

Boutique Chic

The boutique hotel market is booming. Lee Birchall from DV8 Designs discusses creating one, and what the term means today

Everyone loves a boutique hotel, but the term has become so popular over the last decades that it is difficult to pinpoint an exact meaning. It is believed that the "boutique" style came about in the mid 80s when two businessmen started the hotel "Morgan's" in Manhattan. This hotel was completely different and nothing like the hotels that had a domineering presence in the hotel industry at that time.

It was the late Steve Rubell, along with Ian Schrager, one of the owners of Morgan's (and of Studio 54 fame), who came up with the word "boutique", saying that his hotel was more like a boutique rather than a big department store. The main features of this hotel were, without doubt, the independence of the design and its uniqueness.

During the 90s, boutique hotels became even more popular and everyone knew what to expect; super design, excellent customer service and a small intimate feel, characterised by personal service and home-away-from-home ambience in a setting of timeless elegance. However, over recent years the term "boutique hotel" has become more of a marketing tool with some of the big hotel chains describing their hotels as "boutique hotels". There are however, certain unwritten rules that must be followed when designing a boutique hotel, without adhering to these rules a hotel cannot truly be described as a boutique hotel.

With the roots of the boutique hotel style being firmly planted in midtown and downtown Manhattan one could be forgiven for thinking that boutique hotel style is opulence and decadence. However, this style may look out of place on a Cornish beachfront, here one would focus on beach access, light spaces and natural colours. Moreover a hotel in the Lake District is more suited to cosy interiors with log burning fires. The point we are trying to make is the interior of a boutique hotel must be unique.

When creating a boutique hotel you can have a certain degree of creative freedom. However, defining the look and feel of the hotel requires a great deal of attention to detail. The first thing to do is to employ a good interior designer. It will be their attention to detail that will make your hotel stand out above the rest.

A good interior designer will have all the right contacts and therefore be able to source furniture and fittings at reasonable prices. They will have the expertise to know immediately what will go well together and what will simply not work. More importantly they will have the knowledge and expertise of the right quality of fixtures and fittings that will ensure the longevity of your hotel, allowing your hotel to look good now and for years to come.

Most interior designers will agree that it is important to give a boutique hotel a sense of place, not a one-size-fits all that you will find in the large hotel chains. Guests like to know where they are staying and therefore often it is important to tie in the interior to the surroundings. In a smaller boutique hotel there are more opportunities to customise each room. However, a word of warning,

Top Tip!

Neil Tomkinson, Franklite

"It's vitally important you constantly review your budget when renovating – all too often hoteliers go over budget then cut back on lighting expenditure, and this is such an important part of creating a boutique feel. Good lighting can make bad décor fantastic, and visa versa.

"Get a lighting company involved from the start; then they can help with everything, like matching shades to wallpaper. We can find a lime green silk shade to pick out the lime green in the walls, for example, or use clip-on shades which are great for changing the moods of rooms."



there is a fine line that you must not cross, after all nobody likes a themed hotel.

At DV8 Designs before we can even begin to start to work on a boutique hotel it is imperative that we have a meeting with the client. This will be the most important

in 1991 as a hotel many of the original features remained, including the original Mill mechanism.

Generally speaking a good boutique hotel should not exceed 100 bedrooms, however, those with around 20-30 rooms are

"The intimacy of a hotel needs to be created the moment a guest approaches"

meeting that we will ever have, and probably the longest. We will endeavour to find out as much about the client, the building and the local area as possible. During this time we will uncover a nugget of information that will be vital to the design. It will be this piece of information that will ensure that the overall finished design works and works well.

It transpired during our initial meeting with a client that we are currently working with that his family had a title and a very impressive tartan to go with it. We have therefore based the design of his boutique hotel around this and we have created a unique and individual hotel with each bedroom having at least one piece of tartan within it. This has meant that the design of the hotel is very unique to the proprietor. However, as this hotel is located in the South of England it was important not to overdo the tartan as it would have looked completely out of place.

If you are lucky enough to have a building that is rich in architecture then use this to your advantage. Many good boutique hotels are in older buildings, former warehouses, mills etc. 42 The Calls, Leeds is no exception, this boutique hotel started life as riverside corn mill in the 18th Century, when it opened its doors

better placed to offer a true boutique hotel experience. Whatever the size it is the intimacy that is created that is the main attribute. It is often said that an intimate atmosphere is the most important feature when designing a boutique hotel, without it, the hotel cannot properly be defined as a "boutique hotel". The guest must be made to feel like they are the only ones staying there. A good example of how this can be achieved is at the Scotsman in Edinburgh. Each room is connected to the hallway by a dumb-waiter style cubby so that food, drinks, newspapers etc can be delivered without guests having to even open their doors.

The intimacy of a hotel needs to be created the moment a guest approaches. One way to achieve this is in the signage. You will find that more often than not the signage is much understated or simply not there at all in a boutique hotel. This alludes to the idea of a 'secret address', only known by the select few.

Once a guest steps into the building the entrance and reception area are of paramount importance and set the scene for the rest of the hotel. A good hotel lobby will create the right ambience for the hotel. The traditional front desk of the large

Furniture

Graham Johnson, Anderson Bradshaw

"Queen Anne four poster beds are a must for boutique hotels; they make a room look striking and really stand out. It's the individuality of rooms in a boutique hotel that make it feel different from a chain. If the furniture's right, the guest will feel they're somewhere special, rather than in one of a series of identical hotels."

hotels are often missing from a boutique hotel, having been replaced by low, less informal desk arranged with comfortable seating. It is important to get the lighting right and this will depend on the ambience that you are trying to create. A boutique hotel does not have to be all straight lines and minimal colours, some are opulent and luxurious, and this can be reflected in clever use of lighting.

If the reception area is to be used as an occasional seating area then the fixtures must be of a high quality and generally sticking to the same colour palette. This will not only add to the feeling of luxury that you are trying to create but also the longevity of the hotel.

All hotels should be aspirational with the ultimate intention to deliver an experience that is larger than the guest's home life. A key trend that is beginning, to emerge is that travellers are becoming aware of their carbon footprint. Independent boutique hotels are ideally placed to cater for this need. Sourcing local produce in the restaurant or using local artisans for the interior products, be it select pieces of furniture, art for the walls or toiletries in the bathrooms, can help to highlight the hotels green credentials.

Too often it is the small things that are overlooked when designing a boutique hotel. I have, on more than one occasion, seen where a hotel owner has failed to use the expertise of an interior designer and it really saddens me. Yes, using a designer can add an expense to your budget and many people think they can do it themselves but a true interior designer has spent many years doing what they do best and to ensure that your hotel looks good for now and years to come it is money that you must spend.

If you want to discuss your requirements with Lee at DV8 Designs then he can be contacted on 01925 850288 or by visiting www.dv8-designs.co.uk.

What puts the 'boutique' into a hotel?

Simonstone Hall

Offers private dining opportunities with bespoke menus in the hotel's wine cellar, wine vault or the grand hunt room.

"A boutique hotel is one where the offer and experience are unique and the blend of service, accommodation and food and wine cannot be replicated in any other establishment."

- **Franko Mutinelli, manager.**



Grosvenor Pulford Hotel & Spa

This 72 bedroom boutique hotel is home to Spa by Kasia, the only spa in the North West with a traditional Hamman (Turkish bath).

"The Grosvenor Pulford may officially be a large hotel, but we maintain a boutique-style ambience with a very personal, professional service to every guest."

- **Lucy Nelson, sales and marketing.**



THE Inn at Fossebridge

Beautiful Georgian country retreat in a riverside setting. Each room is named after a local area, and the rooms' artwork and décor reflect this too.

"A boutique hotel has an intimate and luxurious environment and differentiates itself from the larger hotel chains by offering personalised accommodation and service." - **Samantha Jenkins, owner.**



TerraVina

Opened by Nina and Gerard Basset, co founder of the original Hotel du Vin Group and winner of the World Sommelier Title in 2010.

"Boutique means small, intimate, well-appointed. Quirky, traditional or minimal in style. The theme of décor isn't what makes it boutique; ambience, size and service make it special and bijoux." - **Nina Basset FIH, owner.**

