

X2

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

Park
Hotel MumbaiEAST MEETS WEST IN MUMBAI'S LATEST
'URBAN RETREAT', WHICH FUSES
TRADITIONAL INDIAN PATTERNS
WITH CLEAN MODERNIST LINES

INTERIOR DESIGNER: APEEJAY PROJECTS, PROJECT ORANGE



more than the sum of the parts. What is more interesting when working abroad is the possibility of tapping into local crafts. In Morocco we really enjoyed working with tile manufacturers, while in India we have just designed some very complicated sandstone carving. These elements really add to the sense of place.

Do you enjoy designing hotels for the luxury end of the market, and how do you define luxury these days?

Luxury really does seem to be the word of the moment; yes and no. I enjoy the flexibility of being able to consider so many options, but there is a huge onus in designing something that is both cutting edge and timeless. Hotel design is now being seen as almost akin to fashion; the difference is that a hotel will be there for many years, but by its nature fashions will change. Thus it is important that the architectural statement is strong and lasting, while other softer elements can tap into the immediate zeitgeist. Perhaps luxury now equals integrity – and the invisible meshing of design, service and deliverables. I hate that word pampering – it represents everything that is wrong about society today!

Geometric patterned relief
plasterwork characterises the
walls of the reception area (above)

The Park Navi Mumbai, a luxury resort set in Navi Mumbai, Mumbai's satellite city, is the sixth hotel of the The Park Hotel group. The urban retreat is situated in the developing district of CBD Belapur and boasts stunning views of the surrounding landscape. The 80-room hotel places a strong emphasis on contemporary design within its private and public spaces, providing guests an elegant setting for both business and pleasure. The building was left abandoned and incomplete for 20 years. Through the work of Project Orange and Apeejay Projects, influenced by modernist design, the hotel has an open plan approach, connecting all parts of the hotel to create a vibrant living environment.

The brilliant white exterior reflects the glistening sun, creating dark shadows across the deep recesses. The landscape gardens house only white flowers to

offer a cool and refreshing retreat. Inside, the Park reception takes up a white palette, with a geometric, patterned relief plaster along the walls and the desk, where small seating alcoves are cut into the material.

The hotel restaurant, Zest, allows guests to enjoy the classic views of the terrace through full height glass windows at any hour. One wall is tiled with an abstract version of a traditional Indian pattern and overlooks the circular bar, which has a brown Italian marble counter top.

The signature poolside space, Aqua, features a huge abstract glass mosaic pattern in blues, greys and oranges, projecting a backdrop for the dramatic black elliptical pool. Guests can enjoy sitting out, eating and drinking on the timber deck, with views of the luxury landscape framed by the huge circular windows along the boundary

wall. Arranged around an enclosed atrium, the hotel features 10 studio rooms, 41 deluxe pool-view and hill-view rooms, 14 luxury garden-view rooms, 14 studio suites and a presidential suite, all finished with elegant decor and modern facilities.

Generously proportioned with high ceilings, each room is decorated in a classic neutral palette lifted by flashes of bright colour in the soft furnishings. The interiors fuse Eastern and Western influences, mixing traditional Indian patterns and textures with clean lines and modern shapes. This is shown through the natural bamboo floors and teak and tan leather furniture. Central to the room is the bed, which hovers over the ground on a slatted wooden base. The bathrooms are spacious with large showers and pristine white tiles X2



A huge abstract mosaic is featured next to the black elliptical pool, with views of the landscape framed by the large circular windows along the boundary wall (far left, top and bottom)

Sumptuous patterned fabrics (left) contrast the modernist, clean lines of the public spaces (below)



What are the biggest challenges facing hotel designers today?

All designers have an increasing responsibility to the environment. I am absolutely convinced that in 25 years from now we will not have the choices we have today – they just won't be available. This was really brought home to me when specifying a marble – the quarry reported that it had run out... that is it. The design community needs to work to ensure that it is so deeply rooted within the process that you are not always aware of it as an issue. In addition, wouldn't it be great if we could have a simple hand held controller that worked the TV, the DVD etc. One day....

Does your inspiration come from travelling a great deal?

Inspiration is something you need both to research and discover. By research I mean reading and appreciating ideas and theories. By discovery I mean looking at the world – this could be an exotic trip abroad or just noticing the way the sun falls through the leaves of a tree. The question then is how to interpret these fragments into an overall framework. On a more practical level I think the digital camera revolution means that you can collect images so easily then put them together when you get back home. I always think that no matter how complex or sophisticated an idea is, you should be able to explain the essence of it in a few sentences.

What is the best, most luxurious, hotel experience you've ever had?

The very first time I stayed at the Park Hyatt hotel in Tokyo was utterly memorable. We had had meetings solidly for days and moved from our corporate hotel at the end of the day to this one. I went for a swim in the horizon pool on the 44th floor then had dinner in the New York Grill on the 52nd floor. I drank the best vodka martini I have ever tasted. Shame we had to check out at 6am though.

Can you name any favourite projects?

I am not sure about the word favourite – but I have just come back from Bangalore where we have finished the I-bar in the Park Hotel. It's great and an enormous amount of effort has gone into creating this little space. Every single item in the room is bespoke down to the furniture. Now that it is done we will be concentrating on our next hotel project in St Petersburg, which will open this summer. This has been a real challenge, and I very much look forward to being involved in the opening.

Have you worked on any new build hotels?

We have not yet had the chance to design a brand new hotel building, though the project in Mumbai was barely a concrete frame when we

started. The Fitzwilliam Hotel in Belfast is a new building as was the majority of the Farnham Estate hotel, and in both cases we worked with the local architects as a team. We are working on phase two of our Chiswick hotel, which is a new wing so that is a start. However we very much look forward to being able to design our own homegrown hotel!

What are the challenges of working on existing properties (are some of them listed buildings too)?

Always the problem of an existing building is that you never quite know what it is you are dealing with. There are never any up-to-date drawings and even a survey does not reveal all of the surprises in store. In the end, you have to be ready to make some changes if required. The main challenge is to ensure that the mechanical and electrical installation has been thought through spatially. It sounds obvious, but so often the design is threatened by a pipe that suddenly appears!

Can you tell us about any hotel projects that are in the pipeline?

Apart from St Petersburg we are working on Eynsham Hall in Oxfordshire, which promises to be a very elegant and glamorous retreat. The actual building and the grounds are magnificent.



QUIRKY MODERN TOUCHES
HAVE BREATHED NEW LIFE
INTO THIS IMPOSING
JACOBEAN-STYLE HALL
INTERIOR DESIGNER: PROJECT ORANGE

Eynsham
Oxford Hall

Set within 12ha of gardens and parkland and 20 minutes from the centre of Oxford is Eynsham Hall, which has just undergone a major interior redesign by London design consultancy Project Orange.

There's been a house here for nearly 300 years, starting with a four-storey Georgian building, which passed through many hands before being bought in 1866 by one James Mason. His son, apparently with a great deal of input from his wife, Lady Evelyn Mason, then grabbed the bull by the horns and completely rebuilt it at the turn of the

last century. The result is this imposing Jacobean-style hall – 'a residence for entertaining on a grand scale'. And it's still doing that to this day, in the hands of the Mason family, although the guests are now paying for the privilege. There are 43 rooms in the main building and a further 101 in buildings which were added in the Eighties, along with the conference facilities.

Project Orange was initially brought in to look at the main building's bar area, which was used as a test-bed to see how the historic building could be redesigned and modernised while taking advantage of its character.

'Originally the room for the Mason family's collection of firearms, the new bar, now known as The Gunroom, fuses old with new, with a touch of art deco glamour,' says Project Orange director Christopher Ash. 'The original oak panelling has been carefully restored and against the warm oak finish you can now find traditional Chesterfield sofas and classic tub chairs upholstered in canary yellow leather and pop art-inspired fabrics. The bar counter is an island of decadent black glass and

polished chrome, sitting in the gigantic leaded bay window overlooking the grounds. The impressively high ceilings have even helped to find a home for some of the estate's vast collection of antlers.'

The bar area proved a success and Project Orange got the green light to look at the rest. 'Following the completion of The Gunroom, we turned their attention to the guest bedrooms; all greatly in need of refurbishment,' adds Ash. 'With no two bedrooms alike on the first floor of the hall and with a series of very tight bedroom layouts on the second floor, we

were presented with a very difficult design challenge.

The first floor deluxe bedroom with a dramatic bay window and a rather fabulous original marble fireplace has been brought back to life with a mixture of old-fashioned luxury and quirky modern highlights; a traditional Knoll two-seater sofa is upholstered in a vibrant, flock fabric and simple white, paneled wardrobe doors with a naughty lime green lining. Previously a tired meeting room, a luxurious, black marble bathroom has been installed to the rear of the bed, creating an elegant backdrop.'

Impressively high ceilings have helped house the estate's imposing collection of antlers (below)



Interview with James Soane Director of Project Orange



James Soane is co-founder, along with Christopher Ash, of architecture and design practice Project Orange. Their first ever building, 266 Glossop Road, won a RIBA award and its portfolio has since broadened from residential projects to include school, retail, restaurant and hotel design. Over the last few years James has overseen the design of several high-profile hotels including Eynsham Hall and the Park Hotel in Navi Mumbai, India.

What was your first hotel project?

Our first Project Orange hotel was Myhotel Chelsea. It had been recently renovated by the previous owners and had a conservatory complete with Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen mural on the outside wall. Sadly, the style was so conservative we had to rework everything. That said, the structure, wiring and kitchens were all fine. The challenge was basically to create the second Myhotel within a very tight budget. Our response was to make



a few key connections between public spaces and then to introduce a completely different palette of materials and colours. It was completed in 2003 and has been a great success.

How has hotel design progressed in the last 10 years?

Overall, the public is much more switched on about design. They realise that every hotel delivers an individual experience and that choosing the right hotel, be it for business or pleasure, will enhance their visit. Ten years ago there was a lot of gadgetry in the room and people did not seem to mind. Now there is a sense that technology should be much more subtly integrated into design – I call it 'crafted-technology'. Also the big theatrical set pieces of the past 10 years are what shoulder pads were to outfits in the 1980s: great at the time but definitely over.

What is your idea of a luxury hotel?

For me, luxury is simplicity in an ideal location – probably a garden of some sort. Last year I stayed at the Rajvilas hotel in Jaipur, India, which I think takes a lot of beating. That said, I think that there are other times when a simple white room with just a clean bed is the answer.

How does hotel design compare to other areas of commercial design – is there more room for creativity?

Like all areas of design, there is so much scope for improvement. We all look at the latest 'design' hotels – but go into any major city and count on two hands the number of C-list hotels with sticky carpets, a themed bar and tropical bedsheets. I think the big challenge now is in the two-star market. In the end, all decisions can be design-led – it's just that you need the right people in empowered positions to make those decisions. I also think that so many of the chain hotels are obsessed with their brand – which is ironic as this is their blueprint for standing still.

Does your approach to global hotel schemes differ to that for UK projects?

We approach all projects with the same starting point – we are looking for a story to tell. For us, each project is informed by its location, the people we work with and ideas we are interested in exploring. The design development is something of a collage where you compose a vision by synthesising all the strands into something you hope is



Carefully restored oak panelling sits alongside quirky modern furniture, 'with a touch of art deco glamour'