience that showcases the tip of the independently minded luxury iceberg that is the SLH brand. It’d take years to visit each and every one of the hotels, so it’s refreshing to see SLH bring a piece of the hotels to the viewer to showcase the independently minded movement.



Cap Rocat in Mallorca, one of the properties featured in SLH’s VR video



YOU’RE INVITED!

What’s next for SLH? “World domination,” says Boyen, laughing. He may be joking, but he’s also not far away from the truth. In a world of OTAs that will take on each and every cupboard with space for a mattress, there’s never been a more crucial time for a brand that relies on quality. Many travellers have given up on quality to the current “cross-your-fingers-it’s-not-a-hell-hole” mentality that plagues them when booking hotels. SLH is the loophole that allows travellers to brazenly book without scrolling through countless TripAdvisor ratings. The legwork has been done by the team at SLH, so all travellers need to do is show up ready for the holiday of their lives. What’s more, the independently minded movement is creating a culture of authenticity, where hotels can cater to your personal preferences in a genuine way. The crux of the independently minded movement is to create a place where people listen and provide, helping you live an independent lifestyle that is uniquely your own. “Everyone’s invited to join us,” says Boyen. It sounds like a plan. So, who’s in?.

CHECK OUT WHAT IT MEANS TO BE INDEPENDENTLY MINDED AT SLH SESSIONS DURING THE NETWORKING BREAKS EACH DAY ON THE SHOW FLOOR’



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