

A large, modern hotel lounge with a high ceiling featuring exposed wooden beams and a large circular skylight. The skylight is decorated with numerous small, white, bird-like ornaments hanging from it. The lounge is furnished with several large, curved, light-colored sofas with green and yellow cushions. In the center, there is a large, round, dark wooden coffee table. The floor is covered with a large, abstract rug in shades of green, yellow, and brown. Large windows in the background offer a view of a city skyline and a body of water.

Grounded Luxury

The role of rugs in
hotel design today

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Hotels today are not what they used to be. Far from the utilitarian functionality of the 60s and 70s, but having veered from the extravagance of the 90s, hotels today are more akin to home – albeit a luxurious one. Ultimate comfort, flexibility and a sense of familiarity, they seek to enrich the lives of those who use them, are designed to be places that people actually want to hang out in, and are, more and more, about creating a unique experience for the guest. Sustainability, of course, is also key to the modern hotel.

In terms of design, the shift in thinking around what hotels are – what they offer, how they are experienced and what they represent – has been significant. Rather than purely cosmetic, design is now embedded in the entire hotel experience – from how you check in, to the pillows you sleep on – and the approach overall is much more human-centric. While having a unique offering is increasingly

becoming a defining feature of hotels, some common up-takes from this more human approach are: giving lobbies greater prominence – offering guest's opportunities for connection, relaxation or work; restaurants that are no longer 'hotel restaurants' but destinations in their own right; incorporating various technology to provide a more streamlined user-experience; and increased services – including wellness areas, places to work, retail shopping.

But while creating the hotel which is at once homely and luxe involves using design thinking at every level and across every aspect, a key player is (still) interior design. And one important aspect is carpet and rugs. Through colour, shape, texture and tactility, carpets and rugs have the power to break up a space and identify zones (making one space grand while another cosy), encourage behaviours and moods (think calming colours or luxurious textures) and



Intercontinental Hayman Island Resort

– significantly – create a certain atmosphere for the hotel overall. The look and feel of a rug can quite quickly transform a hotel and elicit the kind of experience it seeks to offer.

A company that knows this well is Designer Rugs. Since their humble beginnings in a small factory in Sydney's Marickville in 1986, the family-owned company has been providing both the residential and commercial sectors with custom-made rugs and carpet, pieces designed in-house and collections designed in collaboration with some of the best minds in Australia's art, fashion and design industries. They know colour, they know material, they know design. And they know how to collaborate to create a desired effect. As Yosi Tal, Managing Director of Designer Rugs, says "because we custom make, we're not necessarily specific, we see everything and that's the beauty of what we do – we can do anything that they envision."

For hotel's which want to offer their guest's something unique, this is key. But it's the central commitment to craftsmanship within Designer Rugs' ethos that makes them really succeed in this area. The company uses finishes of the highest standards, including New Zealand wool, silk, bamboo and textured yarns; has product that is sustainable (they try and minimise dying of colours, have guidelines when it comes to manufacturing, use mainly

wool – a natural product); and their designs are unique – rather than looking to Europe, Designer Rugs is influenced by an Australian design aesthetic. As the bar for hotels is raised, developers seek out architects, designers, suppliers and brands, that can facilitate good design, are ethical and at the same time can satisfy the desire for expression and individuality. And Designer Rugs ticks the boxes. Two recent projects that exemplify their expertise in enhancing the hotel experience – and the important role rugs play in hotel design more generally – are Taronga Wildlife Retreat and the Vibe Hotel Sydney.

Taronga Wildlife Retreat is all about experience. Nestled within Taronga Zoo on the edge of Sydney Harbour, the new overnight eco-retreat offers guests an exclusive opportunity to spend the night among Australia's wildlife. As Cameron Kerr, CEO of Taronga Conservation Society Australia says, "... we hope that our guests will leave not only rejuvenated, but also with a sense of empowerment to make a difference, and with the knowledge that their stay has made a meaningful difference to wildlife and its conservation".

The main attraction might be the animals, but creating a supremely luxury experience that is also environmentally sustainable is also key. Designed by COX Architects with interiors by CHADA, the five lodges (with 62 rooms in



Wildlife Retreat at Taronga, photography by Mike Chorley



Vibe Hotel Sydney, Image courtesy of TFE Hotels

total) incorporate a range of initiatives which make them environmentally sensitive and sustainable – such as external corridors and timber cladding to reduce the buildings' carbon footprint, they have been designed to fit with the existing landscape – the pods are surrounded by native planted green screens to integrate them into the surrounding bushland, for example, and they are spacious, elegant and luxurious.

Alongside suites that reflect their native bushland setting – thoughtfully curated with calm, elegant tones and views that allow guests to overlook the bush or come eye-to-eye with animals, is the Retreat's lobby and lounge, The Nest, featuring Designer Rugs. Biophilic in design and intention, the rugs are an ode to the Australian landscape, with each piece offering a bespoke interpretation of the colours and aspects that are quintessentially Australian. Illustrations of native blossoms and gum trees are finished in warm greens and soft dusty pinks and oranges, while a large central rug provides an abstract take on open plains. In the context of the wider space, the dynamic patterning adds texture and expression to the room, while the circular shapes mirror the room's architecture. Finished in luxurious wool with a sustainable production process, the rugs play an important contribution to the Retreat's environmental integrity, while also creating a sense of elegance and calm to the space

that complements (not takes away from) the real star of the retreat – the bush and the wildlife.

Offering a different kind of experience is the Vibe Hotel Sydney. Here, hospitality offers a respite from the city's bustling CBD, providing a plush haven for corporate travellers and holiday makers alike. Located just moments from Hyde Park, Darling Harbour and Sydney Tower, the Vibe Hotel requires spaces designed for heavy foot traffic, where design and furnishings are required to triangulate form, function and comfort.

In the hotel's reception and restaurant zones, Designer Rugs supplied expansive, hand tufted rugs that echo the "retreat" feel of the hotel. Juxtaposing the bustling metropolis just outside, the rugs created a space that is both warm and comforting, setting the tone for apartments designed for rest and relaxation. Finished in tones of coffee, copper, taupe and bronze, the rugs play on the hues of Australian outback plains, with fluid lines and melting colours creating a visual statement that transports visitors beyond their physical location. In this space, it is also the distinctiveness of the rug that is important, setting The Vibe Hotel Sydney apart from other CBD apartments that often lack character, and elevating this one to something special.