

ecological hotel design: devising hospitality aesthetics with a touch of green

ecotels make use of materials that not only give that extra finesse to aesthetic design execution but reduce pollution to the maximum possible limit

Designing an eco-friendly hotel is about more than merely buying furniture and pictures and putting them all together in a pleasing manner. While everything, from color schemes, styles, furniture and formats must impress the guest list, it must also strike an emotional chord to gratify a diverse clientele. The sheer fact of designing with some concern for Nature makes the job more challenging.

design considerations

Like other hotels, combinations of the visual along with a domestic ambience determine the basic design element of an ecotel as well. Ar. Khozema Chitalwala, Principal Architect, Designers Group, Mumbai, says, "Our first approach to a hotel, be it an ecotel or not, is always its brand analysis and how we shall be able to sell it. We always take into account the local flavour of the place the hotel is situated – mainly its historical and cultural aspects. The products used are contemporary and what can be recycled. We try sourcing materials locally as much as possible. For example in a hotel in Kochi we used coconut shell in the panelling work."

Summing up the design of ecotels in a nutshell, Ar. Nisheil Shetty, Principal Architect, Nisheil Shetty Consultants, Mumbai, says, "While designing an ecotel we keep two things in mind, "Reduction of carbon footprint on Earth and awareness of the green house gas effect on atmosphere. Along with this, the aesthetic

element and the client's requirement should be blended to get the perfect look."

Agreeing with him Ar. Abin Chaudhury, Founding Director, ADS Designs Pvt. Ltd., Kolkata, says, "A good architect with a concern for Nature needs to have a balance between the client's requirement and local environment. The designs should be done considering the neighbouring culture, architecture and locally available materials."

Elaborating, Ar. Chaudhuri says, "Natural setting, minimal impact on environment, recycling of waste, and optimal use of organic food and renewable energy are the key points by which energy can be saved. While making an ecotel these are the factors that need to kept in mind."



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Floatel, the eco-friendly floating hotel over the Ganges in Kolkata, was the dream enterprise of Manab Pal and was inspired by a similar floating hotel on the River Saigon in Vietnam. The hotel makes use of compressors that inject oxygen into the water body surrounding the hotel, which in turn boosts marine life. The waste treatment plant filters and cleans waste before it is added to the city drainage system. Pal says, "It is because of our concern for Nature that the Ganges surrounding our hotel is blue in color. Everywhere else because of intense air pollution, the colour has changed to grey."

The Floatel is a rare, completely carbon-free hotel. "We emit no smoke that can cause air pollution. The gas that comes out is caught and cleaned through charcoal and water and the residue is used as manure, as a result of which we do not have to buy fertilizers and manure from outside," adds Pal.

Speaking of the awareness that ecologically sound hotels spread, Bambi Juneja, Principal Designer, Interior Ampersand, New Delhi, says, "These eco-friendly hotels work with NGOs, corporate groups and educational institutions to conduct environmental community awareness programs.

They celebrate special days of the calendar like 'World Environment Day, 'No Smoking Day and 'Save our Wildlife Day'. The youth of the country should be made aware through programs and hotels like these play a pivotal part in this endeavor."

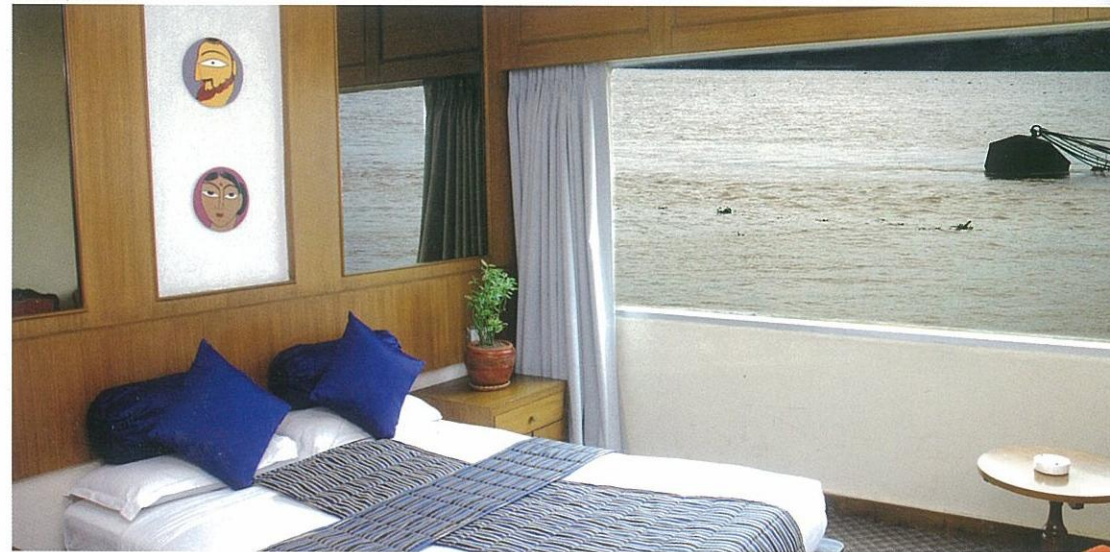
Speaking on ways to combat excess water consumption and its wastage in hotels, Param Kannampilly, Chairman and Managing Director, The Fern Group of Hotels, says, "Green hotels preserve and recycle water. All taps in the guest rooms, toilets, cafeteria and kitchen contain special devices that increase force and decrease water outflow, saving nearly 50 per cent water. The toilets use concealed cisterns, which consume only seven litres of water, compared to the ordinary cistern that flushes out almost 20 litres. Mini tanks (3.5 litres) are used for a quick flush. Recycled water is used for gardening and air-conditioning. Some 'Green' hotels capture rainwater into rain-harvesting wells which helps restore the water table."

"Bio-degradable kitchen, toilet and garden waste is decomposed in pits and used as manure. Non-bio-degradable waste is segregated and sent to recycling centres," adds Kannampilly.

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material requirement

In ecologically sustainable design, the right material adds value to the design. This is the 'wow' factor to the entire construction, feels Ar. C. R. Koli, Principal Architect, L & T, Ahmedabad. He believes that while investing in an eco-friendly hotel, it is mandatory to use materials that not only give that extra finesse to aesthetic design execution but reduce pollution to the maximum possible limit.

Designed by Ar. D M Upasani, Principal Architect, UDC, Mumbai, The Orchid Hotel, the first environmentally certified hotel in Asia, uses imported anti-allergy and odor-free carpets. There is minimal use of wood, paper and plastic. Newspapers and laundry are delivered in cane baskets, coat hangers are made of compressed particleboard, and pens and pencils are made of recycled cardboard, reprocessed plastic and scrap wood. Hand-crafted, rubber-soled reed slippers are available in the room, as are healthy potted plants instead of cut flowers.

Ar. Nisheil Shetty, Principal Architect, Nisheil Shetty Consultants, Mumbai, says, "Green hotels are constructed using environment-friendly materials like PPC cement (Portland Pozzalana cement), which last long, are energy saving (almost 40 per cent) and insulate against extremities of weather. Their windows are thermally sealed and double-glazed preventing heat and noise from entering the room. These measures lower air-conditioning or room heating costs and save electricity."

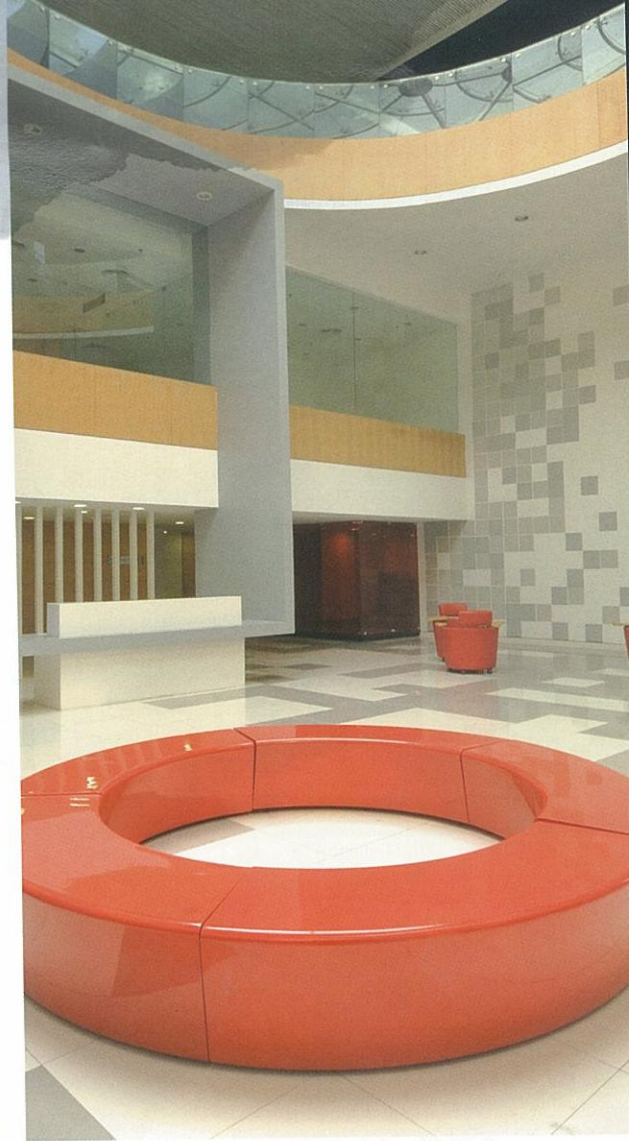
Speaking on measures that further reduce the consumption of electricity in hotels, Ar. Sujait Roy, Principal Architect, Jyoti Roy & Associates, Kolkata says, "Hotels with a concern for nature use low energy lamps (compact fluorescent lamps) for all lighting. For most hotels room lights and A/C are switched on only when we insert the key. The interactive TV in the rooms of some such hotels can be used to send/receive messages and clear bills, thereby saving paper/ phone costs. These kinds of measures not only save the expenses for the company but also reduce a substantial amount of pollution."



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global influence

Design in India is often inspired by that of the West. So also is the concern for the planet. Pirkko Fernandes, Owner, Olaulim Backyards, Goa, says, "In our hotel we try to offer our guests an ambience that is as close to nature as possible. We even make arrangements for interesting activities like kayaking, canoeing, boating, fishing, bird watching, cycling and village walks, which are amusing in an environment-friendly way."

Fernandes says that similar eco-friendly hotels in the West that were built in the lap of Nature influenced her, where instead of television, Nature seemed the perfect entertainer for all. She feels the more developed nations understand the problems besetting the Earth, better and are more innovative in their initiatives to create newer concepts in hospitality.

Ar. Sheila Sriprakash, Chief Architect and Founder, Shilpa Architects Planners and Designers Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, says, "The Eco-hotel is certainly not a fad in India. Energy consumption, waste management and site relevance are intrinsic elements of such

hotels, and people running them should ensure that these are done stringently. Merely using certain external materials would not solve the issue of preserving Nature."

An interesting point that Ar. Sriprakash raises is that eco-hotels situated at places of historical interest also take care of the ecological system of the place and preserve the site, while saving energy. "We need the eco-hotels to preserve our energy. It might be a new introduction in India, a concept taken from the West, but it certainly cannot be a passing phase. Ecologically friendly hotels are here to stay," she adds.

Ar. Probir Mitra, Principal Architect, P. Mitra, Kolkata says, "Whatever is good, finds appreciation the world over. In this respect the West was much ahead of us when it comes to pioneering concepts in eco-friendly hotels." In India some hotels are stringently following the norms of an eco-hotel and Mitra believes that soon, more hotels would be completely converted.



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what the future holds

The concept of eco-hotels is relatively new in India. It has immense popularity on the foreign shores but has not yet developed a strong foothold in India. However, architects are optimistic that eco-hotels are here to stay. Ar. Rajpal Kaushik, Chief Architect Planner, Noida, says, "Eco-friendly hotels have an excellent prospect in India. We have so much untapped resources that with a little bit of planning and effort we can generate alternative sources of energy. In the recent past quite a few eco-hotels have come up in India and with the response they have generated so far, it is clear that they are more than just a passing fad."

Ar. Jayprakash Agarwal, Principal Architect, Agarwal and Agarwal, Kolkata, says, "In this hectic urbanized world, everybody wants to escape into the lap of Nature. As life gets more and more competitive, people are getting inclined towards natural things. Eco-hotels not only save pollution and implement eco-friendly measures, they create an ambience where the guests feel they are as close to Nature as possible." This is the reason why its popularity will increase with time, he feels.

According to Zafar, Host, Annapara Home Stay, at Vythiri, Wayanad in Kerala, "The demand for eco-hotels will increase with the awareness of how these help to conserve natural resources. Pollution is significantly less if the measures

are properly implemented and an eco-hotel is run successfully."

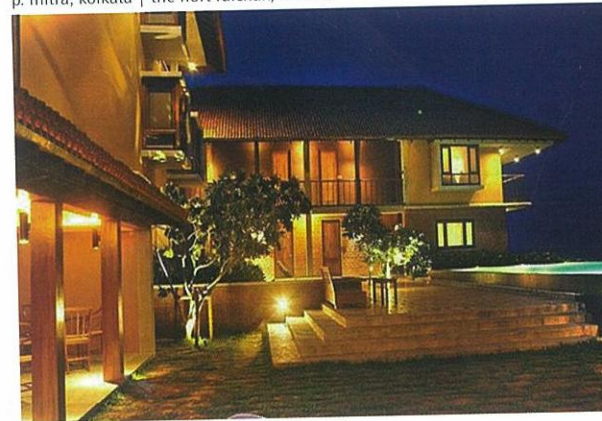
Manab Pal, Managing Director, Floatel, Kolkata, feels, "The Eco-friendly hotel is a concept that should be initiated first and will find acceptance everywhere. At Floatel we have generated an eco-cycle that has created a food chain around the Ganges where our hotel is located. It is in these respects we feel satisfied that we have done something worthwhile to save Mother Earth."

some misconceptions

Earlier there was a preconceived belief that running an eco-hotel is an expensive proposition and the implementation of eco-friendly measures involved a much higher initial investment. However, rubbishing these points Vishal Kamat, Director, Kamat Group, Mumbai, says, "The eco-friendly measures help in reducing the expenses. The whole purpose of running an ecotel is saving energy. So when we are saving that how can the expenses shoot up?"

In order to justify his stand, Kamat puts forth the data, "Take a 55.9% Repeat Clientele being patronized by over 3,500 Corporate Clients. In terms of monetary savings we have saved a

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whopping ₹33,28,435/- per year, which works out to ₹ 9119/- per day only for the use of PL Lamps," says Kamat.

Param Kannampilly who has been associated with ecotels for a long time, says, "Ecotels might have been a fad in India 15 years ago when The Orchid Hotel was started. Now it is not a mere luxurious attachment to a hotel but a necessity without which we cannot survive for long. If hospitality industry has to flourish, ecologically friendly hotels have to find greater acceptance in society." if