

FROM SPACES TO EXPERIENCES

● Redefining Hospitality Design

WHITE PAPER

Redefining Hospitality Design

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INTRO

In recent years, the hospitality industry has undergone a significant transformation and, whilst this shift has been driven by a wide variety of factors, in this whitepaper we focus primarily on those aspects where user experience design, concept design and architecture intersect to devise new strategies for the guest experience.

Within this document, we explore how our design approach has evolved, emphasising new strategies, collaborative practices, and the redefined concept of 'good design' as perceived by ourselves and our clients. We provide detailed insights into the methodologies we have applied in our recent work and discuss key industry trends that have inspired us to reconsider the essence of hospitality. This analysis addresses the implications for developers, operators, and end-users, offering a holistic view of contemporary hospitality design.

SHIFTING TRENDS

PURPOSE-DRIVEN HOSPITALITY

Crafting Experiences for Like-Minded Communities

In today's hospitality world, increasing numbers of travelers are choosing their destinations based on purpose, rather than location. While many of us are familiar with planning trips to visit historic sites, indulge in beach holidays, or seek adventure, a new trend in travel is challenging hospitality design to offer more than just a destination. Travelers now seek to achieve personal goals, or to tap into an aspired lifestyle. They are looking for hospitality offerings that provide programmes and amenities that facilitate their motivations and connect them with a like-minded community that shares similar values. This shift towards experience-driven design reflects a changing notion of the role of hospitality destinations and presents an opportunity for designers to respond early in the development of hospitality concepts to create destinations that fulfill the promise of enabling aspired lifestyles.

DESIGNING FOR ASPIRED LIFESTYLES

A critical aspect of community-centric hospitality design is a deep understanding of the values, aspirations, and motivations of the target audience. Creating spaces that enable aspired lifestyles requires thorough user research, including ethnographic studies and behavioral analysis. This deep dive into user behaviours and environments helps to distill insights that can inform distinct and unique designs.

Applying user research throughout the concept development process of a design enables the creation of destinations that cater specifically to what users seek. This user-centric innovation challenges designers, developers, and operators to devise new solutions and means that the end user influences the style and functional planning of the space, while partnerships with other amenities, brands and services that align with user expectations can further enhance the design.

THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS IN COMMUNITY-CENTRIC HOSPITALITY DESIGN

When the end user is clearly defined and the community concept aligns with their aspirations, it often results in the identification of a unique market segment during the design process. Connecting with a specific group that shares community values becomes a strength in branding, targeting, and marketing. The more precisely you can grasp their interests, values, and aspirations, the easier it becomes to identify unique partners that seamlessly fit the concept.

Identifying partners is crucial to experience-driven design, as a space must be activated beyond its physical design. Uniquely formulated services and thoughtfully curated amenities that fit right into the narrative add additional touchpoints to the user experience. Brand collaborations that combine place, people, and products in a unique way can easily distinguish a destination from others. Whether partnering with artists, F&B brands, cosmetics, fashion brands, or even automotive companies, sharp, community-driven concepts create platforms for both the destination and the community to connect with those who seek similar experiences. This approach not only enriches the user experience, it also strengthens the overall brand identity.



For the development of STH BNK by Beulah in Melbourne, various partnerships have been established to extend the promise of the experiences it intends to offer, including a collaboration with the Centre Pompidou, which bring its world-class expertise to contribute to programming exhibitions, workshops and cultural events for young people via 3,000sqm of dedicated gallery space within STH BNK.



Another recently established cooperation is with the local vertical farming company Greenspace, who temporarily activated the existing site into a 200sqm pop-up micro farm during the preparation phase for construction. Within the Southbank site, various micro herbs, salads, and flowers have been planted to bring urban farming to the city centre. This benefits local businesses including ANZ, Commonwealth Bank, Deloitte, Compass, Foodbuy, Hyatt, Sheraton, W Hotels, Novotel, Zurich Insurance, Trippas White Group, and Two Good Co. STH BNK is therefore employing its core principles to establish partnerships and deliver experiences to future users, even before its opening.



CULTIVATING HEALTH:

The Rise of Wellbeing in Hospitality

While reflecting on the need to create destinations that cater to aspired lifestyles and bring communities together through shared values, it is important to recognise and break down the specific needs indicated by travelers. These needs set them apart and into different groups, inspiring various directions through which hospitality concepts can distinguish themselves.

One significant reason for travelers to choose a particular destination is wellbeing. The Global Wellness Institute forecasted in the 'Global Wellness Economy Monitor Report: 2023' that consumers will continue to increase spending on wellness, and the global wellness economy will grow at an annual rate of 8.6%. By the end of 2023, it would reach \$6.3 trillion, \$7.4 trillion in 2025, and \$8.5 trillion in 2027, which is almost double its size in 2020¹. Wellness tourism now represents 17% of the overall global tourism market². Given these facts, it is not surprising that 74% of hospitality businesses plan to integrate wellness programmes into their offerings within the next five years³. This notable shift in the industry has meant that designers are also now focusing on the integration of wellness concepts into their designs.

To illustrate the diverse values driving this shift in the hospitality industry's leap into the wellbeing market, we share here some trends that have been inspiring us to redefine what hospitality can offer in this evolving market.

INTEGRATION OF MEDICAL HEALTH AMENITIES

One notable trend is the integration of medical healthcare services in hospitality destinations. Often found in high-end resorts and hotels, operators are now going beyond traditional amenities such as spas and expanding to include medical-grade wellbeing amenities. These facilities offer advanced medical treatments, personalised health programmes and holistic therapies, thereby blending luxury with healthcare. Architectural designs emphasise natural materials and open spaces to enhance the therapeutic experience and support the healing process. This shift towards medical healthcare in hospitality reflects a broader societal move towards preventive healthcare and wellness, setting new standards for guest experiences and wellbeing in luxury travel.

¹ Global Wellness Institute, *The Global Wellness Economy Monitor Report: 2023*

² Forbes, *How Wellness Tourism Is Becoming Mainstream*

³ Harvard Business Review, *The Future of Hospitality: How to Meet the Needs of the New Wellness Traveler*

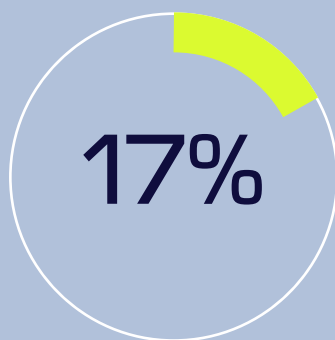


Consumers will continue to increase spending on wellness, and the global wellness economy will grow at an annual rate of 8.6%.

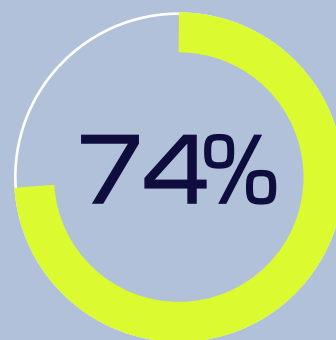
Global Wellness Economy Market Size and Growth Projections



Wellness Tourism Within the Global Tourism Market



Hospitality Businesses Planning to Integrate Wellness in Their Offering



**HABIT-BUILDING
PROGRAMMING**

Many travelers are seeking destinations that help them establish new habits that can contribute to their health and wellbeing. This approach is supported by behavioral science, which shows that building new habits is more attainable when changing your context and forming new routines in a different environment. A range of hospitality destinations are now connecting with the personal goals of travelers by providing specific programming that incorporates meditation, healthy eating habits and physical activities.

**SENSE HACKING
ENVIRONMENTS**

Some progressive developers that specialise in hospitality are embracing neuro-architecture to enhance wellbeing and create environments that cater to the mental and emotional health of their guests. Neuro-architecture leverages principles from neuroscience to design spaces that positively influence brain function, mood and overall wellness.

One key aspect of this trend is the focus on practices such as dopamine fasting and sensory deprivation, both of which are gaining popularity for their mental health benefits. Dopamine fasting involves abstaining from overstimulating activities to reset the brain's reward system. This practice is being integrated into hospitality experiences to help guests disconnect from digital distractions and rejuvenate their minds. The role of design in enabling such experiences involves de-stimulating the senses through a thoughtful selection of colours, textures and spatial layouts that create a sense of calm and tranquility.

THE DESIGN RESPONSE

FROM AESTHETIC TO EMOTIONAL

How Narrative-Driven Design is Shaping Hospitality

At UNStudio, the approach to formulating our design teams and strategies for the hospitality sector has increasingly focused on creating immersive experiences. Although initially somewhat intangible, this understanding has evolved to impact the purpose and practice of architectural design significantly. It has led to the emergence of specific design values and new ways of collaborating with various disciplines.

Breaking Down Our Experience of This Shift

IMMERSIVE EVOLUTION: THE SHIFT FROM GEOMETRY TO NARRATIVE- BASED ARCHITECTURE

In the evolving landscape of hospitality design, there has been a notable shift towards delivering immersive experiences that resonate with consumers who are seeking uniqueness and personalisation. This shift is reshaping the traditional approach to architecture, moving it beyond mere aesthetic appeal and iconic shapes. Instead, it calls for a deeper understanding of how guests interact with space, of how they move, behave, and connect with their surroundings. Today's hospitality design requires more than just creating visually striking structures; it is about crafting environments that engage the senses, evoke emotions and tell compelling narratives.

FROM ICONIC GEOMETRY TO PERSONALISED EXPERIENCES

As designers, we are now challenged to focus on the nuances of human experience, to anticipate and cater to the diverse needs and preferences of guests. This is about designing spaces that not only accommodate, but immerse; spaces that dynamically respond to the rhythm of human activity and that foster a sense of belonging and connection at every turn. This forward-looking approach embraces innovation, technology, and human-centric principles to create hospitality experiences that are truly transformative.

FROM STATIC ANGLES TO DYNAMIC JOURNEYS: A NEW WAY OF ASSESSING DESIGN

This dynamic paradigm encourages a more holistic, user-centric evaluation of design, akin to examining timelines of scenarios and the unfolding narrative within a space. Designers are challenged to envision how guests move through and engage with the environment over time, infusing each moment with surprises and elements that contribute to a cohesive narrative journey.

WEAVING IMMERSIVE NARRATIVES ACROSS DISCIPLINES: INNOVATING THE DESIGN TEAM

In crafting immersive hospitality experiences that resonate with guests on a deeply personal level, it is imperative to adopt a multidisciplinary approach. By assembling a diverse team that includes experience designers, interior designers and product designers, we can seamlessly blend narrative-driven design with bespoke assets tailored to every touchpoint of the user journey. This collaborative effort ensures that each element, from the overarching narrative to the smallest detail, contributes harmoniously to the creation of an unforgettable and immersive hospitality experience.

Key Design Aspects of Creating Immersive Spaces

THE ARRIVAL: IMMERSING INTO THE EXPERIENCE

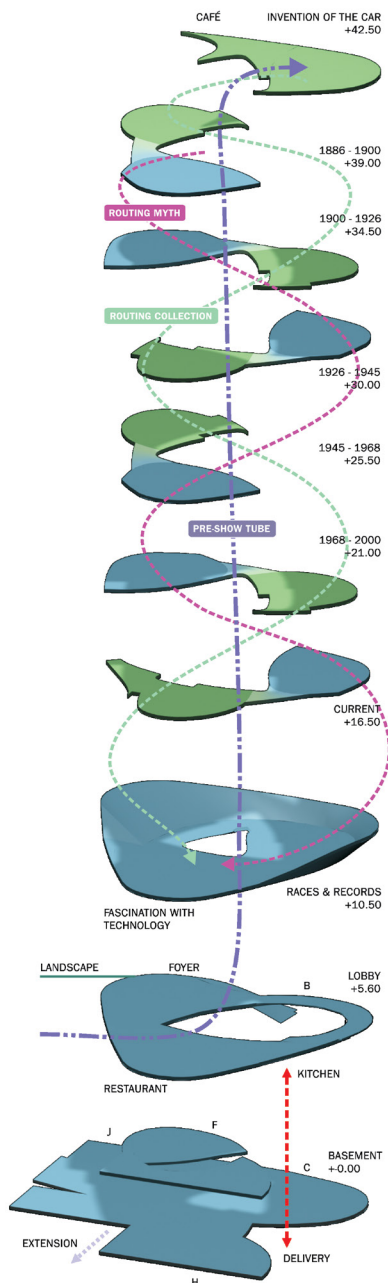
The arrival moment in experience design serves as the threshold to the narrative, marking the inception of a journey that unfolds within a space. It is paramount that this moment makes a profound impression, that it ignites curiosity while providing a glimpse into the essence of the unfolding story. Designing this first moment to engage the senses is crucial; whether through a gradual descent towards the entrance, an intricate play of light guiding the way, or the strategic placement of architectural elements to evoke a sense of passage, each detail contributes to crafting a sensorial experience of immersion. By employing techniques such as creating portal-like structures with bridges, voids, or framing elements within the built environment or landscape, designers can orchestrate a seamless transition into the narrative realm, setting the stage for the unfolding experience.



The importance of the arrival and the design around immersing into space is evident, as seen in UNStudio's design for the [Shenzhen Opera House](#). Pathways from different directions lead up to the entrances of the opera house. As visitors approach, their pathway gradually intensifies its relation to the design of the landscape and building, looping into a central gravity point. As users pass below its slightly cantilevering shape, it creates a momentum of immersion before they finally enter the building.

CIRCULATION: FACILITATING THE FLOW OF EXPLORATION

The flow of people within the building and landscape can be meticulously orchestrated to unfold a narrative of exploration and discovery. Designed around the concept of motion, the layout can seamlessly guide visitors through different stages of a unique spatial journey or event. Whether it's through a flexible layout that allows for diverse experiences or a carefully structured progression that gradually reveals spaces serving various purposes, the design can ensure a tranquil and holistic experience. Transitioning from open to private spaces, or from flexible to structured layouts, each element informs the overarching narrative. Accessibility is considered alongside the mode of exploration intended to be achieved, ensuring that every sensorial experience contributes to the immersive journey being created.

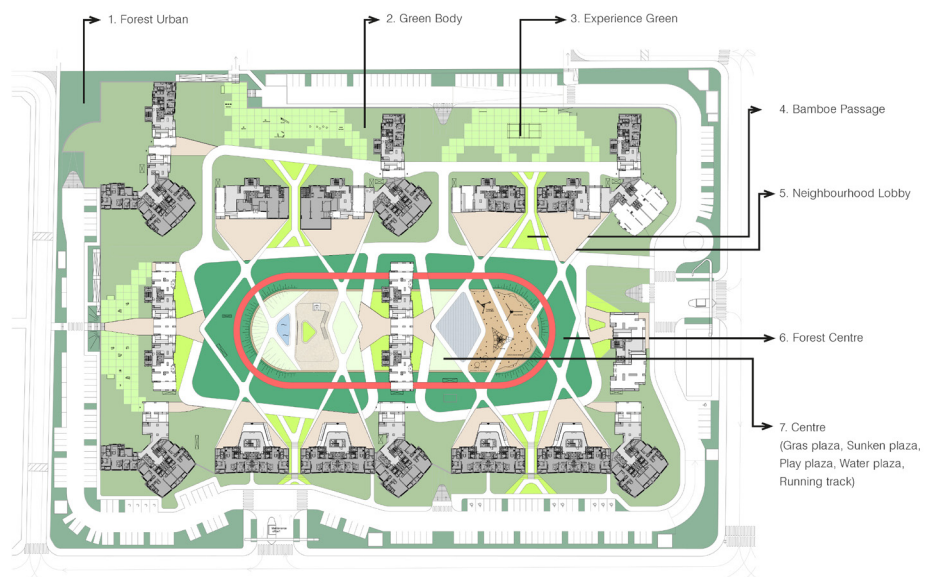


An example of a highly curated journey of discovery is the double helix organisation devised for the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart. The museum offers visitors a journey through time. Two chronological routes follow the double helix structure, descending and intertwining along the gallery spaces.

Spiralling around a spectacular central atrium, one path winds through the vehicle collection displays; the other through historical exhibits. As the routes intersect, exciting spatial configurations, cross-references and shortcuts emerge within the various displays.

**MODE OF EXPLORING:
CRAFTING UNIQUE
TRANSPORT SOLUTIONS**

In the realm of circulation and mobility solutions, the concept of movement transcends mere transportation and logistics; it becomes an opportunity to craft unforgettable experiences. Beyond the utilitarian function of getting from one place to another, urban exploration offers a chance to engage the senses, ignite curiosity, and foster a deeper connection with the environment. From tranquil pedestrian pathways adorned with lush greenery to adventurous trails winding through urban parks, incorporating diverse mobility offerings and ways to explore into your design proposal will enhance the end-user experience and contribute to a unique place identity.



An example application of this is the playful, community-centric landscape connecting Daegu Wolbae IPARK. It was designed with the aim of connecting residents and promoting physical wellbeing. Some of the outdoor paths are inspired by sports courts, guiding visitors towards sports amenities in an intuitive and playful manner.

**RESPONSIVENESS:
ADAPTING TO SEASON,
TIME, AND EVENTS**

As experience isn't a static quality of a destination, good experience-driven design requires a response to the dynamic rhythms of both nature and human activity. Early design strategies should allow the space to seamlessly adapt to changing seasons, times of day, and special events, to create a continuously evolving experience. Flexibility is essential, with spaces transitioning effortlessly between indoor and outdoor environments and accommodating different activities and visitor demographics in response to changes in time, trends, or events. Flexible spaces can create different focal points or capacities, while flexible atmospheres can transform the space as needed. Strategic lighting design is crucial, orchestrating shifts in ambiance to reflect the mood or assist users with specific tasks. The relationship between lighting, space, void, and materials is a key quality of responsive design. By incorporating adjustable spaces and interactive elements, the design empowers users to shape their environment, ensuring that each moment is tailored to their needs and preferences.



Besides the previously mentioned design qualities, another use-case of adaptive, immersive experience can be found in UNStudio's proposal for [Gyeongdo Island](#). Reimagining the concept of the garden, this masterplan wraps around centralised traditional Korean Gardens celebrating its flora and fauna, while benefiting from the changes the gardens display throughout the seasons. Additionally, Strategic lighting design orchestrates shifts in ambiance, enhancing the mood and functionality of spaces.

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