

# Hotel Design

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## Hotel

# Nightclubs

Four hotels get new clubs sure to set the night on fire.

BY KATIE TANDY

While guests may flock to a hotel for a divine night's sleep in palatial suites amid sweeping views, the essence of the surrounding city is celebrated and explored outside the guest rooms, lobby and spa, namely within its nightclub or lounge. The nightlife venue within every hotel has become increasingly important to the overall success of the entire venture, sometimes serving as the driving force behind revenue.

A happening nightclub instantly allows a hotel to be an attraction for both tourists and locals alike, providing an authentic slice of city life. *Hotel Design* discovered four venues that skillfully straddle this notion both in design and moxie: Moon at Hard Rock Hotel Punta Cana, AnKadia in Miami's Fountainsbleau, the CV Lounge in the Hotel on Rivington in New York and Drai's Hollywood atop the W Hollywood.

For James Geier and Karen Herold of Chicago-

based 555 Interiors, there was

another delicate dance of duality heavily influencing their design of Moon—the conversion of the Moon Palace Resort into a Hard Rock Hotel. Rebranding a property is always a challenge, but the befit and history of the Hard Rock brand was especially tricky as Herold and Geier had to couple the past and present, honoring a long lineage of evolving music.

"The vision for all of Hard Rock is for it to be rock-centric, but to do it in a new innovative way," says Herold, vice president of design. "What we are really working on is creating an experi-

ence that is aesthetically up to date; it's at once new and then." President and Founder Geier echoes Herold's sentiments, explaining that Hard Rock wasn't interested in renouncing their past in the name of being avant-garde; rather, they needed a team who could interweave hip with history. "They want to be as 'now' as all the other great clubs and restaurants, but still not run away from 30 years of rock and roll because that's what it's about—the music," says Geier.

Owned by Mexican family the Shapores, who own 11 other resorts throughout Mexico, the Hard Rock Punta Cana is their first property in a different country, the Dominican Republic. The new nightclub Moon, set for a soft opening with the rest of the resort November 1, is like a lush planetarium, featuring expansive chandelier sales draped in deep purple with clews, custom-made rods to the capture of rock, like seven-foot chandeliers crafted from zip cables and microphones. For a touch of the retro, Geier and Herold also designed the backbar with an equalizer amplifier set to change colors and move to the beat of the music, offsetting the highly modern ceiling which features thousands of LED lights.

Herold also explained that in addition to 555's mission to deftly couple the past and present, they also had to deal with structural issues, using floating ceilings and over-sized furniture to convert the 3,500 square feet of space into something that decidedly said Hard Rock, something cooler and more intimate.

"The property was not designed for what was to come," she says. "We ended up throwing out a lot of what they had just finished, working with the property owners and the Hard Rock to come up with things that would

really redo the entire environment for them without being thematic."

### Making It Work

Steve Lewis, designer of the CV Lounge in the Hotel on Rivington, knows that nightclub design isn't all glamour and glistening either—crafting a functional space that is still aesthetically stunning is daunting—especially on a tight budget (\$40,000) and an even tighter timeframe (11 days). Just as 555 had to carefully convert a pre-existing space into something rock-centric, so too did Lewis have to convert a largely unusable space into a nightclub worth booging about, rising to a seemingly impossible challenge.

"The space wasn't functional," says Lewis. "It didn't work. It seemed to be an afterthought to the hotel property. My task was to create a versatile space that functioned well for tourists as well as the hip New York crowd. So often money is thrown at a problem and that is not design in use. This was design in its pure form. I wish there was a client watching us do it. We transformed it way under any conventional budget. I had to be a Jedi knight, a kamikaze. You don't say 'woe is me,' you embrace it. The work was and the staff that helped me were all invigorated."

Lewis started his design with a wild wallpaper from Testimates, featuring asymmetrical shapes with pops and swirls of vibrant pinks and oranges. "We knew the wallpaper would carry the room," says Lewis. "The rest of the hotel is grey. We wanted CV Lounge to stand out against the rest of the design." Lewis clandestinely watched some of the original leather banquettes with vinyl by using a cross-stitching trick and covered the steel bar top with the supple "acacia" plastic as well. Countering the black walnut-stained floor, which crosses a rub-or rustic look, are glass filters on the lights, casting deep amber and red glows across the walls, which glow brightly off the wallpaper. Furthering CV's vibrant feelings are repurposed woodcarvings and faux flowers spanning from behind the banquettes.

The openness, Max Azzou, had to invest an incredible amount of trust in Lewis's vision, allowing him to maximize his design without intricate guidelines or restrictions. "They know that you know better than they," says Lewis. "Of course you keep them informed the entire way, but they trusted in my abilities to turn it around and now they are praising higher than they ever expected."

Trust remains a delicate issue



## | nightlife design

among the dialogue between designers, owners and operators, something even the hospitality juggernaut W Hotels & Resorts seeks to honor. Victor Drai, proprietor of myriad red-hot nightclubs on the West Coast, explains that he too was allowed free reign with his design work, as W had seen his aesthetic at both Wynn's Tryst and Encore's XS, renowned for their sultry style—"No one tells me what to do," he jokes. Channeling the opulent glamour of Hollywood's heyday, Drai's at the W Hollywood features walls in quilted red velvet, black leather banquettes and an undercover disco ball hidden beneath an enormous lampshade, casting huge circular shadows instead of the typical twinkle. Drai says that it takes him months to finish a lighting design, making sure that each track on the ceiling features a separate dimming system to give himself as many alternatives as possible.

"Lighting for me is 90 percent of the place. You can make an ugly place look good with lighting but I am so particular—the beam of the light has to be very small. If you come too close to the window, you can start to see the parking lot so at night you have to keep a cozier atmosphere. All my shades have a cover so there is no direct light on your face."

The outside portion of Drai's is equally seductive yet decidedly more exotic, featuring Moroccan-style inlaid wooden tables and cabinets as well as woven wicker chairs and four VIP cabanas that overlook the glinting lanterns and blood-red chaise lounges below.

Despite Drai's continued success in the nightclub realm, he has been confronted with a few pleasant problems that come with servicing more than 5,000 guests reminiscent of a *douvoir*. When you add tufted vinyl couches coupled with golden goblet tables and a purple backbar with a beveled mirror, guests are more than



### A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

Victor Drai's new nightclub at the W Hollywood features a pool table, a bar area, and a disco ball. The club is designed to be a glamorous lounge, with a focus on lighting and atmosphere.

was like, 'Woah, Francois, it's too much,' but we kept it this way; it's an elegant, glamorous lounge."

Frossard struggled with structural problems similar to that of 555 International, insisting that in order for a nightclub to be successful, there has to be an intense level of warmth and sense of enclosure. "We tried to make it more like a small jewelry box because the space is very big," he explains. "We had to divide the space and make it more intimate versus an open floor plan. Otherwise, if you only have 100 people in there, it's going to look totally empty and not have any energy."

Frossard tackled the problem with undulating "octopus columns" that create a kind of screen, separating the entry from the main space and also from the pool table. "I wanted to be able to see through the space completely but also have an obstruction—it adds some volume to the room." Featuring layer upon layer of glinting gold mirrors set against a palette of black and purple, Arkadia is foreign lands, but also speak to the locals who comprise the very city it resides in. Perhaps even more important, but much less tangible, is the nightclub's power to stylishly suspend guests from reality. "It has to transform you," says Lewis. "It has to take you out of your world and into another one that is familiar and you are awed by. A bottle of Jack [Daniels] is the same bottle of Jack in the swankiest of places or in a dive bar. What people buy is atmosphere and it is the nightclub's job to take people away from their lives." ■

a week. "It's tricky, I've learned what we can and cannot do because of the volume of people," he says. Not only has he already had to switch out the glass tiles on the banquettes for ceramic ones due to excessive stiletto stomping, he also has plans to switch out the wooden tables. "It's not feasible to have natural materials between the ice and the spilling and the cleaning," Drai says. "It's very tough. At the end of the day we need to have some sort of plastic or acrylic tables instead of wood. The wear-and-tear is huge."

Speaking of durability, Fontainebleau in Miami has undergone myriad incarnations including a two-year, \$1 billion renovation project in 2007 and now, a total makeover of the rathelike to become hypnotized by the countless reflections. "It makes you lose your senses," says Frossard. To counter the basement-esque feeling of the space,

er quick-to-close Blade Sushi, set to reopen at an undisclosed date as the new nightclub Arkadia. Gleaned from the Greek province of the same name, which dates all the way back to antiquity, the modern manifestation of the word refers to a Utopia or paradise. French designer Francois Frossard was chosen to take on the project with David Glutman of MMG asking for a space that echoed an old arcade from the '50s and '60s. Soon enough, however, Glutman acquiesced to Frossard's over-the-top interpretation as the design was irresistible. "After doing a couple renderings we basically said, 'Listen, this is not what you want to do in the Fontainebleau Hotel,'" Frossard says. "Let me do my take. And then everybody Frossard also added laser-cut golden mirrors to the ceiling that succeed in hiding the old pipes and the structure from the floor above. Despite being somewhere between a gut renovation and a regular renovation, the project was completed in just six months and on budget, a monetary accomplishment that Frossard calls the first one of his career.

Wherever a hotel is located, however it's operated and however it's designed, it has a very specific role to play; it must not only woo tourists from far-flung



### ELITE SERVICE:

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