

# Hots and Nots

## 7 Trends for Boutique Design

By Margit Whitlock, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP

Culture and lifestyle preferences attribute to shifts in design savor among guests looking to retreat in boutique accommodations. While boutique is a buzz word in the hospitality industry, delivering a truly unique and sensitive atmosphere is not easily obtained – or common. Through the years, we have seen trends move from “tone on tone” to “sea foam” to “black and more black” as a national phenomenon. From Coast to Coast, design

was homogeneous; now global exposure to lifestyles unlike our own has presented us with a period of indulgence, capturing individual expression and style.

Architects and designers are giving more consideration to layering materials, texture, color and light while blending these elements with some highly themed concepts. As they say, “it is all in the details” ... yet there is no

right or wrong on quantity; it is the quality of the detail. One’s sense of perception needs to connect with these details, creating emotional feedback; therein lays the ultimate decision indicator for the guest’s choice of one boutique experience over another.

Diverse as the market is, similarities emerge in designers’ applications and consumers’ tastes, thereby driving what’s *Hot*, and what’s *Not*.

**HOT**

### Shades of Gray

Color concepts with depth using gray undertones sets a new trend. Often a dusky color adds more earth to the tone. There are warm grays and cool grays so be aware of mixing the two.



**NOT**

### Random Black

Black accents are always in style like the little black dress. However, the inexperienced seem to randomly use black as just another color, yet it is not a color it is a hue.

**HOT**

### Illumination

Illumination covers many facets of “light”. Quality, color, source, fixture design and placement are key aspects. There seems an explosion of light fixture selections and it is quite the science to get it right.



**NOT**

### Darkness

Many spaces are poorly lit – restrooms, for one, are a personal pet peeve. Long corridors with an endless stream of down-lights leave polka dots and scallops in their trail. Visually uninteresting spaces which are hard to navigate are particularly uninviting.

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## HOT

### Natural

Our senses are gravitating towards Mother Earth - organic, eco sensitive materials and finishes. Natural materials have a grounded feeling, usually warm to the touch, and are soothing.

## NOT

### Over-Zen

Arbitrary water features, bamboo, rock gardens and motivational images are out. Try an "Under-Zen" approach. Near to my heart are spaces void of extraneous decoration, where the voice of the architecture can be heard.



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## HOT

### Intimacy

Strange as it may seem, the Y generation has embraced the thought and use of intimacy and romance as design criteria. This generation, permanently plugged into personal apparatuses ...me, me, me wants big cozy sofa beds by the pool with billowing canopies, music, blankets and fire pits.

## NOT

### Cattle Call

Unless you are in the high school gym for assembly why would you want to be in a space with 1,000 of your unknown friends? (Of course I take that back when remembering St. Marks Basilica, Venice.) If you want to create an enormous space for the masses, create an envelope from which the space becomes secondary to the use.





# HOT

## Texture

Soft, plush, nubby, knotty, silky, thick or thin. Visual or tactile textures awaken our senses. Most days, we are exposed to the same slick surfaces. It is refreshing to experience new, and not so new, 3-dimensional surfaces and materials.

# NOT

## Sameness

Unless careful and deliberate, sameness will be boring. Today's culture is interested in complexity with contrast and intrigue. The 'Entertain Me' attitude is more likely to feel un-loved by sameness.

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# HOT

## Depth

Saturation and layers create depth in a space. Saturation can be in color, texture or light quality. Where layers are a bit harder to explain but think of an onion and peel back the layers as you explore deeper into the design and unique aspects of the space.

# NOT

## Generic

Homogenous is not a lifestyle trend. We are individuals; we want to be catered to, "I am of value, my individualism counts". This is at the core of the X/Y generation cuff.

**HOT**

### Glamour

Bling is back and for those who love mirrored dressers and crystal chandeliers along with studded wall covering, there are wonderful materials, light fixtures and faux fur to choose from.



**NOT**

### Dullness

Dull, drab and lifeless is not an approach for today's traveler. While environments might be minimalistic, simple and clean design, the trend is to have some sparkle of delight, regardless.

In all my years I am having the most fun with designing environments for our clients – today more than ever. The options in materials are abundant, the clientele is sophisticated and owners are putting more vision into the process. Each project is like a piece of art, created from scratch, all to achieve a similar response of empowerment for the end user – the guest.



Margit Whitlock joined forces with Graham Downes Architecture in early 2010. Previous to this she operated her own San Diego-based firm, Architectural Concepts, Inc. for 18 years. Her professional experience includes all aspects of architecture and the building process. Her focus has been on resort and hospitality design for national and international projects. Ms. Whitlock is an accomplished speaker with various engagements at ARDA and HD conventions and her work has been published nationally.

Graham Downes Architecture, Inc. The cutting-edge architectural design firm is known for providing creative solutions for retail, hospitality, entertainment, and multi-family residential projects. The firm's recent focus is on projects that drive relevant, contemporary lifestyles, including boutique hotels and mixed-use, urban infill projects. The firm's headquarters are at 1600 National Avenue in downtown San Diego, with offices in Las Vegas and Phoenix. More information about the firm is available online at [www.grahamdownes.com](http://www.grahamdownes.com).

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