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I'm sure we can all think of a product where the designers clearly forgot (or ignored) the primary needs of the user. The focus on form (the look and feel of the thing) has completely eclipsed the function (the usability of it). In my ruminations on this matter I am indebted to proto-modernist architect Louis Sullivan, who stated in 1896 that "form ever follows function". In other words, for any given design it's got to actually work, and then let's worry about how it looks.

And so it is in some sectors of the accommodation industry. The hotel design trend these days seems to favour groovy and edgy architectural and fit-out signatures, clearly aimed at the groovy and edgy Instagram generation. We might call them Gen I, with only a touch of irony.

When done right with a bit of class both new and renovated hotels can be very special places to spend a night or two. In the spirit of embracing these trends the Managing Director and I recently decided to give one such property a test run. Sadly, to our expectations, this relatively new hotel on the Brisbane CBD fringe misses the mark, and by some distance.

We arrive by car and first impressions suggest a relatively professional if casual process. Valet parking is recommended at \$75 a day because self-parking will be more expensive. Ok, it's been a long day, so we choose not to debate this apparent paradox. Valet it is.

The entry and reception lobby has a kind of industrial minimalist feel combined with jarring wall art we suspect is intended to suggest graffiti. Banksy it ain't! The check-in staff are friendly but don't understand that Applepay will generate a different card reference number on receipts to the actual physical card we booked with. We try to explain it's the same card and hit a stone wall with apparently no wriggle room to accommodate such a scenario. After a spirited debate and a supervisor intervention, we proceed. To be fair we didn't know about the Applepay card ID thing either, so lesson learned.

The property is serviced by two banks of lifts with limited signage to direct the hapless guest. A less than thrilling ride to nowhere ensues until we work out where we are and finally alight on our floor. I guess if you are a 70's nightclub aficionado the décor might work, but to our tastes attempts at creating a vibe with dark corridor colours ends up feeling like a step back in time to dark and dodgy recesses, sticky carpet and the occasional mirror ball. I exaggerate for effect, but you get the picture.

We opted for a corner room with views of the river and across to the South Bank precinct. The room fit-out is a study in form over function, and to our taste an uncoordinated mess of disparate design queues, textures and colours. It suggests the room decorators stayed in a lot of different hotels, took what they liked from each, and jammed them all into one space with scant regard for overall design integrity. The fact that no one had thought to provide two chairs and a small table says it all.

All lighting and electrical functions are accessed by latest tech touch pads which would be fine if you could find them in the dark. Likewise, the TV which allows many streaming and connectivity options but manages to make accessing an actual TV channel near impossible.

The coffee mugs (we think) positioned next to the coffee machine look very cool but have a bit of a problem. They are metal and have no handle. By the time you can actually pick up your coffee without sustaining third degree burns, it's gone cold. Maybe they were meant for cold drinks only but who knows? No other hot beverage receptacles of any consequence were evident.

We decided that the no doubt groovy, but sort of unliveable room must surely be an aberration and decided to go exploring. The deck bar and pool area were described as very enticing. Sadly, the pool is indoors and bar outdoors but adjacent. If you like your beverages provided by largely untrained staff and served with a strong whiff of chlorine this might be just your spot. Otherwise, maybe not!

Throughout the property, from bars to lobby, repetitive unimaginative doof music assaults the ears. Not the sort of jazz-tinged happy vibe that could be achieved if the venue took the time to curate a more nuanced soundtrack. Instead, multiple DJ's manage to do the impossible and clear the hotel bars by 8pm on a Friday night.

We give up and retire for the evening. Loud air-conditioning resembling the rumbling of a coming thunderstorm was only distracted by the constant on and off of the fridge motor and the traffic noise below. If the builder paid for double glazing I'd be demanding a refund. On a positive note a request for pillows not filled with rocks was hastily addressed, the bed was comfortable enough and the shower nice and hot. Maybe that's all we can expect after the budget gets blown on stuff that doesn't work.

At corner room rates north of \$500 a night, the hotel in question simply didn't do it for us. It tries too hard and would have benefited from a more subtle and stylish approach, better trained staff and a quieter room. What I'm sure the designers intended as the last word in cool has turned out tacky, soulless and gauche. If the place had been full of beautiful people taking selfies all weekend, I'd be inclined to conclude that I'm out of touch. It wasn't.

Maybe we're just too old to match the target audience. Maybe not.

I'll leave you with a short quote from a genius:

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." Leonardo da Vinci 1452 - 1519

An aside... The reference to beautiful people above got me thinking about the phrase. Readers of my vintage will recall an Australian Crawl song of that title. I decided to revisit the lyrics. Sufficient to say other than the cost of a good push bike, nothing much has changed. I guess that's what happens when you can't find the light switch and the décor is most definitely a sonic boom. Here's a sample:

*I said beautiful people
They ride two-hundred-dollar pushbikes in the park
Beautiful people
They won't admit it
But they make love in the dark
Beautiful people
Snap frozen potted palms
In the corner of the living room
Beautiful people
The art-decor sonic boom*

James Reyne and Mark Hudson 1979 EMI

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