

Editorial No. 3

Speakeasy Salon: the pulse of the hotel industry



Clockwise from left: Christoph Hoffmann, Mario Pick, Folke Sievers, Andreas Löcher, Rolf Westermann, Marco Nussbaum, Ingo Peters, Fabian Engels, Peter Joehnk – All picture credits to Hamburger Abendblatt – Macello Hernandez

One of the best things about moving to a new home is getting to share it with friends and colleagues. And when your new home is a listed 1920s villa, you feel responsible as a caretaker to honor its heritage and look after its future.

This, combined with our aim of promoting the free exchange of ideas about the hotel industry, has resulted in our revival of the classic tradition of art and literary salons through JOI-Design's very own "Speakeasy Salon". Every few months, we'll be hosting discussions about emerging topics in the hospitality industry.

So why do we want to do this? As founders of one of Germany's first interior design offices concentrating specifically on the global hospitality industry, my wife Corinna and I have gained abundant knowledge about the sector as well as its processes, partners, trends etc... We are convinced that by sharing this through debates with some of hospitality's most important leaders, we can really help elevate the entire industry.

Our first conversation took place at the beginning of autumn, with Chief Editor of industry magazine Allgemeine Hotel-und-Gastronomie-Zeitung (AHGZ), Rolf Westermann, helping organize and moderate this first even. We brought together several prestigious German hoteliers to dig into the psychology behind evolving guest needs and discuss, "what comes next after the hotel living room?" In addition, Brit Glocke, editor of AHGZ, Vera Fangler, editor from the newspaper Hamburger Abendblatt, and of course our German Marketing Manager, Theresa Goetze, joined to report on the trends driving hospitality in new directions.

I'm excited to share with my blog readers some of the top insights from the participants:

- Christoph Hoffmann, CEO and founding partner of 25hours Hotels, the pioneering brand that helped transform the lobby into a “living room” and develops unique, imaginative properties

Creating intentional connections with the community attracts new market sectors

Some 25hours destinations offer a concierge service where locals can pick up their mail and packages, use the dry-cleaning service, shop for sundries or grab a sandwich to go. As a result, the property becomes a meeting place for residents and strengthens the neighborhood spirit



- Marco Nussbaum, CEO and co-founder with designer Karim Rashid of the hotel brand, prizeotel

Adapt to meet the real needs of guests

Developed with the philosophy of "designocracy", or that high design should be affordable for all, guest preferences are at the heart of the brand's DNA – particularly younger generations. Therefore, offering a digital hub in the public areas is essential to creating a lively atmosphere that lasts beyond breakfast.



- Andreas Löcher, Head of Investment Management Hospitality at Union Investment Real Estate GmbH, owner of 62 hotels with a total stock value of 3.5 billion euros.

Cozy cocooning will remain popular

With Union's commitment to developing future-proof hotels, sustainability is highly important. An offshoot of this is the wellness movement, with people's desire to find an escape from the hectic, "always on" pressures of living in a digital age.

- Folke Sievers, general manager of the Hotel Reichshof Hamburg CURIO Collection by Hilton

AirBnB has shown that people don't want to travel as tourists, they want to feel at home in a foreign city

Creating an offering that widens the mix. For example, so many locals come to the Reichshof on Sunday afternoons for coffee and cake, the hotel needed to allocate more space.

- Ingo C. Peters, managing director and general manager at Fairmont Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, Hamburg

A hotel's location and history are assets that attract both guests and locals

Investing time and money into preservation can bring strong dividends. For the 120-year-old hotel's recent renovation, Mr. Peters and his wife personally inspected each

guestroom and commissioned an art curator to restore old pieces and acquire new ones to help it transition into modern times. The luxurious quality of experience has resulted in 80% of the hotel's F+B turnover coming from Hamburg locals.



- Fabian Engels, general manager of Lindner Park-Hotel Hagenbeck, Hamburg

A hotel's story must feel genuine and timeless, even when it has elements of fantasy

Although the “antiquarian zoo” theme of the hotel's interiors (created by JOI-Design) playfully interprets the spirit of the adjacent Hagenbeck Zoo and Aquarium, the high-style décor doesn't veer into short-lived trendiness or sacrifice comfort for design's sake.

- Mario Pick, COO of Novum Hotel Group

Maximize user data collected online

Hoteliers can get to know their guests before they arrive, which enables them to tailor services and special offers that will appeal to an individual's personality.

- Me! Peter Joehnk, co-managing director of JOI-Design

Guests should feel treated as individuals

Hoteliers must analyze what their guests truly need and want. Many no longer wish to travel like tourists; they want to dip into a new world and discover the same cool, secret hotspots that locals enjoy and really understand the people who live there. This can be a great opportunity, yet at the same time, it's a big challenge since this means hotels must become a place where locals want to go and, as a result, guests feel comfortable.



Some other observations that came up in our conversation were

- Decreased staff levels due to increased technology. More and more guests use the internet to book their rooms and check in and out, plus keys are often no longer needed since doors can be opened via a code sent to their phone. The consequence is that conventional reception areas are no longer necessary, as guests prefer to get recommendations from locals rather than receptionists.
- Every hotel tells a story of some sort, whether good or bad. Hoteliers need to make sure theirs feels positive, genuine and sets the property apart from its competition

I agree with many of these perspectives, and was especially interested to learn from Christoph Hoffman about 25hours' recipe for developing new hotel concepts: the "extra hour lab". Consisting of an anthropologist, a design psychologist, a product designer and a storyteller, this innovation hub investigates a location's history and culture, and then translates this into a one-of-a-kind hotel design.

The process for designing hotels that feel relevant for today's zeitgeist is changing in response to guests' use of technology. Whether it's access to seemingly unlimited information about a neighborhood, the ability to research local recommendations, or sharing "instagramable moments" of quirky interior details, a hotel's design, location and web presence are now intrinsically connected. This puts greater pressure on hoteliers to validate

what is shown online through experiences that provide what the internet cannot – cozy, genuine and human touches that feel real and honest.

So will this considered approach become the norm in the future? What else is in store for the hospitality industry? I look forward to discussing this and more in our next Speakeasy Salon!

- Peter Joehnk -