

## LUXURY HOSPITALITY DESIGN ROUNDTABLE DECLARES SPECIALISATION AND SEGMENTATION AS THE NEW WATCHWORDS

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**HONG KONG:** Specialisation and segmentation are key future trends for Asia's luxury hospitality design industry, according to the regular roundtable series hosted and organised by BLINK Design Group.

The group of experts, representing some of the most prestigious names in the hospitality industry and covering operators and owners, gathered recently in Hong Kong at the Yah Toh Heen restaurant in the InterContinental Hong Kong on the fringes of the annual HICAP event.



BLINK's Roundtable in Hong Kong saw 14 senior figures from the hospitality and media business trade gather to discuss "What's The Big Idea?". For high resolution version, click [here](#).

In a session titled, What's The Big Idea, moderated by C9 Hotelworks Managing Director Bill Barnett, hospitality luminaries were charged with bringing their experience to bear with the objective of defining what is next for luxury hospitality design.

"The industry is changing in many ways. The axis is shifting from Europe becoming more influential

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towards Asia rather than the other way around, and more than anything else this is bringing with it specialisation," said BLINK Design Group Founder and Senior Creative Director Clint Nagata.

BLINK's Managing Director Christopher Chua added, "Hotels are looking for icons to set them apart, and this is happening with restaurants and bars. Hotel designers and restaurant/bar designers are very different from one another, and we are seeing more and more F&B experts come into projects to establish a stand-alone restaurant or iconic bar. And there's much more collaboration between design specialists."



BLINK is headed by Founder and Senior Creative Director Clint Nagata (left) and Managing Director Christopher Chua. For high resolution version, click [here](#).

MGM Resorts, Intl, Vice President, Design & Construction APAC, John Miller agreed: "There's a major opportunity for new ideas. Twenty years ago in Asia all international-quality restaurants were in hotels, while since then they've sprung up outside hotels, in the cities and even in resort destinations such as Bali. But now they're on their way back, and there is a fantastic opportunity to create strong identities for restaurants housed in hotels."

Participants argued that specialisation could manifest itself in other areas too, such as redefining the archetypical meeting spaces in hotels.

"There are a few brands considering this question, us included," said Langham Vice President Development (Worldwide), Andrew Jessop. "We see an opportunity to reach the new entrepreneurs in Asia and create new types of spaces - such as office networking - that appeal to this generation."

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"We are seeing this trend also," said Mr. Miller. "Younger entrepreneurs need to work on the road and are attracted by design, but not everyone wants to work on a sofa."

"It is important, however, to ensure that the design integrity is maintained but allow hotels and resorts to differentiate and be more personal to the destination," added FRHI Hotels & Resorts Senior Vice President, Wayne Buckingham. "But, design needs to be done within a clear framework, so that spaces can generate revenue and meet the return on investment requirements needed by owners," he said.

In Europe, participants agreed that segmentation was a deeply rooted concept that had been a key driving force behind design concepts that would appeal to different groups of travellers.

"We have family hotels and adults-only hotels, and they are completely separate," said MELIA Hotels Vice President Development, Gonzalo Maceda. "They are each working very well. We have themed hotels, too, such as The Flintstones. I don't see it in Asia yet, but it could work well."

"I think it is a case of adapting design to meet what the customer wants," added Mr. Buckingham. "The emerging younger wealthy families travelling with children and extended families also need to be well taken care of. This is important for hotels to recognise, as they can do very well by tailoring their offering through flexible room product, bedding type, interconnecting rooms and customised amenities allowing operators to differentiate.

Yoo Hotels Chief Executive Officer Marco Nijhof said that the big ideas for him were celebrity design and innovation. "Celebrity design sells. We don't have this at home; this is something that is different and it sells," he said.

"Innovation is key too. I stayed in Dallas recently and there was an air-purifying machine under the bed. It cost an extra USD40 and I slept fantastically. With the air pollution in some Asian cities, small innovations like this could get traction."

The BLINK Roundtable series has conducted three events to date in Hong Kong and Singapore, with previous topics including "How can imaginative hospitality design drive business for hotels" and "What's next in luxury hotel design". Participants have been from many influential hotel brands such as Regent Hotels and Resort, Jumeriah Group, Taj Hotels and Resorts, Patina Hotels & Resorts, and ONYX Hospitality Group.

#### **BLINK Design Group roundtable was attended by the following people:**

- BLINK Design Group Founder & Senior Creative Director, Clint Nagata
- BLINK Design Group Managing Director, Christopher Chua
- Yoo Hotels Chief Executive Officer, Marco Nijhof
- C9 Hotelworks Managing Director, Bill Barnett
- MELIA Hotels Vice President Development, Gonzalo Maceda
- Langham Hotels Vice President Development (Worldwide), Andrew Jessop
- Six Senses Hotels and Spas Director of Development, Karan Kaul
- MGM Resorts, Int'l, Vice President, Design & Construction APAC, John Miller
- FRHI Hotels & Resorts Senior Vice President, Wayne Buckingham
- The Peak Hong Kong Managing Editor, Rex Aguado
- Prestige Hong Kong Writer, Oliver Giles

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**Notes to Editors:**

**Blink Design Group (BLINK)** has reinvented the traditional service model to offer clients an integrated stay from check-in to check-out. BLINK's end-to-end suite of services includes interior and building design and branding. Founded by Clint Nagata in 2006 and operating out of Bangkok, Singapore, New Delhi and Shanghai, the company designs luxury hotels, resorts, restaurants, clubs, spas, and residences for leading global brands. Believing each project is a platform to achieve something extraordinary, BLINK draws on the instincts and intelligence of its inspired team to create icons of design in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

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