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How designers are making the most of smaller room sizes

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Moxy New Orleans

Marriott International's **Moxy** and Hilton Worldwide's **Tru** are two brands with one thing in common: small guestrooms. It is a movement that is not losing steam.

The appeal is understandable, especially in urban markets. In cities, land cost in relation to room rate is quite high, said Michael Suomi, principal and interior director of design at **Stonehill & Taylor**. But by shrinking a room's square footage by 30 percent to 50 percent, a hotel can add 30 percent to 50 percent more rooms to the overall count, and make 30 percent to 50 percent more each night. "The math works out well for big cities," he said.

The TV Effect

What element has made smaller hotel rooms possible? "Flat-screen TVs have propelled the design of smaller guestrooms forward because you no longer need three or even two feet of space to have a TV on a dresser," Suomi said. "That's allowed the room to shrink a lot."

Thinner TVs also have an effect on room count. "Most people don't realize it, but when you have so many rooms in a hotel, it's a huge determining factor. So thin TVs are very helpful," said Jessica Lotner, senior interior designer at **The McBride Company**.



Flat-screen TVs at the Moxy Milan

save guestroom space

But thin TVs also present their own challenges. For example, what angle is best? How can wires be hidden? How should the bed be positioned for optimum viewing? “The size of the TV affects the whole layout of a room,” Lotner said, noting that some operators don’t want TVs to be immediately visible in a room and keep them hidden in casegoods or behind artwork. “There are some very interesting ways to deal with the TV at this point.”

What to Keep

When creating a smaller guestroom, David Shove-Brown, a partner at [Studio3877](#), said a designer’s instinct is to remove furniture—but this can backfire in the long run. For example, he said, a designer may want to remove desks, tables and luggage storage, but travelers—especially business travelers—often look for those features in a room. To that end, Shove-Brown said designers need to look at how each element of the room is used, and by whom.

“The biggest challenge is the consolidation of guest experiences into fewer pieces of furniture,” said Suomi, who is working on both Moxy and Pod hotels. At the upcoming Pod Hotel in Washington, D.C., the guestroom’s desk doubles as a nightstand for the bed, and the closet has been replaced by a wall rack for hanging clothes. Luggage can be stored under the elevated bed or on shelves that are high enough for guests to walk beneath.

Customizing furniture for smaller rooms becomes important, Shove-Brown said. While getting millwork or casegoods at a closeout sale may sound appealing, he quipped, these fixtures might not be suitable for a reduced footprint. A customized piece that works particularly well for the room’s unique footprint, he said, can save money in the long run if guests like the room and recommend the hotel to others.

Notably, many of the small-room hotels are new-builds, Shove-Brown said. This makes sense: When renovating a hotel, he explained, the cost of knocking down walls, working around electrical or plumbing systems and compressing the square footage can become overwhelming. “It becomes cost prohibitive,” he said. “You’d never get your money back in this lifetime.”



Tru by Hilton

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