



HOTEL & LEISURE ADVISORS

## RENOVATION STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

By: Eric B. Hansen, AIA, ISHC

Is a renovation project in your future? In these economic times the pressure to keep fresh product in front of an insatiable customer is more prevalent and challenging than ever. In order to gain market share, owners and operators are on a continual path down the road of renovation and upgrade. The strategy of flexibility combined with a methodic pre-planning phase is key to success. The knowledge of how the property operates is brought to the table by the owner/operator and the knowledge of design and construction is brought to the table by the architect/designer. How well these two entities communicate and share their respective knowledge base relates directly to the success of the project. Architects/designers that understand the product from an operational point of view are more likely to generate solutions that are compatible with the day-to-day operations of the hotel. Performing the renovation work with minimal impact on day-to-day operations is another critical success factor in any renovation.

Once the understanding of specific hotel operations has been communicated, the next step is to address those design issues that will provide the desired results. This phase is generally referred to as the programming phase. Not all solutions to the issues may be design related. Your hotel architect/designer with their expertise should be looked upon to help “creatively” solve the renovation issues at hand. The architect/designer needs to work with a variety of hotel employees. The sales and marketing staff provide the understanding of the property’s seasonal activities and produce a clear understanding of project timing. The architect/designer needs to work with the building engineer to address any building material issues and the architect/designer needs to work with the general manager to ensure that during the renovation, clear paths of egress and building systems are maintained and operational. The entire hotel staff needs to be informed and understand what is happening to the hotel and how it’s renovation is going to occur. This sharing of knowledge will help your staff more effectively communicate with your guests.

Next, a specific scope of work is generated that relates directly to the solutions that were created during the programming phase. Simple, low cost, effective, solutions should be evaluated at every opportunity. Items such as light fixture upgrades, allow renovation work to be accomplished with minimal disturbance on the day-to-day operations. Renovation of exterior landscaping also provides for a minimal impact on day-to-day operations. In general, those areas where your guest can feel, see, and interact with the property are the areas where a concerted renovation effort should be focused.

The notion of flexibility as a key to success relates to the sequencing of the project during the actual renovation work. Choices as to which areas of the hotel will

undergo renovation first, by closing off a wing or sectioning off a floor, will allow the work to be performed logically and systematically. If the renovation calls for work to be done to the front desk and the main lobby area, a temporary registration and welcome area needs to be provided. A guest, upon arrival, should be able to easily discern a temporary entry. Make them feel as if the entire project is about their satisfaction. If the sequence of the work is such that the guest rooms are renovated first, the guest, having gone through some disruption at registration is rewarded with a newly renovated guest room. Again, the heightened awareness of the project by the hotel staff can help to educate your guests about the value and commitment you have made to their experience.

Through the structured process of knowledge sharing and pre-planning with an eye towards flexibility, a hotel's renovation can be accomplished efficiently and with minimal impact to the guests. By taking the time to effectively communicate with your architect/designer, the chances for success of your renovation increase greatly.

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Mr. Hansen offers over 13 years of experience in the hospitality industry and has been the responsible architect on over 65 hotels and conference centers of various brands, including full-service, extended-stay, select-service and economy chain scales. Mr. Hansen has worked with various major hotel company corporate offices and has extensive knowledge of brand criteria.

As a 15 year architect with a foundation in financial management, appraisal theory, and hospitality consulting, Mr. Hansen brings well rounded expertise to various H&LA assignments and assists H&LA clients with their pre-development, consulting, and valuation needs.

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