

The
Sustainable
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Top ID Winner 2024 – Dawson Design Associates

Each year the NEWH UK chapter honours the creative talents of chapter members who are aligned with their mission of supporting scholarship and education with the much-coveted Top ID award. This year's Top ID awards were sponsored by Boss Design and held in their newly refurbished Clerkenwell showroom. Words by Catherine McConkey

Top, left: the lobby at Newport Harbor Island Resort; right: Andrea Sheehan Principal, Art Director and Cameron Rankin, Interior Designer at Dawson Design Associates.

Hospitality Interiors is delighted to share exclusive interviews with each of the three 2024 Top ID winners. In this edition, design practice Dawson Design Associates discuss their winning project and sustainability in hotel design.

How did you approach the Hotel Ziggy project and what specific design decisions did you make in relation to sustainability?

Hotel Ziggy is the seventh hotel in the Unofficial Z Collection. This is a brand we created for our client, Pebblebrook Hotels. To understand Ziggy, you must meet the family. The Zs like to cause trouble. People go there to hang out and talk about the things impacting their lives. They are designed to be provocative and stimulating, intentionally bringing up topics that people wouldn't normally discuss in public. We work with artists of all kinds to capture these challenges and societal issues. The public spaces serve as an informal gallery.

Hotel Zetta, the first 'Z' designed in 2012, was located across from Facebook's original offices in San Francisco. It was designed

to shine a light on social media. The tech community loved it and appreciated that we made this a public conversation. They were already seeing the dark side of social media and became their hangout. Thus, we began to build this brand.

With the Zetta, we focused on sustainability. The upper back bar is made from old wine bottles and the chandeliers of over 2,000 used eyeglasses from optometrist offices. The whole art collection in the hotel is repurposed garbage. Every guestroom elevator foyer has a stylish photo mural taken at a landfill site. A throwaway retail mannequin was given to a local graffiti artist then made into a lamp. It's fun, cheeky and provocative.

Hotel Ziggy carries on this legacy, the hotel's narrative asks the question of 'Who really owns the music?' The musician or the corporation? In a community where luxury, glamour and celebrity reign, Hotel Ziggy's unruly energy challenges conformity and taps into the gritty West Hollywood music scene, located on Sunset Boulevard at the epicentre of the music scene of the 60s and 70s.

At Hotel Ziggy, the lobby serves as a music venue, with guests checking in at the bar. The walls are decoupage with copied



layers of lawsuits between studio and musicians. The lobby serves as a ‘pop up’ concert venue for up-and-coming musicians to be heard and, hopefully, discovered. Hotel Ziggy promotes the bands on social media and invites the studios to come and listen. Named in honour of Ziggy Stardust and David’s Bowie’s life of experimentation, we are experimenting with how much a hotel experience can help the musicians ‘rise above the noise’ to be heard.

As with the Zetta and all the Zs, sustainability is always the subtext. There is a large percentage of commissioned art made of garbage that would otherwise be tossed in a landfill. The lobby foyer at Ziggy is lit by a custom hanging art installation made from parts of speakers: repurposed woofers, horns and amplifiers.

What are the major trends and influences are you are seeing within hospitality design?

My clients are serious investors and want their hotels to stand out. They know that originality sells, and they have the financials to prove it. So, what does it mean to be original? Fashion, beauty and style alone are no longer enough, people want depth. An experience that enhances their life, not just a place to stay. Designers must be more aware and sophisticated; they need to take the time to understand their guest and the needs of the market to provide a great return for their clients. Branding and positioning are critical. As designers we see ourselves as commercial artists. AI is powerful, but not when it comes to original content. Hotel experiences need to be unique and dynamic because that is the real product that we sell.

If we give our guests a more hands-on experience, they engage and interact with the space. It’s an emotional connection and they come back wanting more. This applies to everything, from cool, urban hotels to high-end, relaxing resorts. We recently completed a coastal resort in Newport Rhode Island, where we hired fifty New England weavers to create over 200 original

“ *If we give our guests a more hands-on experience, they engage and interact with the space. It’s an emotional connection* ”

Clockwise from top, left: Hotel Ziggy’s lobby, the retail mannequin adorning the lobby at the Zetta; and Showfish at Newport Harbor Island Resort.

hand-loomed pieces. We didn’t put them under glass, instead encouraged our guests to touch them. QR codes positioned beside each piece direct guests to more information on the artist and the guild or village they belong to, encouraging further connectivity, curiosity and exploration.

Sustainability remains an ongoing trend and is becoming more urgent. In Newport, we focused on art representative of balance and nature. A driftwood whale in the lobby, and a hand-carved nautilus screen separate the lobby from the lounge. Behind the front desk is a hand-loomed installation of wool and sea garbage. Each piece asks the question, how do we live in harmony with nature?

The IHotel in San Francisco has a similar mission and ethos. It too emphasises a commitment to sustainable design and natural, honest materials. They go as far as to not allow plastics in the hotel operationally or in the design. From textiles to furniture to art, the emphasis is on organic materials and sustainability.

Why was it so important to go back to the destination roots and what impact has it has in the local community?

Travel is an opportunity for personal growth. Lifestyle guests are explorers and want to learn about what’s happening on a

community level, it makes the experience more memorable.

At a community level, engaging local artisans, craftsmen and even contractors give the local community a sense of ownership. It becomes 'their hotel', a place where their stories are told and appreciated. Hotels that capture the energy of their location and the stories of the community ground the whole experience making it relevant and real.

Right: The IHotel in San Francisco has a commitment to sustainable design and natural, honest materials

What inspires you, and what advice would you give to students studying interior design today?

Powerful art always inspires me and the story behind it, especially when tied to the human experience. When we can help struggling artists be discovered and seen, it helps us all. We design many of our own pieces and we are always looking for young designers who are good in Photoshop and graphic design. Take as many art classes as possible and learn how to sketch and mix paints.

For me, experimenting with new ideas and techniques is really satisfying. As a tool, AI is wonderful and I am looking forward to discovering just how much more we can create.

A life as a hotel designer is demanding and relentless. It is far easier if you have a busy and curious mind. If you like to explore and discover and if you are willing to dig in and commit to

Below: The lobby at Hotel Zetta



learning a craft and a profession that can lead to a life of constant stimulation and adventure; then you will love hotel design. There is nothing easy about hospitality, especially learning it. Working collaboratively in a shared office, makes life a lot more fun as you all get to learn from each other's mistakes and victories.

What does NEWH and winning TopID mean to you?

NEWH supports graduates trying to break into hospitality. 90% of the designers I have hired in the past 37 years have been new college graduates. That means 90% of my entire portfolio has been created by juniors being trained in their first and second years. I love their spark.

Mentoring, coaching and training hotel designers has filled my entire adult life. We have a training program we call DDA Grad School to help them learn faster and more effectively. Most of my peers have said I was crazy for hiring college graduates, yet I really think it has been the key to our success.

NEWH is a scholarship organisation, and our industry needs passionate new talent. I believe our industry has an obligation to train the next generations, so our clients are taken care of.

Winning Top ID in the UK was completely unexpected. As a working, hands-on designer, being acknowledged as Top ID in the UK where there are so many amazing international designers is a wonderful and humbling surprise. I am so proud of my young team and their dedication to have been given this award. We are actively in the process of moving back into London and hope to be much more involved in the UK Chapter to help with your fund raising and for helping grow the next generation.

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