

Hotel Management International
Dining Club
In partnership with:
IRIS CERAMICA GROUP
Luxury Hotel Brands
Age of Sustainability:
of experts will re-examine
brands to find out what the key
are to make a sustainable
luxury hotel brand.
y 31st March 2022 | 18:00 - 21:30
SPEAKERS:
Federico Toresi - Global Vice President Design, Luxury & Premium Brands - Accor
Neil Andrew - Head of Hospitality - Perkins & Will
Andrew Linwood - Head of Design - Areen Design
Moderator: Monica Palmas
Moderator - Hotel Management International



Sustainable luxury

In the high-end luxury brand market where customer demands are changing fast, **Federico Toresi**, global vice-president of design for luxury and premium brands at Accor; **Neil Andrew**, head of hospitality at Perkins & Will; and **Andrew Linwood**, head of hospitality and business development at Areen Design, speak to *Hotel Management International* about what it takes for a luxury hotel operator to respond to the growing need to be more environmentally friendly.

The luxury hotel market is very different compared with ten, five or even two years ago, explained Monica Palmas, moderating the lively discussion at *Hotel Management International's* Dining Club, which brought together over 50 delegates. Operators need to redefine the notion of luxury to cater for an increasingly diverse range of clients and investors with sustainability high on their agendas. Indeed, pressure is mounting to prioritise real estate assets designed to incorporate ESG principles.

Federica Minozzi, CEO of Iris Ceramica Group, founded in 1961 by her father, began the evening by noting that sustainability is not a new concept.

"Sustainability back in the '60s was something pretty strange," she remarked.

"My father started putting up billboards with an equation – 'economy equals ecology'. I asked him what it meant, and he explained to me that his business was not a sustainable activity unless we started to take care of raw materials, air and water. To create a long-lasting business, we had to take care not to waste what was at our disposal."

Sustainability as a foundation for design

With companies like Iris leading the way in key areas such as renewable energy, Minozzi announced that

it will soon be the first company in Italy to produce electricity on an industrial basis using hydrogen power plants. The question now is whether other brands are as willing to invest in sustainable design and, if so, what they should invest in.

Federico Toresi, global vice-president of design for luxury and premium brands at Accor, observed that two challenging years of the pandemic have provided an excellent opportunity for brands to reconsider what luxury means in today's market.

"We think luxury is really about time and space, and how we can develop that in an experiential way," he remarked. "We looked at our brands to see what really matters to our guests through an in-depth analysis of what we do when we go on holiday, or what we do now when we work. Longer travel stays are becoming more frequent, because of Covid [and] the fact that we can travel less, or we have less money to do so," Toresi explained.

"The whole idea has really been to become all-inclusive, which means looking at how guests enjoy their stay and then each of our 43 brands would interpret that guest journey," he said.

Accor is building on a heritage of sustainability, on which its Fairmont brand is heavily focused. For instance, it is one of the first brands to put art installations in the sea that can generate coral and put recycling facilities in the guest rooms 25 years ago. In recent years, Accor has tried to differentiate its ultimate luxury brand Raffles. For this, it came up with the 'Design for Harmony' approach, which focuses on well-being and applies feng shui and biophilic principles to create peaceful sanctuaries.

"Sustainability has been part of the thinking in everything that we do," added Toresi. "Everything we do has an environmental aspect. Design for Harmony means designing for well-being, not just the well-being of our guests but also the well-being of the environment and the society that is around the hotel."

A key feature of this approach is that it extends to supplier relationships. Accor is getting to know suppliers and property management teams better, scoring them against global sustainability standards.

"As a big operating company, we don't have the time and resources to go into the same depth of research that our suppliers do," he remarked. "We are working with a designer that is helping us to develop a room in Singapore that is supposed to be carbon-neutral and, to deliver that, we have to work with our suppliers. We are pushing the standards of all brands to point towards a much better sustainable future.

"That means that we are demanding from our suppliers that they show us their carbon footprint," he added. "They show us how they produce, how they ship, how they treat their staff, how they engage with the community. The same applies to management in



Above: Federica Minozzi, CEO of Iris Ceramica Group, begins the event by discussing sustainability.

each property and we work with that in our guidelines, so that eventually it's a standard thing." Ultimately, sustainability cannot be separated from quality.

"We want to design the best there is," says Toresi.

"If there is a building company that wants to build my design, can they interpret it in the most durable, sustainable, design-led, experiential way that it possibly can be? That is the hardest part of what I do."

A net-zero pledge

For the architect's perspective on what sustainability means in the hospitality sector, Neil Andrew, head of hospitality at global architecture and design practice Perkins & Will, gave his view on net-zero design.

"Last year, we launched our net-zero hospitality pledge," he noted. "We've been at the forefront of sustainable construction methods for about 25 years and sustainability is really at our core. We have a process to track the carbon impact as you move through the design process."

This process involved identifying the big offenders in a guest room – lighting, furniture, gypsum, carpets, resins, tiles – then going further to include transportation, construction and maintenance. The next step is to figure out how to deal with the embodied carbon in each item and to track greenhouse gas emissions stage-by-stage.

"Data is what drives us through all of this," Andrew explained. "Our sustainability director outlines the objectives with the client's expectations of what level of certification they're after, then we move into the concept, then we do an initial net-zero circular design report."

"Then you get into more detail," he added. "We can work on the design in Revit and actually create a materials passport for the project with a full inventory and materials database, so the client goes away with

Opposite: Industry leaders come together to discuss the development of high-end luxury brands with sustainability in mind.

Right: From left to right: Monica Palmas, Federico Toresi, Neil Andrew and Andrew Linwood discussing luxury and sustainability.



basically a full set of documentation. These are just some high-level strategies that you think about when you're trying to design a sustainable project.”

For materials, there are many candidates with strong sustainable credentials. Terrazzo flooring, for example, is much in demand, not only for its aesthetics but also because it is a durable, low-maintenance material containing recycled content. Marble finishes are more likely to be maintained should a property change hands, so there is less environmental impact from refurbishment. Retrofitting light fixtures with LEDs requires no changes to the housing so is relatively simple.

“Reuse and refurbish,” said Andrew. “Trying to reuse furniture is always going to be a challenge when you take over a property, but with the material passport you can resell that furniture and then buy vintage or second-hand furniture.”

Localised sustainability

Andrew Linwood, head of hospitality and business development at interior design and procurement management consultancy Areen Design, shared an interesting case study comparing two very different properties and explaining how sustainability manifests differently in each.

The first is the Westin Palace Madrid, where the brief was to renovate a 120-year-old structure – the first concrete building in Spain – and drag it into the 21st century.

“There were a lot of problems with the hotel,” Linwood remarked. “But what we decided to do was to do several things at once. So, we’re greening the building. In the courtyard, there are planters, which are actually hiding rainwater collection points. The biggest expansion will be on the roof, where we plan to put a new spa, a new swimming pool, a new bar, and lots of greenery.”

“For sustainable energy, we proposed changing the roof tiles to collect as much energy as we could,” he

added. “There is space for a vegetable garden for the hotel to grow as much produce as possible. But part of sustainability is anchoring this property in its locality, so it’s not just a foreign body that’s been foisted on the people.”

At a resort in Kenya with a linear arrangement of villas and a large golf course, the brief was to embed this project in the locality through the architecture. Areen chose to use local heritage and craftsmanship to generate architectural forms.

“I can’t stress enough how important that is in a coastal community in Kenya, where skills are in danger of dying out,” said Linwood. “Those guys are weaving baskets that they use for fishing, and you can apply that to building a lot of the accommodation that we had in mind.”

Sustainability, then, is more than consideration of the environment. It is as much about integration with local communities and creating authentic experiences for guests. After all, as Linwood suggested to the attendees, using renewable energy is already accepted as a fundamental part of hotel design, like having a shower or a TV in the bedroom. The attendees certainly accepted that sustainability is not a new concept and that, since the 2016 Paris Agreement, it has become a concern for everyone. So whether it is getting to know the supply chain and evaluating its sustainable credentials and embedding standards of sustainability into its business culture, as Accor has done, or incorporating net-zero into design concepts, the luxury hotel sector is already hard at work.

“It’s really ingrained in how we do everything, so all our design guidelines already have built-in these aspects of sustainability,” said Toresi.

“It’s always been fundamentally good to design something that lasts,” added Andrew.

In the past, luxury and sustainability have been seen as opposing forces pulling in different directions. Now, however, it seems that sustainability must be viewed as a core feature in any luxury brand. ●