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The Official Publication of AAHOA

The design Issue

Staying ahead

of design trends

Using **smart design cues** to generate profit

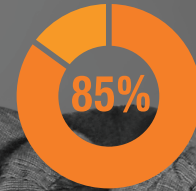
a **father/son**

AAHOA Member duo on the ins and outs of independent hotel ownership



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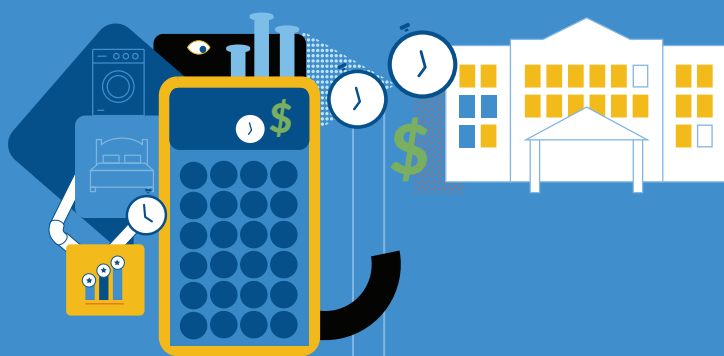


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1. WINNING WITH WEBINARS.

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AAHOA.com/12PointsWebinars



2. SAVE THE DATE FOR 2023 AAHOA HEROWNERSHIP CONFERENCE & RETREAT.

AAHOA's next HerOwnership Conference & Retreat will take place November 2-3, in Dallas, TX. Stay tuned to learn more about how you can join AAHOA's engaged community of women hoteliers for two days packed with incredible insights into hospitality, entrepreneurship, leadership development, and wellness techniques to help you balance it all and take your business to the next level.

AAHOA.com/HerOwnership



3. FORE! AAHOA CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENTS HIT THE GREENS.

AAHOA's 2023 Charity Golf Tournament will tee off next month. The Mid South Charity Golf Tournament will take place on Monday, July 24, at the beautiful Cherry Blossom Golf Club. We invite players and sponsors to join us as we come together to support local charities while enjoying the 178-acre golf course that has been voted by Golfweek Magazine as the "#1 public golf course in the state of Kentucky" for seven years running (2004-2010). Sign up today: AAHOA.com/Golf



4. PLEDGE TO BE ALL IN.

Forming later this year as an IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit, the AAHOA Charitable Foundation will aim to support humanity, providing disaster relief, educational scholarships and grants, charitable initiatives for worthy causes, and humanitarian aid. We're asking for YOUR pledge to donate - no contribution is too small! Take the pledge today, and give back to our industry that has given us all so much. bit.ly/3AjaZvT



5. JOIN AAHOA OFFICERS AT THE ANNUAL NYU HOSPITALITY CONFERENCE.

The NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference is June 4-6 at the New York Marriott Marquis. The three-day conference features general sessions, workshops, and networking events to provide data, analysis, perspectives, insights, and opportunities. Join AAHOA Officers and leading lodging executives, investors, developers, analysts, and economists for an extraordinary

program at hospitality's hallmark annual conference in New York City.

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BHARAT PATEL, CHO, CHIA
AAHOA CHAIRMAN (2023-2024)

“

Since AAHOA Member-owned properties represent a significant part of the U.S. economy, our footprint is large and wide, and we must lead the way when it comes to setting expectations.”

Scan the QR code below to watch a quick video highlighting the four core pillars of AAHOA's 12 Points of Fair Franchising and their importance to the industry's future.



Designing our future

HAVE YOU EVER BOOKED A HOTEL RESERVATION OR STAYED SOMEWHERE without looking at photos first? Most likely, you looked it up.

Appearance is everything, and hotels need to evolve with the times to stay relevant. All information, content, and photos of your properties need to be fresh, modern, and accurate. If renovations are needed, it would be a good investment for your property's longevity.

Post-pandemic travelers' preferences are changing, and hotel design and operations changes are being fueled by those changing desires.

Online apps, social media, and the Internet have shaped how customers and guests book reservations. With a simple click of a button, it all starts with a search, followed by research and comparing various options, and hopefully ends with a reservation at your hotel.

Visibility is key - as there are many choices - and these guests are browsing to see what you have to offer.

Since AAHOA Member-owned properties represent a significant part of the U.S. economy, our footprint is large and wide, and we must lead the way when it comes to setting expectations.

AAHOA's 20,000 Members own 60% of the hotels in the United States - that's a lot of hotels that need to continue to make customers feel welcome, and create a particular atmosphere and ambiance to keep guests coming back. But, design in hospitality goes beyond that. It's about designing your business, designing your future, and designing the future of AAHOA.

This past spring, AAHOA held its Spring National Advocacy Conference. More than 300 hoteliers showed up to meet with elected officials from across the country. And all these members of Congress have one thing in common: they want to see their constituent, the constituent who lives, works, and plays in their district, show up and tell them what's important to them.

If we are going to help "design" our industry and help it grow, we need to make sure that there aren't rules in place or laws in place that hurt our industry. We need to continue to be proactive.

As a second-generation hotelier who learned the hotel business through hands-on experience at properties owned by my parents, I've experienced every aspect of hotels first-hand.

I've lived the hospitality journey. I've walked in your shoes. I've rented rooms, cleaned rooms, and can relate to fellow AAHOA Members in this business.

Now, as Chairman of the largest hotel owners association in the world, I feel it is my responsibility to share my personal insight on behalf of AAHOA Members everywhere - to remind you to be the own designers of your hotel, your future, and AAHOA, and help create positive change for our industry. ■



LAURA LEE BLAKE, ESQ.
AAHOA PRESIDENT & CEO

Designing AAHOA's present and future as a hotel industry leader

“

Your success is our success. Together, we will be working to continue designing an American story that lifts up AAHOA Members, their hotels, and their contributions to our industry.”

“Every great design begins with an even better story.” - Lorinda Mamo, designer

JUST AS DESIGNING A HOTEL'S AESTHETIC IS ESSENTIAL TO ATTRACTING GUESTS, designing and defining a brand is essential to our association's advocacy goals. Our brand is all about the story of advancing the American Dream of entrepreneurship. AAHOA has a proud history of breaking down barriers for generations of Asian Americans who have played a transformative role in America's hotel industry.

AAHOA now represents nearly 20,000 hoteliers across the U.S., making us the largest hotel owners association in the world. Our more than 34,000 member-owned hotels with more than 1 million employees represent a significant part of the U.S. economy.

From defending free and fair franchising to strengthening our hotel workforce as the pandemic recedes from daily life, AAHOA has positioned itself as the voice of small-business hotel owners.

We are standing behind groundbreaking New Jersey legislation that would advance several key principles of transparency and fairness to sustain a mutually beneficial relationship between franchisors and franchisees.

We are urging federal policymakers in Washington to consider the ramifications of proposed changes to rules governing franchisors to ensure that hotels and other small businesses are treated fairly.

AAHOA is successfully rallying for local governments to maintain oversight of short-term rentals to ensure a level playing field for hotels. We also are pursuing legislation to clarify that occupants of hotels, motels, or similar lodging, do not have tenancy rights until they have stayed more than 90 consecutive days. This promotes certainty and safety for all concerning the rights and responsibilities of the hoteliers and their guests.

We ultimately are pursuing these goals to design an environment that reduces the economic obstacles for small-business hotel owners.

That, in turn, will further help AAHOA members build and design hotels that are attractive to guests.

As leaders in the hospitality industry, we must ensure we are at the forefront of not only policy advocacy but promoting a positive environment for hoteliers to thrive.

That is why AAHOA's leadership is dedicated to advocating for small-business hotel owners' interests in Washington and states across the country.

But, we are only as strong as our members. AAHOA's voice is only strong because of our hoteliers' contributions to their communities, and by extension, the nation's economy.

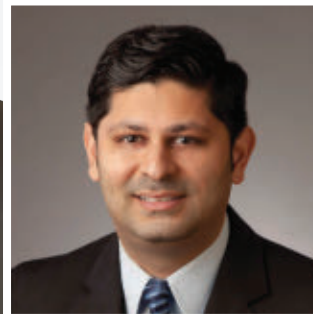
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A Family affair

A father-son AAHOA Member duo on the ins and outs of independent hotel ownership

by EVELYN HOOVER

HISTORY IS PACKED WITH individuals who have braved new frontiers. It's no secret those who embark upon uncharted territory are often filled with mixed emotions. On one end, there's the thrill and sense of fulfillment from pushing boundaries, achieving goals, and expanding your experiences. But, on the other side, the unknown is intimidating, overwhelming, and scary.

Surely no other industry is as filled with risk-takers than the hotel industry, composed of hoteliers, franchisees, and independent hotel owners who have boldly

changed hospitality over the years. One prime example of such entrepreneurship boldness is the father-son team, Victor Desai, an AAHOA Member since 2020, and Rushil Desai, who has been an AAHOA Member since 2016. This dynamic duo risked it all to take the independent hotel route. Today, they own and operate the Southern California hotels Lexen Hotel Hollywood, Lexen Hotel North Hollywood, and Hotel Lexen Newhall.

"There is always a risk being an independent hotel owner when you have to especially compete with all brands nearby," said Victor, owner of Lexen Hotels. "But, providing a unique style and design, and adding all the amenities found in high-end hotels provide excellent customer service and marketing opportunities. I had faith that Hotel Lexen would be successful, and it indeed has been."

Victor Desai

UNIQUE BOUTIQUE-STYLE EXPERIENCE

The Lexen properties beautifully blend the rich culture of the local community and deliver an elegant boutique-style guest experience. For example, the North Hollywood location is made up of contemporary and modern design elements, fully embracing the area's art district. On the other hand, Santa Clarita's rich Western heritage is embedded in the Hotel Lexen Newhall location, where guests lounge in a modern rustic-style environment.

"We wanted every boutique hotel designed by us to have a wow factor," Victor explained. "There had to be something unique and different that guests hadn't experienced at major hotel chains."



THE INDEPENDENT OUTSET

Victor kicked off his hospitality career in 1996 with a small independent brand. During his early days as an independent hotelier, he generated business and increased reservations with the assistance of a GDS platform.

“The first small independent hotel did great,” Victor said.

Several years later, Victor attended hospitality design conferences and trade shows and read articles about the new trends shaping hotel businesses. He began dreaming about owning a unique and special independent hotel that would stand out when travelers booked their lodging in Southern California. So, Victor launched the Hotel Lexen brand in 2016 by opening Lexen Hotel Hollywood, then later, opening Hotel Lexen North Hollywood in 2018 and Hotel Lexen Newhall in 2020.

“I didn’t have to follow any of the prototypes or designs required by the regular brands,” Victor explained. “Instead, I jumped into creating my boutique hotel, and not long after that, I received the IAHA Independent Hotel of the Year Award from AAHOA in 2020.”

DYNAMIC INDEPENDENT HOTELIER DUO

The father-son team stays on top of every detail it takes to run Lexen Hotels successfully. The daily operations include offering seamless customer service, meeting, and exceeding guest amenity expectations, maintaining a strong reputation online and within the community, and outperforming competitive brand hotels in the area. In fact, Victor partnered with a property management software company for his three Lexen properties in 2020.

“Our distinctive properties are in highly competitive markets, which – together with the rising cost of labor and pressures imposed by the pandemic operating environment – have made it essential to gain every operating advantage,” Victor shared in 2020.

The father-son team has done an incredible job staying on top of every task required to run the properties effectively.

“Lexen has been ranked No. 1,” Victor shared. “It’s tough to be independently owned, stay in the market, and compete with higher end brands. Our reviews are pretty good. We’re on top of everything.”

SECOND GEN

Rushil grew up watching his dad handle it all – the front desk, the marketing strategies, the maintenance requests, and more. When it was time to continue his education at California State University, Northridge, pursuing a hospitality career was not at the top of Rushil’s mind. Instead, Rushil enrolled in computer science and engineering coursework. Around the same time, Victor started to develop the Lexen Hotel in North Hollywood, and Rushil stepped up to help his dad launch the independent

property. This experience inspired Rushil to change his college major to business and play a more active role in his dad’s hotel business.

“I first started working as a front desk agent,” Rushil shared. “I was still in college while I was working. It was hard to focus on going to work and school simultaneously, but I learned how to manage my time.”

Today, Rushil takes the role of human resources manager at both properties. He handles payroll, tracks inventory, stays in touch with the housekeepers, and monitors the reviews from guests. His excellent industry experience leads to valuable advice for hoteliers.

“If you’re running a family business, you must be on top of your game and understand your reputation is on the line,” Rushil explained. “As an independent hotelier, you must take the initiative to inspect your hotel and talk to your employees and customers to see how your properties can improve. It is also crucial to understand upcoming deadlines for licenses and taxes.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

The two boutique Lexen hotels are thriving, with about 90 rooms collectively. There are plans to find the next urban downtown market for Lexen, Victor said.

Fortunately, the father-son collaboration will continue to grow stronger, showing that independent hotels are here to stay.

“Once I graduate, I’ll take a more active role in the family business and expand the Lexen brand,” Rushil said. “I want to help with quality control and train the right people to run the business. Maybe I will meet new managers and teach them to keep a lookout for everything.” ■



Rushil Desai



LOUSY LAYOUTS

Poor hotel design affects the guest experience and the bottom line

by NICK FORTUNA

IF YOU STAY IN HOTELS MORE THAN 200 NIGHTS A YEAR, you're bound to see some harshly lit spaces, and Tanya Spaulding has seen a bunch.

Spaulding, principal at Minneapolis-based Shea Design, said she's on the road most of the year helping to design new hotels or renovate existing properties, whether it's a boutique hotel or part of a major brand's portfolio. Across the industry, she said, poorly lit spaces are "the biggest mistake" hoteliers make when designing guestrooms and common spaces – a correctable issue that affects the guest experience and the hotel's bottom line.

"You need to light in zones and understand how people are moving through spaces," Spaulding said. "You can't have a harsh transition from one space to another. You need to create transitions between spaces through light, and you can do that very easily."

Some hotels still have lights in guestrooms and bathrooms that are simply on or off and can't be dimmed according to guests' wishes, Spaulding said. Common areas such as lobbies and restaurants may be too bright or too dark for their intended function, making them less-comfortable spaces, and they may be uniformly lit throughout, failing to offer guests any flexibility, she said.

Similarly, harsh elevator lighting can make guests feel like they have a spotlight on them, and when the doors open, corridors can "feel very long and vast" if there's too much or too little light, Spaulding said.





“

Employee-only spaces often are cramped and inadequate, suggesting to workers that their comfort isn't important to management. That's the wrong message to send amid a persistent labor shortage.”

What's the most-common lighting infraction? Spaulding said it's definitely bathrooms that “aren't appropriately lit at all” because they're too bright, too dark, or make guests “look blue.” Installing backlit mirrors or even applying LED tape lights to the borders of mirrors can “soften” the lighting in a bathroom and make it more appealing to guests, she said.

Tom Ito, hospitality leader at the global architecture and design firm Gensler, said bathroom lighting should “make people look their best” instead of highlighting every blemish and wrinkle. Bathrooms with high-tech lighting-control systems that are difficult to use only add to the frustration, even if they're meant to be more convenient, he said.

“You have to have the right light color and source to make people look good,” Ito said. “Your guests shouldn't be asking why they look so green.”

Beyond lighting, there are many common design flaws that put hotels at a competitive disadvantage, according to Spaulding and Ito. While there are indeed many areas that can be improved aesthetically, here are areas where a little effort can go a long way in making a property look better.



GUESTROOMS

Most hoteliers know that a strong Wi-Fi signal is essential, but do your guestrooms have enough electrical outlets in the right places? Ito said guests want outlets next to each side of the bed so they can charge their smartphones, tablets, and laptops. With so many guests now working remotely, a good desk or table and a comfortable chair are vital, but don't forget to put outlets there too, he said.

Built-in desks and closets may save space, but they make guestrooms less adaptable to guests' changing preferences and needs, Spaulding said. Built-in closets typically have many drawers but, often, none of them are big enough to store a large suitcase and get it out of the guest's way, she said.

Instead, many hotels are now choosing “open” closets that don't have drawers, Ito said. Open closets give guests better access to their belongings and can enhance the aesthetics, he added.

“It's a design statement that can be done very beautifully,” Ito said.

Typical guestrooms are small but, even so, commonly have “superfluous” furniture that rarely gets used, including tables, chairs, and couches, Spaulding said. Hoteliers may have a mental “checklist” of furniture items that should be in every guestroom, or they may believe that empty spaces hurt the aesthetics, but that approach often just leads to clutter, she said.

With less furniture in guestrooms, hotels can get creative with that extra space, according to Ana Ardon, global leader of Gensler's hospitality practice. She said one hotel brand is installing so-called smart fitness mirrors – internet-connected devices allowing guests to take fitness classes in their rooms. The amenity targets a key segment of the brand's client base – business travelers who want to stay fit on the road.

“It goes with the DNA of the brand,” Ardon said.

BATHROOMS

After solving the lighting issue, hoteliers should ensure guests have adequate space for their things, Spaulding said. Some guests will bring a large variety of toiletries and electrical devices to brush their teeth, shave, and style their hair, so they'll need outlets in addition to counter space, she said.

Concerns over space are the main reason many hotels are eschewing bathtubs and instead focusing on providing a "great shower experience," Ito said. To be environmentally friendly, many hotels have installed shower dispensers instead of providing small bottles of shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. But, some showers lack the shelf space for guests' own toiletries, causing frustration, Spaulding said.



COMMON AREAS

Many properties are situating their bars near the main entrance so that arriving guests instantly feel like part of a community and are more likely to grab a drink, Ito said. In those cases, it's best to locate the check-in process off to the side of the lobby. Otherwise, if multiple guests line up to check in, they could encroach on the bar area, diminishing the experience for those guests, he said.

Some lobbies were elaborately designed for a "wow effect" and to look beautiful in pictures, but if the lobby looks like one giant space, it can be uncomfortable for guests, Spaulding said. Partial walls, structural columns, indoor plants, seating arrangements, different levels of lighting, and other design elements can break up a lobby into many useable spaces, she added.

"No one wants to feel like they're sitting in the middle of a room, so you need to create rooms within rooms," Spaulding said.

The lobby should have areas where guests can sit down with a friend for a drink, attend a Zoom meeting, make a phone call, or read a book without feeling

like they're in a high-traffic area, Spaulding said. Furniture should be both beautiful and durable enough to withstand heavy use, and hard surfaces that reflect sound should be used sparingly in most cases.

Lobbies also should have some connection to the outdoors, whether through natural light or design features that "bring the outdoors inside," Ito said.

To the extent possible, restaurants should be situated to facilitate outdoor

dining, a popular trend ever since the pandemic greatly limited indoor dining, he said. If there's enough space for a private dining room or meeting room, that can be another source of revenue. Restaurants should be able to accommodate parties of different sizes, and there should be several types of seating so guests don't just see a "sea of identical chairs," Ito said.

Long corridors should be broken up by indoor plants, artwork on the walls, or

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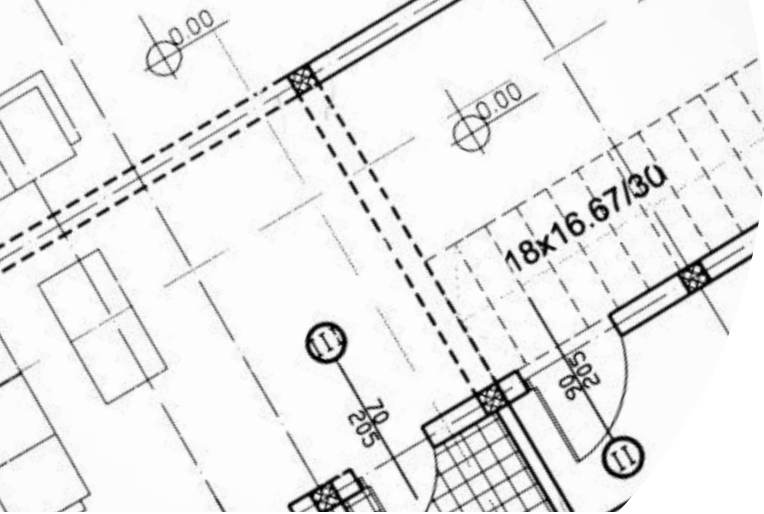
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“

You can't have a harsh transition from one space to another. You need to create transitions between spaces through light, and you can do that very easily.”

other design elements that reflect the local flavor and “some design intent,” rather than just a generic hallway, Ardon said.

Lastly, consider ditching your business center. People rarely need to print documents, and if they do, they should be able to send them electronically to the front desk or concierge, Spaulding said. Since multiple guest amenities often are located on the same floor, use that space to expand your fitness center, or make it available as a small meeting room, she said.

4

EMPLOYEE FACILITIES

Break rooms, locker rooms, cafeterias, and other employee areas often are shoe-horned into layouts only after guest rooms and other revenue-producing areas have been designed, Ardon said. Hotels in urban settings often place employee facilities in the basement, which may prevent workers from enjoying natural light and fresh air on their breaks, she added.

Employee-only spaces often are cramped and inadequate, suggesting to workers that their comfort isn't important to management. That's the wrong message to send amid a persistent labor shortage, Ardon said.

“We've seen a lot of the brands actually upgrade their design standards [for employee spaces], so that has been amazing,” she said. “They're asking us more and more to make sure there's a thoughtful design process throughout those spaces because they want to make sure retention is high.”

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FEATURE

Breaking through

IFONG/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Budgeting for current and upcoming hotel design trends

by ADAM and LARRY
MOGELONSKY

PROPERTY RENOVATIONS, IMPROVING the physical design of spaces, and upgrading amenities all are inevitable for hotels to stay current with guest expectations. The current problem is that brands are simultaneously confronted by market forces that are drastically increasing the costs of executing any change while navigating some profound, ever-evolving shifts in post-pandemic customer behavior.

Therein, we often have a bit of shopper's paralysis – too much choice that ultimately leads to inaction. And yet, if you don't start making plans for what's coming, you may soon find that it's simply too much and conversion out of the hotel real estate landscape is the only move left. The two of us don't want that to happen, so let's discuss the lay of the land for you to better decide what capital investments will maximize your return on investment.

DEALING WITH THE CURRENT MESS

It's 2023, yet we still need to interject the 'C word' – COVID – into this conversation. The backlog of maintenance updates, supply-chain issues, and inflationary cost overruns all are challenges that must be considered with any hotel design update. To give you a better sense of the scenario, Jeremy Buffam, the partner who oversees construction and development at New Castle Hotels & Resorts, an East Coast hotel management company, said it best.

"With FF&E reserves still being replenished, prioritizing capital expenditures is more critical than ever. Many hotels have deferred maintenance that will compete with front-of-house upgrades to improve guest impressions and experiences and, in some instances, meet brand requirements," Buffam said. "Add the uncertainty that inflation and contractor shortages have added to budgets, and you have a challenging multi-step process to deploy capital dollars effectively. Several brands are looking to push sustainability projects, and the cost of this work and associated ROI will become increasingly important in the years ahead. We expect these initiatives will begin showing up on PIPs soon."

Right now, the choice is clear. There's no point in even thinking about room updates or SOP upgrades if a maintenance issue may impede the sale of a guestroom. But at a certain point in the near future, the pandemic log-jam will be fully attenuated while, it's hoped, contractor labor shortages and any supply chain headaches will also become non-issues. When that happens, you have to start thinking about the future of hotels and where your brand fits into the new paradigm.

THINKING OF THE FUTURE

Your first thought about upcoming challenges may lean towards sustainability and updating your hotel to meet the

“

If you don't start making plans for what's coming, you may soon find that it's simply too much and conversion out of the hotel real estate landscape is the only move left.”

ever-mounting ESG regulations. Indeed, this will be of tremendous importance in the coming years, both for capital assets and construction, as well as for financing vehicles, as epitomized by C-PACE financing in the U.S. as well as the EU's green bonds program.

To help decipher the scope of work involved in navigating this market evolution, masterful hotel designer Alessandro Munge, founder and design director of Studio Munge, offered invaluable input. Munge has been involved in many new builds and redevelopment projects, specializing in the upscale and luxury end.

“We often think about the luxury sector driving trends and influencing the market,” Munge said. “Sure, an element of research and development simmers down from the top-tier projects, but the influence is reciprocal. Activated lobbies and bar lounges with a sense of fun mostly permeated from approachable brands to more established luxury. There's a rising new generation of four- and five-star hotels that are much more social and relaxed. Luxury doesn't have to be stiff. Perfectly illustrating that concept is the Pendry brand, for which we're designing two properties in Newport Beach and Tampa after successful

1

Wellness

Demand by guests for wellness amenities at hotels is increasing, but how design influences employee wellbeing also must be considered, especially as a means to combat inflationary wages and high turnover rates.

2

Inflation

It's all too easy to think of the supply shock that was the pandemic as the only culprit behind the rising prices we've all experienced these past three years, and yet more global forces are at play – like the war in Ukraine, the reshoring of supply chains, and shrinking populations in advanced economies – that may make this a perpetual challenge.

3

Psychographics

The traditional “heads in beds” model largely was based on appealing to certain demographics and levels of wealth. The future portends a shift to people identifying and aligning according to their specific, and often niche, interests.

3

other concurrent trends worth your time.

collaborations in Chicago and San Diego. A great emphasis on social spaces and F&B ultimately creates a multi-layered guest experience that is much more engaging, connective, and profitable for the hotel.”

THE HOTEL DESIGN GRADIENT

Munge's thoughts support the notion of the “hotel-design gradient,” where the in-vogue trends often start at the luxury or boutique categories and then disperse outward into midscale and select service as they gain momentum within the broader consumer landscape. That is, the initial buzz and awareness for something new drives guest demand in a positive feedback loop until the trend shifts from a value-add to a customer expectation.

“For years, we've seen the concept of signature narratives driving the design of more unique boutique properties that

evoke a deep sense of place and authenticity, challenging the large conservative brands and hospitality groups to rethink their offering,” Munge said. “The next decade will be about reinvention and helping brands create new standards, redefining the room product, and re-exploring what brand fidelity means to the consumer. Because of the economic climate, I foresee many renovation projects soon in the Americas, which aren't always easy to navigate. The guest is more design savvy than ever, so the design community must bridge renovation and innovation smartly.”

Indeed, guests are more sensitive to good hotel design than ever before. In an experience economy, guests no longer are satisfied by cookie-cutter approaches to interior spaces. And, heightened local market competition is also driving this as a bigger factor in the purchasing decision.

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Hotel guests have so many options and there's so many ways to discover new hotel products that fascinating design can longer be ignored. Hotels need to create both strong digital then onsite impressions to respectively drive bookings and guest satisfaction.

"Where we'll continue to see new builds is the mix-development sector, which coincides with evolution within the lifestyle segment," Munge said. "It's becoming less and less about the room value as much as it is about the crystallization of a value set. Equinox, 1 Hotel, Proper Hotel, EDITION and Nobu are great examples. And because of the brands' strong appeal, we see an increase in branded residential development. This year, we're completing the first integrated Nobu Hotel, Residences, and Restaurant in Toronto. We also just opened the sales office for EDITION Residences Miami Edgewater, the brand's first residence-only property. It shows that brands are still relevant and powerful to lift pricing. But groups must adapt to the evolving market and demographic. This branded residential concept is proven within the luxury sector. Can it translate to the mid-scale sector? I believe so, but we need stronger brands with defined statements to carry the torch."

THE BOTTOM LINE

To close by circling back to budgeting and incorporating Munge's remarks, the hybrid hotel-residence model should also be on the table. Given the cost of incorporating savvy design principles or building new wellness facilities to meet that growing demand vertical, brands of all categories should consider offsetting those upfront costs with condominium unit sales – a move that concurrently can generate more baseline revenues for onsite amenities.

While looking at how this hybrid model affects revenue projections is the topic of a whole other conversation, the overall and inescapable fact is that there are profound changes afoot that will impact every hotel segment. These changes are starting slow, until they're suddenly an immediate priority. The best bet is to map out your vision for how your property or brand will meet these forthcoming shifts in guest demands and then begin setting aside funds so you're fully prepared to execute without needing excessive external financing. ■



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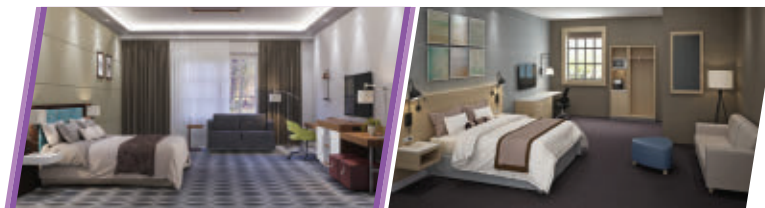
team, with more than a decade's worth of material online. As the partners of Hotel Mogel Consulting Ltd., Larry focuses on the hotel operations and marketing, while Adam

specializes in technology and wellness. Their experience encompasses properties around North America and Europe, with a focus on independent properties of all sizes. Their work includes seven books, the latest focused on increasing profits from wine sales in an environment of tight labor markets. You can reach them at adam@hotelmogel.com to discuss your business challenges or to book speaking engagements.

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The importance of Independence

U.S. Representative John Kevin (Jake) Ellzey, Sr. (R-TX) on the importance of protecting American small business

by NEAL A. PATEL

A **AS AN AGENT FOR THE PEOPLE IN THE 6TH DISTRICT** of the Lone Star State, U.S. Representative John Kevin (Jake) Ellzey, Sr. (R-TX) has a long record of public service, including a 20-year stint and nine deployments in the U.S. Navy, his tenure as a member of the Texas House of Representatives, and his current status as a Congressman.

As part of *Today's Hotelier's* ongoing efforts to help AAHOA Members get to know their government representatives a bit better and to demonstrate the crucial impact making connections with lawmakers can have on the industry, Rep. Ellzey sat down for a wide-ranging interview, which covers his strong stance on the importance of protecting small businesses and the crucial role hotels play in the economy of his home state, as well as the country and economy at large.



WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES WHEN THE NEXT SESSION BEGINS?

When Republicans took the majority in the House of Representatives in January, we made a commitment to America that we would work to create an economy that’s strong, a nation that’s safe, a future that’s built on freedom, and a government that’s accountable.

To do that, we must end unaffordable federal spending that burdens taxpayers and businesses by changing current tax policies. We also must work to balance the federal budget and reduce our national debt. We need to secure our borders to stop illegal immigration and the unprecedented flow of drugs that are resulting in more than 104,000 Americans dying by overdose every year. Ensuring that we continue to make moves to gain energy independence again and reduce gas prices by advancing pro-energy policies is one of my highest priorities.

the regulatory and tax burden on small businesses. Inflation is hurting all industries, hospitality included. This is cutting into people’s purchasing power and changing their spending habits. I’m supporting key tax provisions that will be helpful to travel and tourism, including preserving small business deductions, like-kind exchanges under section 1031, and stepped-up basis provisions.

In addition to efforts in Congress, the Small Business Administration needs to improve hoteliers’ access to capital and develop or improve strategic relationships with hoteliers.

WHAT EXCITES YOU THE MOST ABOUT SERVING IN CONGRESS?

Being able to impact the lives of my constituents directly and having the opportunity to play a role in moving our country forward. As a member of Congress, I am in the service industry. Each day, I have the privilege of representing more than 800,000 people in Texas’ 6th Congressional District.



U.S. Representative
John Kevin (Jake)
Ellzey, Sr. (R-TX),
6th District

WHAT SORTS OF POLICIES, SUCH AS TAX AND REGULATORY REFORMS, DO YOU HOPE TO WORK ON TO SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS AND THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY?

As a member of Congress sitting on the Small Business Committee, there are many ways we are trying to reduce



I have called on the current administration to continue to scale back pandemic-era protections and drop the emergency powers. We see far too many help-wanted signs across businesses in our country.”



There is nothing I would rather be doing, and I am blessed to be in this position.

WHAT INDUSTRY (OR INDUSTRIES) DID YOU WORK IN BEFORE YOU WERE ELECTED TO CONGRESS?

Before being elected to Congress, I served 20 years in the Navy as a helicopter and fighter pilot. After I retired in 2012, I worked as a contractor in the Navy, as a Southwest Airlines pilot, and as a small business owner.

WHAT LED YOU TO RUN FOR CONGRESS?

Since I was seven years old, I knew I wanted to serve our country. After four years at the Naval Academy and 20 years in the Navy, I think dedication to our country and fellow man is ingrained in me. In between my retirement from the Navy and when I was elected to my first position as a State Representative, I consistently volunteered and served in whatever capacity I could, both locally and statewide.

WHAT DO YOU MOST ENJOY ABOUT STAYING IN HOTELS?

For the last 30 years, since my military service, I have made my bed every day without fail. That means I effectively have over 30 years of experience making a bed. To be considered an expert in something, it's said you need 25,000 hours of experience. That means I have 10 times the number of hours needed to be an expert at bed making, and I still cannot make a bed better than a great staff at a hotel.

WHY ARE HOTELS AND HOTEL OWNERS IMPORTANT TO YOUR DISTRICT/STATE?

Texas is one of the most traveled states in the nation. If you combine the air traffic from DFW and Dallas Love Field, we get the most incoming flights in all of the United States. This is in part due to the success of the hotel industry. With the amount of traffic coming into Texas, we need quality places for travelers to stay. Specifically, in my district, we are home to two major interstates, have close proximity to several major sporting and entertainment arenas, and see thousands of in-state travelers coming to the DFW area for both business and long weekends. Hotels and the hospitality industry are not just nice to have in Texas. They are a must.

THE HOTEL WORKFORCE WAS ONE OF THE INDUSTRIES MOST AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC. DO YOU SEE CONGRESS PLAYING A ROLE TO SUPPORT BUILDING BACK THE HOTEL WORKFORCE?

I have called on the current administration to continue to scale back pandemic-era protections and drop the emergency powers. We see far too many help-wanted signs across businesses in our country. Pandemic policies made people more inclined to sit on the sidelines instead of getting jobs. I am committed to focusing on incentivizing work through the tax code to show there are good-paying jobs out there right now that don't require four-year college degrees. ■

Neal A. Patel is the vice president of Alpine Group, a bipartisan, bicameral government affairs consulting firm located on Capitol Hill, and he can be reached at npatel@alpinegroup.com.

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Economic snapshot

How has the changing economic landscape affected capital markets and what can we expect to see next?

by RUSHI SHAH

IN NATURE, WHEN TOO MUCH change happens too fast, it can cause stress fractures throughout the system. The economy is no different. We've enjoyed an extended period of low interest rates and easy credit designed to induce growth in the markets. The Federal Reserve's intervention both from an interest rate standpoint as well as money printing (quantitative easing) standpoint has been unprecedented. In fact, the majority of the growth experienced in the past two decades can be attributed to the Fed's relatively relaxed monetary policy. Then, the pandemic hit. The Fed had to take action and moved at a high level of speed we've never seen before – and rightfully so. The shutdowns provided a much-needed hedge for the precipitous drop of interest rates, as well as the Fed's increased buying of bonds from the market in an effort to induce extra liquidity. When productivity fell during the shutdown, these tactics successfully shored up the economy.

Fast forward to today, and the landscape has changed. Federal programs, along with the fiscal policy in the form of paycheck protection program (PPP), economic injury disaster loans (EIDL) and employee retention credit (ERC) assistance, have pumped so much aid into the economy, that the government has essentially doubled down on the recovery, swinging the pendulum the other way and inducing inflation.

Prematurely interpreting this inflation as transitory, the Fed increased rates as a correction. However, it soon realized that the inflation was structural in nature and here to stay. As a result, the Fed started doing everything in its power to reverse the effect of “easy money.” And, as expected, doing too much, too fast, has had repercussions. Here are just four of them.

“Overall, there is plenty of liquidity in the alternative lending markets and this will be the time for non-regional bank players that have proven balance sheets to shine.”





BANKING WOES

The collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and other regional banks was an unintended casualty of the Fed increasing rates too quickly. At the same time it increased its Fed fund's rate, which subsequently increased short-term interest rates, the Fed pulled additional money out of the system through quantitative tightening. As interest rates increased, credit spreads also rose on bonds that many of these banks owned and the bonds' values plummeted. When banks like this fund their balance sheets using long-duration bonds without sufficient interest rate hedging mechanisms in place and this situation occurs, there's a mismatch. As we've seen recently, this imbalance has dire consequences not only for the failed banks but for the market overall, creating a credit crunch.



THE RIPPLE EFFECT

In an effort to inspire confidence in the system and the regulatory framework, the Fed and other regulators have tightened control over new loans being originated by at-risk banks. Additionally, and arguably more importantly for the U.S. economy, is that mid-size and regional banks are some of the largest buyers of commercial real estate backed bonds. These include CMBS (bonds backed by fixed rate mortgages on commercial properties), SASB securities (bonds backed by large loans on large buildings), CRE CLOs (bonds backed by short-term bridge loans on commercial real estate), and other commercial real estate loan derivatives. This phenomenon yanked liquidity out of the overall commercial real estate lending system and spreads on commercial real estate-backed bonds skyrocketed to a new level. Higher spreads combined with higher index rates now begets higher coupons on loans. When both short-term rates and

spreads increase, the market is hit with a double whammy, as the Fed intended. Liquidity floating in the market is reduced, creating a trickle-down effect and easing the inflation pressure.



EFFECTS ON HOTEL FINANCING

Hotel financing has yet again found itself front and center of commercial real estate lending. For one, office trends fundamentally have changed, creating capacity for other asset classes. From a risk standpoint, the view hasn't gone down per se, so investors are still demanding higher credit spreads for every dollar of risk that they take on financing a hotel asset.

But, even with this mindset, many hotel projects that were passed over a few years ago can now be financed. Keep in mind, however, that the economic uncertainty from the bank failures and credit crunch has pushed leverage on hotel assets down. Additionally, the current economic environment could affect job losses. A reduction in income directly impacts both leisure and business travel. Right now, all these factors are taken into account for every deal being underwritten across the country. Converting hotels to apartments remains a trend, providing needed housing for the lower to middle income workforce and culling obsolete product out of the marketplace.



EFFECTS ON OTHER COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE LENDING

Apartment financing remains liquid thanks to Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Private debt funds and regional banks, however, no longer underwrite unlimited rent increases and 3% to 5% inflation increases that were built into last year's projections. Self-storage continues to show resilience and, as an asset class, has weathered the

storm largely unscathed. Industrial assets also are solid, but to stay in balance with the interest rate environment, industrial trade cap rates are expanding. Retail has had the biggest comeback. As we put the pandemic in the rearview mirror and consumers reconnect socially the pressure of online shopping and other e-commerce trends has lessened. This is creating healthy tailwinds for the retail sector and the capital markets are showing their support for this trend.

HOW RATING AGENCIES ARE REACTING

The agencies that rate commercial-real estate-backed loans, namely FITCH, have recalibrated their model to deliver better risk ratings for some asset classes. This new approach should help retail, hotel and apartments, and self-storage assets get financing and hurt office. Overall, there is plenty of liquidity in the alternative lending markets and this will be the time for non-regional bank players that have proven balance sheets to shine. CMBS debt funds and life insurance companies are ready, willing, and able to open their checkbooks for the right deal. ■



Rushi Shah is Principal and CEO of the commercial mortgage and real estate investment banking firm and AAHOA Allied Member Mag Mile Capital. As a leader in

hospitality financing, Shah specializes in structuring and placing high leverage, nonrecourse bridge and permanent debt with cash out for full- and limited-service hotels nationwide. Since joining the firm's predecessor, Aries Capital, in 2015, Shah has structured and closed hundreds of millions in financing for all property types. Shah has held previous positions at Northern Trust and has an MBA from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.

Digging into the DETAILS

Using smart design cues to generate profits

by ALPA PATEL

DESIGN IS ABOUT MORE THAN JUST AESTHETICS; IT CREATES AN EXPERIENCE. And, in the hospitality industry, experience is everything. When guests feel like they've received value, they're more willing to pay a higher rate for their stay. This is why hoteliers must shift their mindset from treating customers as mere transactions to hosting guests who are yearning for a unique, authentic, and immersive experience.

One advantage independent hoteliers have is the ability to truly immerse their guests in the local community and culture through their hotel's design. By adding modern touches and warm, inviting

spaces, guests can relax and enjoy the hotel as more than just a place to sleep. For instance, designing a cozy lobby that resembles a cozy and inviting living room – complete with comfortable furniture and a welcoming public spaces that reflect the destination – can create a warm and inviting atmosphere that makes guests feel right at home.

These don't always have to be grand gestures, either. Small touches like offering a small library of books, magazines, board games, and coffee table books also can add to the charm of the lobby or make guests feel the hotel is their home away from home. And, with motels making a major comeback since the pandemic, investing in a property's design can yield a strong ROI while providing guests with an unforgettable experience.

YOU ONLY GET ONE CHANCE...

To create a lasting, positive first impression, hoteliers should focus on improving the hotel's curb appeal. A fresh coat of contrasting paint and beautiful landscaping can go a long way in attracting guests. And, for those with a bit more budget,

inviting a local artist to create a large wall mural can create an Instagram-worthy spot that guests will love to share with their friends.

In addition to the lobby, public spaces like the pool area can also be designed to give guests a memorable experience. Adding a barbecue grill or a fire pit can create an inviting and cozy atmosphere that encourages guests to relax and socialize.

Guest rooms also can be designed to reflect the local culture and add value to the guest experience. Simply updating the artwork with local landmarks or iconic buildings can give the room a unique and personalized touch. Investing in higher quality bathroom amenities, such as shampoo, conditioner, body wash, hand lotion with pleasant fragrances, and softer, more luxurious towels can also make a significant impact. Finally, using a white comforter instead of dark patterns can create a sense of cleanliness and elegance that guests appreciate.

Ultimately, design can create a memorable experience and add value, which means guests often are more willing to pay

higher room rates. By investing in design and creating a unique and memorable guest experience, hoteliers can increase their average nightly rates, gain guests' loyalty, and increase revenues while ensuring their guests leave with positive memories and good reviews. ■



Alpa Patel has more than 16 years of experience in the areas of sales, marketing, and operations management of economy and midscale hotels and motels. She's the founder and CEO of 9th House, an experience and hospitality design studio based in Los Angeles and has a passion for all things hospitality design, technology, marketing, and innovating on hospitality design to help hoteliers increase room rates, occupancy, their overall revenues and ultimately, maximize their bottom line.

“Inviting a local artist to create a large wall mural can create an Instagram-worthy spot that guests will love to share with their friends.”

Keep it

Getting back to basics

by PENNY DUELK

“Ultimately, this is what guests will remember about the hotel. This is where their great experiences will continue or will come crashing down, leaving you with a scarred reputation that will be hard to disprove.”

TODAY, TRAVELERS HAVE THEIR pick of many hotel brands and short-term rentals to choose from and the choices seem to be growing every day. Luxury, midscale, and economy brands all are competing for their business.

With competition knocking at their doors, hoteliers must consistently assess their hotel, keeping in mind that, although their guests are looking for a unique guest experience, they're ultimately looking for a respite from their everyday lives. Aside from curb appeal, welcoming lobbies, and a friendly face to greet them, their room remains the primary focus of their experience. It seems this is where a hotel generates the majority of its customer reviews.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

When you think about it, isn't a bed and bath the easiest location of the hotel to use for creating a lasting impression? After all, it's what the hospitality industry is based upon.

Back in the day, when automobiles were first hitting the nation's backroads and highways, travelers required a place to rest their heads and freshen up before they continued on their journey. The nostalgic motor lodges offered a room to get a good night's sleep – a total refresh to face their travels the next day. Today, no matter how evolved our lodging has become, we must not look past these basic necessities that created the hospitality industry!

Whatever level of service or amenities a hotel provides – whether it has marble lobbies or luxury vinyl flooring – every hotel must offer a comfortable mattress and clean, tidy bedding, as well as a sparkling bathroom. Ultimately, this is what guests will remember about the hotel. This is where

their great experiences will continue or will come crashing down, leaving you with a scarred reputation that will be hard to disprove.

CLEANLINESS COUNTS

In today's world, we've become understandably germophobic, and expository news stories with black lights exposing bodily fluids don't help! So, around a decade or so ago, the hotel industry went to back-to-basics bedding – plush white duvets draped in triple sheeting surrounding the guest in a sea of white sterility. This new approach to linens has become the norm, creating a more relaxed environment for travelers, who can see for themselves that there are no hidden surprises in bed with them! Add the new solid bedframes that enhance the height of the mattress and eliminate the need for a dated bedskirt and the room has transformed into a “sleep oasis.”

The guest bathroom has also been under more scrutiny, especially following the pandemic. Poorly maintained tile floors, discolored grout and caulking in bath areas, and dim lighting can really hurt a hotel's reputation, as this room is expected to be pristine. Even though “worn” doesn't necessarily mean “dirty,” the brain sees it as so. The age of a hotel isn't as much of an issue as the cleanliness and condition are.

An inspection list should encompass the sink, tub, and their fixtures. Does the sink drain properly? Is the lighting bright enough for shaving and applying makeup? Are the towels bright white? Does the exhaust fan work? Does it rumble? When was the

last time the shower curtain was washed? Are soap dispensers replenished?

The larger hotels with a head housekeeper usually have these items covered, but some smaller hotels need to check the rooms on a regular basis to make sure the bathrooms are being maintained, not just cleaned. Make sure the cleaning staff reports something that requires a repair or replacement. Doing so not only makes the guest feel more comfortable; it helps to eliminate negative reviews.

MAKE IT WORK

Every guest who stays at a hotel needs that room, whether it be for work, for vacation, or just a “home” for the night. The rates have risen and demand for quality has, too. Social media has stirred business from points never imagined, but it also spreads reputations wider than ever before. Years ago, word of mouth and an occasional billboard were

the only means of advertising. Today, reviews are exposed to the world. It’s important that guests are happy and leaving positive feedback.

To remain relevant and reputable in a highly competitive industry, the hospitality “basics” should be maintained and updated on a regular basis. When guests sleep well, they feel well, they boost your reputation, and they return! ■



Penny Duelt is an assurance and marketing program director for hihotels by Hospitality International, as she helps franchisees focus on increasing ROI by implementing customized sales and marketing

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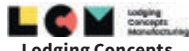
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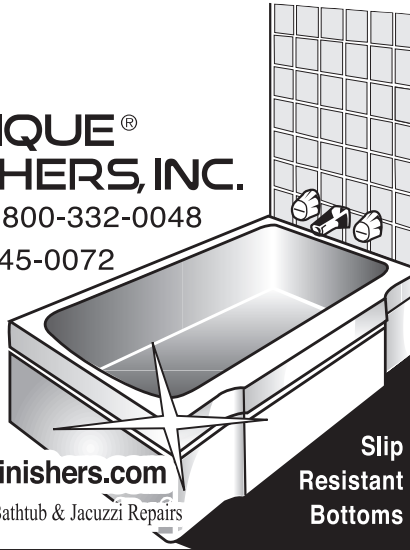
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AAHOA MEMBERS IN ACTION



The new AAHOA Director Class gathered in Atlanta, GA.



Assemblymember Alex Lee (second from left) recognized AAHOA for its remarkable work in the hospitality industry and across California at the town hall meeting in Milpitas, CA.



AAHOA thanks the Wyndham team for their support and commitment to AAHOACON23 and America's hotel owners.



More than 125 attendees gathered to hear from esteemed speakers Assemblymember Alex Lee and Congressman Ro Khanna during the North Pacific Town Hall Meeting.



AAHOA Chairman Bharat Patel visited the beautiful BAPS Temple in Chino Hills, CA, to pray and give thanks prior to AAHOACON23.



[L-R] AAHOA Lifetime Member Raman (R.P.) Rama, HFTP President Neil Foster, Past Chairman Neal Patel (2022-2023), and HFTP CEO Frank Wolfe strengthened the partnership between AAHOA and HFTP at AAHOACON23.



North Pacific Regional Director Ankit Panchal (right) had a chance to interview Congressman Ro Khanna (left) about policies and initiatives that will support hoteliers during the North Pacific Town Hall Meeting.



New Director Orientation at the AAHOA headquarters in Atlanta, GA.



AAHOA Members discussed the New Jersey 1958 Bill and independent hotel issues during a Town Hall Meeting at the BAPS temple in Robbinsville, NJ.

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