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Hotels get rid of closets, add other storage solutions

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A look at creative hotel guestroom storage spaces Hotels by InterContinental Hotels Group will have luggage benches with room to store belongings

AC Hotels, a brand of Marriott International, are moving towards open closets as a way to maximize space in smaller rooms. (Photo: Marriott International)



A look at creative hotel guestroom storage spaces

The traditional hotel closet and dresser drawer are becoming obsolete. Instead, hotels are finding creative ways for guests to store their belongings.

Many guest rooms are getting smaller, especially as hotels introduce new brands that appeal more to younger travelers who don't take trips with large luggage. Plus more travelers are spending time in lobbies or beyond the hotel boundaries vs. nesting in their rooms.

Closet doors and dressers are disappearing, nooks are becoming more fashionable and the bed is serving a dual purpose with space underneath for bags.

Designers spend hours trying to understand consumer behavior when it comes to unpacking. Take out the equation of the high-end long-term traveler who will essentially live in the suite and you will get this: a middle-class worker trying to get the room to work for him or her.

Sleep Inn, part of the Choice Hotels family, added a luggage bench, reduced the number of drawers, and designed a partially open closet. The partially open closet allows guests to see clothes hanging, but covers up the clutter of the ironing board.

“Many guests aren’t using drawers, but don’t want the ‘economy feel’ of exposed hooks on the wall or a stark hanging bar. But, they also don’t want to inadvertently leave anything behind,” says Anne Smith, vice president of brand management and design for Choice Hotels. “These changes reflect the way guests use the space today.”

Richard Born, co-creator of the Pod Hotels, which have very small rooms, says designers have placed shelves and drawers underneath beds as well as hooks around the room to maximize space.

“You need to engineer everything that goes into a room,” he says.

Marriott International’s designers spend hours debating how best to utilize space, especially in new brands such as AC and Moxy that have smaller rooms.

Aliya Kahn, a designer for Marriott, says designers pay close attention to the types and sizes of bags that people are traveling with. They also study how guests move around the room.

For instance, they try to provide places for guests to leave their belongings, ideally near the bathroom, so that they are not throwing their clothing on a chair across the room.

“The thought here is how do we make it easy? How do we make it seamless? How do we make it intuitive?” she says.

Moxy hotel rooms tend to be about 185-square feet so Kahn had to get creative.

“If you’re going to stuff it with a closet, you now have no place to move,” she says.

So she and her designers created an open storage system. They included a few stylish wooden handles on a peg wall, and a shelf to keep the roller bag, which is what most people use for traveling.

The new Moxy Times Square in New York has a cubby for the suitcase and drawers for shoes. Kahn is constantly keeping tabs on the luggage sizes allowed by airlines.

Designers have also made room for suitcases to fit under the bed—not to be stuffed into but to fit in seamlessly.

“You don’t want it to look like a dorm room,” she says.

Mostly, the hotel doesn't want its guests to spend too much time on figuring out where to place belongings.

"People want to go out and experience the city," she says. "No one wants to spend time unpacking."

Kristen Conry, vice president of product and brand development for Hyatt Hotels, says much thought has gone into the layout of rooms.

Hyatt is also experimenting with the open closet. Designers have created a grooming and prep zone. They got rid of traditional drawers.

"There's a hesitancy to use storage in a room because things are not visible," she says.

Designers at the new Tru by Hilton brand have included space underneath the bed for roller bags, a metal bench above the air conditioner to make non-useable space useable, a luggage bench in the closet with a mini-fridge underneath, an art piece with hooks that also serves as a hanging space for garment bags, and a storage ledge underneath the bathroom mirror.

Research has shown that many guests do not unpack their suitcases because they typically don't stay longer than two days, says Alexandra Jaritz, senior vice president and global head of Tru by Hilton.

"Given the expanded offering of our lobby and our smaller room size, we were laser-focused on making the guest room as functional, efficient and comfortable as possible," Jaritz says.

Best Western Hotels and Resorts has a new brand, Vib, that better utilizes space underneath beds. Either the beds have extra room to fit a suitcase or they have drawers. Designers are also streamlining closets by using creative hanging mechanisms and hooks or bars.

"As developers look to keep building costs down, room sizes are shrinking in some markets," says Ron Pohl, senior vice president and chief operating officer at Best Western. "That said, guests are more accepting of smaller guest rooms today, in certain markets. Also, guests prefer open uncluttered spaces."

InterContinental Hotels Group's designers have also re-imagined the rooms for their new brands.

David Breeding, vice president of architecture and design for IHG Americas, says that when designed its newest brand, avid hotels, the company did extensive consumer testing to figure out how people move about the room.

When it comes to storage, inside the entryway is an open design that allows for quick unpacking and storage. The design contains a door-less, open closet, a designated area for an ironing board and open shelving that allows for an optional room safe and refrigerator.

“This is to minimize clutter and maximize space and promotes a clean, minimalist area that is functional and easy to access,” he says.

There is also a “working wall,” a central mounted beam along the back wall that connects elements including a full-length mirror, a vertical lamp, a mounted TV screen, hooks for hanging items, and plugs with USB ports.

The desk has also been redesigned as a sturdy ledge mounted against the wall with open space beneath for additional storage.

Lisa Checchio, senior vice president of brand for Wyndham Hotel Group, says the company is also getting rid of dressers and designing open closets and luggage racks to conform with consumer behavior.

“We believe that smaller doesn’t have to compromise on quality or guest experiences,” she says.