



→ The wooden flooring matches the décor at Chime Bar in Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center.

THE WRITING ON THE FLOOR

From wood to tile to marble, the right flooring selection can set the precise tone for a hotel's holistic design theme

BY PRADEEP SUVARNA

It is quite ironical that flooring is often the largest continuous visible surface in a hotel, especially at its entrance. And yet, till a few years ago, not much attention was paid to it from the aesthetics perspective. However, that has changed and now, hotels are using it as an opportunity to play a key role in the holistic design theme.

In fact, India has a history for some fantastic floor design; one just needs take look at the heritage hotels to see some stunning examples of in-

terwoven floors with multiple stone colours. Inspired by this and the effect it has on guests who love taking and sharing photos on social media platforms, hotels are using flooring as an essential design element.

When it comes to flooring, hotels present a unique set of requirements; these should have high-performance features and appealing designs to create the perfect balance of quaintness and commercial durability. In the past, that meant less-appealing commercial flooring alternatives, but

with breakthroughs in manufacturing and maintenance technology, now better options are available.

Take the case of The Country Inn & Suites in Gurugram. Amit Krishn Gulati of Incubis Consultants, a multi-disciplinary architecture and design firm that worked on the hotel, used diamond polished Grey Wave marble in the reception area with a simple geometric inlay in Thassos white marble. This combination accentuates the contemporary palette and gives a heightened sense of arrival,

while making the spaces feel connected and open.

"Specially commissioned hand-woven carpets are used in the guest room corridors to keep the noise from trolley bags to a minimum while adding touches of brightness within a tasteful and muted scheme. The rooms have a combination of marble, engineered hardwoods and bespoke place rugs to provide a sense of luxury and all encompassing warmth," he added.

Novotel Goa Dona Sylvia Resort is a Mediterranean-styled resort that features clay tiled roof and massive symmetrical tiles in public areas. Acknowledging that the texture of the flooring, pattern and design leave a lasting impression on the guests visiting the property, Vishal Khosla, GM, Novotel Goa Dona Sylvia Resort said that these tiles were chosen as it complements the Mediterranean-styled elements in the lobby. "Portuguese Calçada or mosaic is a specific



➔ Amit Krishn Gulati, Incubis Consultants.

pavement, used mostly for finishing the walkways and sidewalks, alleys, squares and other places in Portugal. Most common colours used are black and white. The hotel features fish bone patterned black and white mosaic floor in the lobby and at the activity centre," he elaborated.

The Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway has used Sofia Beige marble in its public

area, and Omani marble in its guest rooms. If maintained well, this will retain its glaze giving a crisp and polished look. Le Meridien, Kochi, on the hand, has invested substantially on granites of exquisite quality. "As far as the hotel's façade is concerned, we have opted for Kota stone flooring and have also used a wide variety of carpets as it provides warmth and opulence," said Tejus Jose, general manager of Le Meridien Kochi.

His peer, Vijayan Gangadharan, general manager of Four Points by Sheraton Visakhapatnam added that flooring could also be used to enhance the size and the brightness of a room. Hence, light-coloured carpet in the hotel's guest rooms exudes a rich look, while white marble at the room's entrance make room look bigger.

COST ANALYSIS

A hotel is a complex environment with a wide variety of flooring



➔ The asymmetrical flooring design at Bene restaurant at Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway.



➔ Amit Khanna, principal design, AKDA.



➔ Vijayan Gangadharan, GM, Four Points by Sheraton Visakhapatnam.

needs and, hence, satisfying every aspect of its flooring requirements is not an easy task. While F&B areas like kitchens and restaurants present unique challenges in terms of hygiene and maintenance, areas that witness heavy footfall, like the banquets or lobbies are likely to see faster wear and tear.

Jose gave the example of Le Meridien Kochi, which is a coastal state and experiences heavy rainfall. "Wooden flooring has been installed in many guest rooms. Over the months, it develops noticeable amount of spills and scuffs that can comprise the flooring's look compromised. Soaked-in moisture also causes buckling and requires series of repairs. To avoid such problems, we apply multiple coats of oil-based sealers or water-based mixtures," he said.

Gulati pointed out that floors are exposed to the maximum wear, especially in India where abrasive dust, dirt and moisture enter properties with ease and accelerates damage.



➔ Tejus Jose, GM, Le Meridien Kochi.

"Moreover, Indian food also causes stains easily, especially on marbles and untreated carpets. It is challenging for hotel projects to source materials with adequate strength and hardness, stain-resistant characteristics without compromising the superior aesthetic values and controlled maintenance costs," he noted.

Amit Khanna, principal architect, AKDA, therefore, cautioned that flooring is often a crucial decision, and not an afterthought, not only because it is a huge cost, but also because re-laying the floor can be a hugely disruptive process. It needs to be sturdy, remain fresh longer and not be too heavy on maintenance.

AN EFFICIENT FLOORING STRATEGY

While various hospitality trends may come and go, there is no denying that every hotel project demands firm flooring that balances functionality and aesthetics. While often regarded as a functional feature, hospitality designers and project heads are realising that it presents them a chance to accentuate their image, while also keeping their long-term cost in check.

Ather Raza, EAM, rooms, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center said that if not maintained well, hotel flooring can present a lot of challenges for the operator. "If not looked into at the correct time, the hotel is sure to have to deal with high replacements cost, wear and tear and / or accidental hazards, which are also an additional liability. These would inevitably lead to low guest satisfaction," he opined.



➔ Vishal Khosla, GM, Novotel Goa Dona Sylvia Resort.

Khanna believed that a well-planned flooring layout can be a boon from an operations perspective. "A well-laid, medium glossy marble at the reception provides a luxury ambience; hardy double charged fully vitrified tiles in the service areas can take a lot of abuse over a longer time period; noise-absorbing carpet tiles in the guest room corridors can help guests at business hotels get their well-deserved rest; granite flooring in open areas such as porches, swimming pool decks can be a risk-free, non-slippery and maintenance free option for the exteriors; etc.," he elaborated.

Gangadharan suggested putting in place a well charted, planned strategy taking into consideration the annum life span of the flooring. For e.g. the carpet must be shampooed once in a month to refresh the feel and look of it. Adding to this, Rishi Kumar, director of operations, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway said, "Sandstones should not be used in open areas and bathrooms. Wooden flooring may be used; however, in heavy traffic areas it needs to be avoided. Proper waterproofing should be done specially in guest rooms where there are bathtubs."

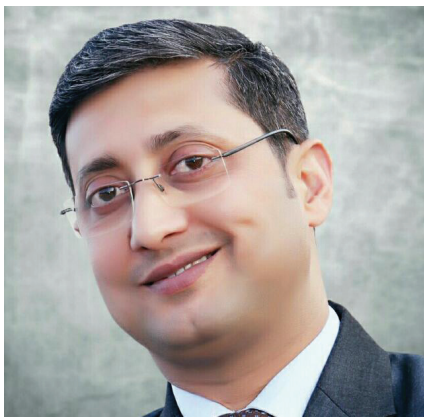
Khosla, too, agreed with the idea of having a flooring strategy. "Owing to the changing climatic conditions, footfall and aesthetics, a strategic plan is put in place by our internal team. This efficient flooring strategy includes regular checking, operation friendly techniques and results in an easy maintenance from an op-



➡ Rishi Kumar, director of operations, Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway.



➡ Ather Raza, EAM, Rooms, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center.



➡ Anirban Sarkar, GM, Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, Gurugram.

erational and cost-management perspective as well," he said.

Jose recommended that hotel designers should work closely with the operational team while designing the décor and flooring. While there are many options available for hotel flooring, making the right choice will depend on the use of each particular space. "Measuring the foot traffic and

anticipated wear and tear are vital considerations in making that choice. Innovations are constantly occurring, creating improvements in all aspects of flooring manufacturing and design. Availability of the design and low-cost maintenance, a maintained attic stock during the pre-openings is vital to ensure continuity and reduce capex expenditure," he stated.

BECAUSE CARING IS SAVING

Tough as flooring may be, whether it is marble, granite, tile or wood, it too needs some care and maintenance. Gulati noted that the biggest culprits that cause maximum damage to flooring are abrasive dust, grime and grease brought in with shoes and trolley bag wheels, moisture, smoldering cigarette butts and food stains. "The effect of these can be mitigated by having more effective dust control measures in the immediate surroundings of hotels, high quality entrance matting solutions, high performance moisture barriers, under-floor protective layers as well as top coat protective sealants, etc.," he suggested.

Khanna noted that public spaces are susceptible to damage by dragging poor quality luggage and movement of furniture. "In restaurants, stains build up over time and can need rigorous deep cleaning occasionally. Rooms are often overlooked as being prone to heavy damage, but in the case of carpet flooring, these can be damaged by dampness or careless use of flammable materials," he said.

Kumar believed that the four big culprits are lack of regular maintenance, dragging of equipment and furniture, excessive exposure of wet mops and use of abrasive chemicals. He said, "To avoid such issues we need to ensure that we understand the flooring and use only the recommended products for maintenance. The team should be trained well to look after the area, along with proper equipment suitable to flooring."

But therein lies another challenge. According to Anirban Sarkar, general manager, Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, Gurugram, a key aspect

CHOOSING RIGHT

Whether it is a guest room or public area, flooring makes a strong style statement from a design perspective. Here are some aspects that hospitality companies keep in mind while investing in flooring:

- Combination of style and functionality
- Pricing
- Durability and ROI
- Maintenance costs
- Stock availability
- Sustainability
- What is the competition using
- Health and safety
- Traffic of the area where flooring will be used
- Type of clientele
- Climate in the region.

that is often ignored is how the staff are trained to do the same and also how the behaviour of guests can be influenced so that the risk of damage done by the guests are mitigated. "For example, a busy bar with a wooden flooring is expected have spillage and at time cigarette butts falling on it but by having the right placements of tables, having the right layout and by having a set of observant and alert service professional can definitely ensure that the chances of damage is reduced," he pointed out. This is why Jose suggested training on chemical usage, daily cleaning, ensuring routinely preventive maintenance, following deep cleaning cycles in a timely fashion, laying of the tiles, selection of underlays are a few ways to avoid the untimely damages.

Most hotels do adhere to proper cleaning schedules for different areas depending upon the cleaning needs and kind of traffic in a particular area. Complying to daily, weekly and monthly cleaning schedules will definitely help them in increasing the longevity of the flooring.

Flooring in hotels has evolved from carpets to tiles to marble to granite and indigenous materials. Properties are moving away from a cookie-cutter approach to have more individualistic one where flooring can steal the attention, not just for a few years, but several –all with just a little thoughtful maintenance thrown in. **H**