

A SLEEP SET INSIGHT WITH ANDREW LINWOOD...

by: Rohma Ahmed / © 19-Oct-2015



As one of the most anticipated elements to the Sleep event each year, the Sleep Set competition enables five designers to show-off their creative skills and expertise through a series of room sets designed exclusively for the show. Curious to know how each designer will interpret the theme of Wonder Tale, Between Our Sheets caught up with designer Andrew Linwood, Head of Design at Areen Hospitality - in hopes that he will spill some beans on what we can expect to see...



Andrew Linwood, Head of Design at Areen Hospitality

What is the inspiration behind your Wonder Tale Sleep Set, and how is the design process going so far?

Fairytales always involve a distortion of perspective and particularly scale, so in Alice in Wonderland for example, she is always too big or small. We therefore started to focus on a theme of duality, reflecting the idea that things are not always what they seem in fairytales. We want to try and change people's expectations as they walk through our sleep set room, and experience things which are not exactly what they appear to be.

This competition each year is a great showcase for designers and particularly for the suppliers, for example Laufen Bathrooms who are exhibiting at this year's Sleep Event are also supplying parts for our sleep set. We are treating our sleep set as a prototype, to give people an idea of where the market might go in the future and what we're capable of creating.



Areen Hospitality, Sleep Set Poster

What are your thoughts on Wonder Tale as a theme?

It's an interesting theme because it gives commercial designers like us the opportunity to flex our creative muscles and think outside the box. Normally we are restricted to a tight programme, budget and concept, but with Wonder Tale we can actually have some fun and push the boundaries quite a bit.



Sheraton Hotel, Dushanbe, Tajikistan

How do you think the hospitality industry is moving forward?

I believe services from Airbnb are really changing the hospitality business model, and it is becoming a challenge for established international hotel companies such as Marriot, Hilton and Sheraton. Personally as a hotel designer, when I travel on holiday with the family I use Airbnb everywhere. You really get a flavour of the context and where you are, you can talk to the neighbours next door about the best places to eat, rather than the concierge in a hotel.

Although hotel design has been moving in the direction of residential-style design for a few years, the high-end hotels are now responding to the younger traveller by diversifying their lifestyle brands and becoming more established in their location. They are moving towards the concept of limited-service and multi-functionality. Lobbies are being used as meeting places, which makes a change for interior designers as we are challenged to make a lobby more interesting. Many hotels located in big cities such as London are offering fewer restaurants and bars, because there's so much on offer just outside the hotel doors.



Hilton Cape Sierra Hotel, Freetown, Sierra Leone

How important is interior design to the hospitality industry?

Very important - places that look as though they're not designed have in fact been carefully considered in terms of the interior. The current vogue is for hostels. They're purposefully designed to look like Hoxton/Shoreditch-style places to reflect residential feel and the elements are the same as in a traditional hotel, but designed differently.

Can you tell us about the project's you're currently working on?

We are working hard to promote ourselves this year by sponsoring events such as the African Hotel Investment Forum, Annual Hotel Conference in Manchester and Leaders in Design MENA in Dubai.

Traditionally we're set up to exploit developing markets such as India, Iran, Middle-East and particularly Africa as there's enormous growth out there, but we have recently focussed on pilgrimage tourism, having just completed a design project for the world's largest Holiday Inn in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Looking forward, we will focus on the UK market and we would like to expand within this.



Raffles Makkah Palace, Saudi Arabia

What is your favourite project you've worked on in your career so far?

The projects in Mecca, Saudi Arabia were challenging to work on because we couldn't physically go there. We do have some people who we can send, but generally speaking the meetings are held in a different location where we design remotely and work around it by building mock up rooms. At the same time it's a great privilege to work on a project in the centre of Mecca, overlooking the Kaaba, in a place that's so sensitive and holy. We have tried to reflect local culture and customs, but also the broader cultures and customs to accommodate visitors from around the world.

One of our existing projects in Sierra Leone is quite interesting because it will be the best and only hotel in Freetown. It's tricky to develop what is essentially a luxury hotel in a town with an awful lot of poverty. The developer is taking an approach whereby he is trying to put something back into the community and hoping to include a training academy for local citizens.



Al Azizia Holiday Inn, Saudi Arabia

How did you get into the hospitality design world?

I spent 10 years working in Hong Kong and Singapore, working for one of the big hotel design companies, Hirsch Bedner Associates and I came back to London with them 10 years ago. I was then approached by Richmond International, which is owned by Areen and I was passionate to develop a sector which targeted developing markets. In 2008 Areen Hotel Design was created, which changed to Areen Hospitality to broaden the opportunities of what we can do as a business; we were receiving enquiries about football stadiums and stand alone restaurants in addition to hotels. Seven years on, Areen Hospitality have an annual turnover of £3-4 million with a team of 25 designers.

To experience Andrew's Sleep Set creation along with the other four designers, join us at this year's Sleep Event!