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INTERNATIONAL HOTEL DESIGN

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## DESIGN BROUGHT TO THE TABLE

In February, SPACE hosted a roundtable lunch in collaboration with leading bespoke lighting manufacturer Dernier & Hamlyn where some of the UK's most prominent hotel interior designers were invited for a conversation about trends, technology, heritage and the importance of lighting. Both SPACE editor Can Falk and Features Editor Tonje Odegard hosted the lunch at the Granary Square Brasserie in King's Cross alongside Jeremy Quantrill, Managing Director of D&H

It was cold outside, but warm inside when the invited designers battled through the snow to attend a roundtable in London to discuss all-things hospitality design. Martin Goddard, Co-Founder and Co-Director of Goddard Littlefair; Dennis Irvine, Director of Dennis Irvine Studio; Guy Oliver, Managing Director of Oliver Laws; Ariane Steinbeck, Managing Director of RPW Design; Lewis Taylor, Design Director of David Collins Studio; Fiona Thompson, Principal of Richmond International; and Constantina Tsoutsikou, Creative Director of HBA London, all gathered to offer their expert opinions on the larger issues concerning hospitality design today.

The topic that spurred the most debate and enthusiasm between the designers was technology. Developments in technology have undoubtedly opened doors and created opportunities when it comes to design, but the consensus among the designers was that it's gone too far. They strongly felt



there is a need to stop over-complicating things and go back to simple, intuitive and functional solutions.

Martin said: "We have to ignore tech and what it can do. As long as you have the infrastructure there, that's all you need. You need somewhere to charge your phone and that's it – I feel we are past that conversation now."

Fiona agreed and stressed that people still love the human interaction of hotels, saying that this can actually be the differentiator that makes you stand out these days.

Guy said it's all about keeping it intuitive, while Ariane pointed out how it all comes down to functionality, which is ultimately the responsibility of a designer – how to make something look beautiful, but serve a purpose at the same time. "That's when it becomes successful – when design and functionality come together," she concluded.



Some of the best designers in the UK gathered at Granary Square Brasserie for a lively discussion on hospitality design. Photos: Dernier & Hamlyn

When the topic of trends came up, the designers had rather resolute stances on it. Fiona announced the death of trends, arguing that design is a much more fluid and buoyant concept these days. Constantina agreed and explained that if something is considered a trend, HBA tends to shy away from it. Interestingly, Martin then proclaimed the 'anti-tech' movement we've seen in recent years as a trend in itself.

Then what about Instagram? Instagram, 'Instagramability' and getting the right 'Instagram-moment' is perhaps something that can be labelled as a trend these days and is something that dictates design, at least from a marketing perspective.

Lewis reinforced this as he experienced it starting to creep in a few years ago, but that now the topic of social media is paragraphed in every brief – what does this tell us? The designers all returned to the question of practicality

and functionality. "If there is thoughtful design, history or a story behind it, I don't mind Instagramable design at all, but if it's only there as a gimmick, I don't appreciate it," said Fiona.

The conversation then segued onto the topic of uniqueness and the strive for the ultimate unique design, which is getting increasingly more difficult to achieve.

Ariane said: "By replicating what's unique, it's not unique anymore." Lewis could relate, and uttered his frustration on the topic: "We get projects where you have so many guidelines to adhere to that the 'uniqueness' disappears. When a guideline specifically asks for uniqueness, can it ever fully be achieved?"

Dennis then emphasised how it ultimately comes down to the confidence one has to have in designers as experts in their field. "It's not about personal



**Lewis Taylor**  
Design Director of David  
Collins Studio

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**Dennis Irvine,**  
Director of Dennis Irvine  
Studio

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**Martin Goddard,**  
Co-Founder and Co-Director  
of Goddard Littlefair

"We have to ignore tech and what it can do. As long as you have the infrastructure there, that's all you need."



**Constantina Tsoutsikou**  
Creative Director of HBA  
London

"Bad lighting can really destroy your design, so it's something that is very important."



Fiona Thompson and Martin Goddard discussing

opinion or taste, it's about the trust you get from the operator, which I think is growing these days," he said.

Guy completely agreed and said you can't dilute a vision.

What Martin considered necessary to achieve uniqueness, and something he thought is an interesting movement in the industry, is the breaking down of hotel brands. He suggested that people don't recognise the brand of the hotel anymore, it is more about the hotel's location and how the design reflects this. "This challenges hotel operators to rethink design, which is really exciting," he said. He used the PRINCIPAL hotel brand as an example, which is renowned for creating hotels in historic or iconic buildings and locations across the UK and having a strong emphasis on integrating the history of the property and the city into the interior design of its hotels. Instead of the brand dictating the design, the locale and heritage dictate the design, and the design consequently becomes the brand. "This is a completely unintentional process and the design becomes unique as a result."

Another enthusing subject for hospitality design is the issue of lighting. The designers all agreed that lighting is a crucial factor for the total fulfilment of the design concept. "We consider lighting from the very beginning," said Lewis. "It will dictate the ambience and the atmosphere we want."

Again, the conclusion landed on functionality, practicality and simplicity. Guy said: "We have to make sure that the vision is maintained the whole way through the design process. Functionality has everything to say – it's about making sure it's idiot-proof. As with everything else related to design, it needs to be practical and intuitive. Saying that, it doesn't have to be complicated."

"Bad lighting can really destroy your design, so it's something that is very important," said Constantina. While Martin emphasised the importance of maintaining lighting as part of the core design vision throughout the design process.

Everyone agreed that bespoke lighting is the way to go to make the most out of budgets, but also to fully achieve the design vision you have in mind.

When discussing costs, in a world where budgets are getting tighter by the minute, Jeremy from Dernier & Hamlyn also highlighted the benefits of using bespoke lighting, but stressed the importance of building good relationships.



**Ariane Steinbeck,**  
Managing Director of RPW  
Design

"That's when it becomes successful – when design and functionality come together"



**Guy Oliver,**  
Managing Director of Oliver  
Laws

"You can't dilute a vision."



**Fiona Thompson**  
Principal of Richmond  
International

"If there is thoughtful design, history and a story behind it, I don't mind Instagramable design at all, but if it's only there as a gimmick, I don't appreciate it"



**Jeremy Quantrill**  
Managing Director of Demier  
& Hamlyn

"If designers talk to us, we can work with them to produce lighting that meets their needs at a cost that's within the budget"

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In response to the problem of decreasing budgets, Dennis had the perfect solution: "This might sound controversial, but I think you need to address all the other areas but design when you're looking for cuts in the budget. The design is one of the most important aspects of the hotel and should not be compromised on."

After a couple of hours of debate, fresh opinions and stimulating discussions, the session was concluded and followed by a lovely lunch, where the conversation continued. It was obvious that some of the country's best interior designers were present – the expertise, knowledge and experience shared around the table left us all with both new perspectives and established facts concerning hospitality design today – it's ever evolving.



Jeremy Quantrill explains the benefits of bespoke lighting



SPACE editor Can Faik with Dennis Irvine