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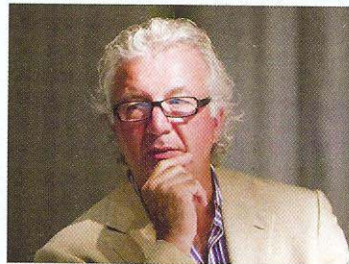
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Raising the bar for guest satisfaction

Where is hotel bath design headed? Clients frequently ask me that question in the very beginning stages of a hotel's interior design. Why? Well, it's because the baths and the beds are the most important aspects of the hotel experience that the guest remembers, good or bad, and what they report to their friends, relatives and acquaintances.

As a designer of hotels, I am very critical of every place I stay, and I travel a lot. As soon as I



Anthony J. DiGiuseppe
Principal
DiGiuseppe Architect

enter a guestroom, my eyes examine all the elements that I consider important in room design and

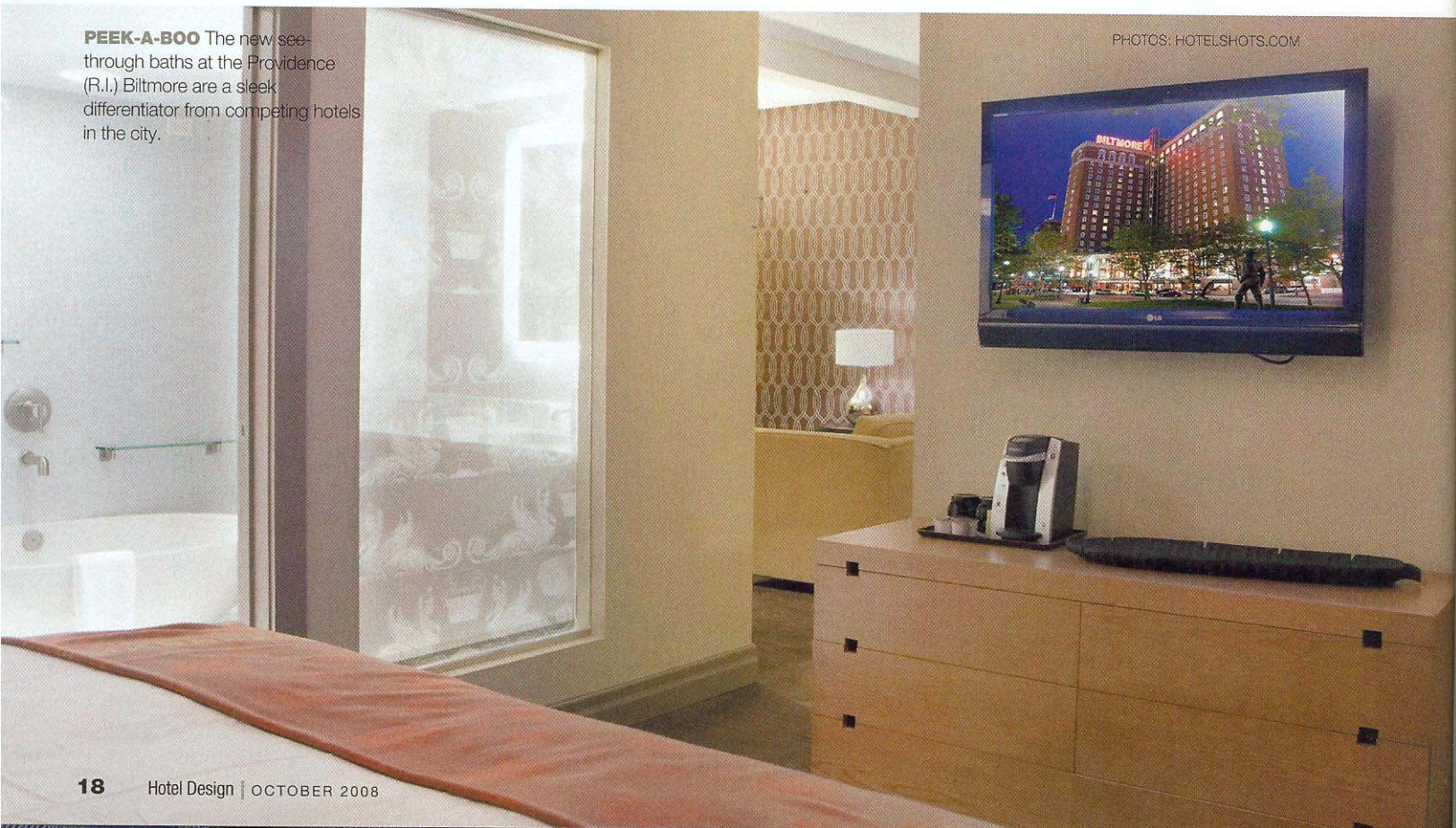
I perform a mental checklist, especially when it comes to the bath. Is the lighting good? Do I have enough space to place my toiletries? How is the quality of the towels, and do I have enough? What are the bath products, and can I read the packaging labels? (The eyes are not what they used to be, as is the case for most of my fellow baby boomers.)

Recently I was asked by one of my clients, Grand Heritage Hotels International, to rethink the guestroom experience at the Providence (R.I.) Biltmore Hotel.

This 1910 historic hotel is the grande dame of Providence, a city that recently has experienced a resurgence in visitors and interest; no longer is the city just a gas stop on the way to Boston.

About two years earlier we had renovated 104 guestrooms at this property, and, as a result, the Biltmore has captured 70 percent of the market share of hotel occupancy. However, recently the market has changed: A Westin opened featuring a modern, urban design; the old Masonic temple was converted into a hip Renais-

PEEK-A-BOO The new see-through baths at the Providence (R.I.) Biltmore are a sleek differentiator from competing hotels in the city.



PHOTOS: HOTELSHOTS.COM

bath trends

sance Hotel; and a new W will break ground next year. Modern, hip and chic hotel design has come to Providence.

The ownership asked me to create a design that would feature amenities that the other properties did not and ones that would appeal to a younger market. As a test, they took a set of six rooms on the top floors of the hotel and reworked them into five suites. We were given a tight budget of \$21,000 per room, including all materials and operating supplies and equipment. We had a four-month design window and a 10-week construction schedule to complete the project. We provided the interior design and procurement services for a fixed fee.

The standard Biltmore baths were small: no vanity space, only 5-foot tub/shower combos and mirrors with wall sconces above. We decided to break the mold and expand the bath into the guestroom space, which had never been done before. At the same time, we would add vision panels of glass to extend the bath experience into the bedroom areas of the rooms, which we had successfully incorporated at another project, the Emerson Resort and Spa, located in Mt. Tremper, N.Y.

The trend in bath design, as we saw it, was large vanity surfaces with single sinks, mirrors with built-in lighting all around the edges, vanities with rolled-towel storage, separate water closet rooms, separate glass-enclosed showers and free-standing soaking tubs with remote-controlled chromatherapy lighting that lit a feature wall of iridescent Italian tiles. We looked for the most

innovative, new and cost-effective solutions we could find, which included a new product for shower retrofits by Smart Showers that featured a great showerhead, six body sprays and a foot washer in a stainless steel surface-mounted panel.

We decided to keep the tile simple, inexpensive and white, and add the bang where the guest appreciated it most: great lighting and mirrors, 6- to 7-foot marble-topped vanities, a four-fixture bath, unexpected chromatherapy lights, great showerheads with body sprays and a separate water closet.

The design called for the glass vision panel to allow viewing only of the vanity and soaking tub areas from the room. If more privacy is desired by the guest, a roller shade made of a solarveil material is employed. Imprinted on the shade is the hotel's iconic face-to-face griffins, which were part of the hotel lobby's original decorative plaster work.

This was the *pièce de résistance* of the project that the general manager, Michael Allen, formerly of The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co., liked the most. The rooms followed through with a modern tone-on-tone design that has an urban, residential feel.

We designated these rooms the Spa Suites, each of which comprises about 500 square feet, and all of which have separate living areas, bedrooms and large baths.

Anthony J. DiGuiseppe is principal of DiGuiseppe Architect, with offices in New York, Boca Raton, Fla., and Accord, N.Y. He can be reached at diarchit@msn.com.



BATHING BEAUTY A free-standing soaking tub dominates the expansive bathroom. (Above) The shower fixture features six body sprays and a foot washer.

