

Adapting to the New Face of Travel with Hybrid Hotels

By Bruce Wright, Vice President & Principal, SB Architects

With greater flexibility in working remotely, people are creating their own work-life balance and extending vacations to blend work, exploration, and leisure. Slower travel, opportunities for nature and cultural immersion, and experiences built around hobbies and interests are in high demand. How can designers leverage hybrid hotel concepts to resonate with today's travelers and hotel branded residence buyers?



Hybrid hotels, which we are defining as multi-functional hotel concepts that blend the hotel experience with unique offerings – from branded residences to coworking spaces and immersive experiential offerings – are challenging traditional hospitality norms to address the needs and desires of today's travelers and buyers.

Branded residences – luxury residential properties attached to a brand, either within or adjacent to a hotel or as a standalone development, are an early iteration of hybrid hospitality, [dating back to the 1920s](#). Combining the service and amenities of a trusted hotel brand with high-end residential living, branded residences give buyers a sense that the ethos of a particular brand aligns with their lifestyle and interests. Owners see purchasing a home within a branded property as an investment that captures a vision of how they live, or desire to live, their life.

While the idea behind hybrid hotels has been around for a long time with branded residences, the term has more recently gained traction and relevancy as perspectives and behaviors changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As we adjust to a new normal and many of these changes remain relevant, it is important for hotel owners and

operators to respond agilely to the trend. With greater flexibility in working remotely, many of us can travel at one's convenience and for longer periods of time, profoundly blending travel with our personal lives. People are finding a work-life balance in extending their vacations and bringing their families with them, there is a heightened interest in immersing into the local community and environs, and a desire for slower travel providing one-of-a-kind experiences tailored to the interests and lifestyle of the area.



Evolving Design for Remote Office Setups

There has been an overwhelming consensus that people are not ready to give up on the newfound perks of working remotely, at least not entirely, and this has pushed hotels and branded residences to reimagine and expand their offerings towards a hybrid work and leisure – bleisure – model. Many of us can now attend meetings over video and still get just as much from the interaction without having to hop on a plane or go into the office on an everyday basis. There are situations when being in person are very important, but most of the time we can utilize all kinds of platforms – Teams, Zoom, Webex – to get that work done remotely.

This ability to easily ‘Work from Home’ has allowed us greater flexibility in working remotely while we travel, whether for business or leisure. [Airbnb's May 2021 Report on Travel and Living survey](#) revealed a 10% increase in long-term stays of 28 days or longer from 2019 to 2021. Now when we travel, we do not have to worry so much about getting from point A to point B so quickly to get back into the office; we can use our time in a way that is more meaningful and purposeful and focus on making and strengthening connections with others.

We anticipate more flex spaces and semi-private or private rooms that can be made into an office, a yoga studio, a guestroom, or whatever desired space fits the owners’ lifestyle at the time. In our forthcoming branded residential projects – which for many represent a second or even third home in a desired location – most prospective buyers are asking about adding office space. They want a place where they can enjoy time with their friends and family and the surroundings of the environment as well as a place where they can easily break away to focus on work.



At [Barbuda Ocean Club](#), Discovery Land, we designed seven model home types – including waterfront cottages, beachfront homesites, and custom beach estates all ranging from 1,900 to 7,500 square feet – where clients can choose which model they like and then work with us to customize it in various ways to fit their needs and desires. Each residence is designed to connect buyers with their family and the incredible natural setting, blending indoor and outdoor spaces to capture the island’s distinctive tropical breezes and spectacular views. Buyers are accustomed to working remotely all over the world, and this development will be another extension of that when they are there four weeks out of the year, or however long they choose. For a recent buyer, we customized the unit with a second-floor office that prioritized views and a connection to the outside, which could easily be converted into a home gym setup with a treadmill, smart cycle, and stationary trainer.

With the onset of remote work, we are also seeing greater value in our in-person interactions, because now when we choose to come together it is in a more intentional way. This produces a greater need for hotels to create corporate level meeting space where people who are meeting or living remotely can still have a communal office experience and work to build a connection while getting work done. In addition to the inevitable large group meetings and conventions, smaller footprint meetings will help facilitate more interpersonal connections for a remote workforce who may not go to the office regularly or reside in cities or countries away from their colleagues.

At [Carmel Valley Ranch](#), a resort on California’s coast, the landscape provides a relaxing and inspiring environment to enjoy during work or leisure time, with flexible and diverse indoor and outdoor spaces designed for both productivity and play. This destination is equally suited for bringing colleagues together around team

building activities and attracting business travelers who want to bring their families along for some outdoor exploration and educational experiences.

Inspired by the valley's natural textures and colors, reimagined meeting and event spaces bring the outdoors in, creating an inviting backdrop for personalized gatherings. Featuring 18 holes of world-class golf and access to miles of hiking trails, organic gardens, and three pools – one for fitness, one for adults, and another for the whole family – the resort offers curated group activities designed to bring work teams together and engage families traveling with kids. With experiential programming and 500 acres of breakout space, the resort appeals to those working remotely who also want to venture outside their comfort zone and learn something new, through activities as varied as archery, falconry, artisan workshops, and culinary programs.

Last summer, Hyatt launched a “Work from Hyatt” program to cater to those who want to enjoy the resort's amenities and services while working remotely, beyond just a weekend escape. With strong interest from the initial launch, Hyatt expanded its extended stay package to nearly 90 hotels across North America and the Caribbean, helping travelers balance work-life and school-life from the comfort of a resort where the hotel perks are curated just for that property. The program at Carmel Valley Ranch includes personalized activities and educational experiences for children, in addition to creative food experiences such as chef-assembled picnics on the lawn.

The 181 spacious hotel suites at Carmel Valley Ranch each feature a private deck, separate living room, complimentary Wi-Fi, flat-screen television, smart-room technology, and bath amenities made with fresh-pressed lavender harvested right on property. Families can take advantage of a selection of suites that can be configured to create two-bedroom suites with kitchens, perfect for booking longer stays and feeling at-home in the idyllic surroundings.

For many travelers considering “workations”, renting larger accommodations provides the opportunity to enjoy meaningful connections and experiences without compromising space, comfort, or amenities. At [Pendry Residences Park City](#), where we transformed the traditional alpine lodge into a modern, life-enriching base to call home, whole owned residences can be leveraged as short-term rentals for those who want a level of comfort and spaciousness beyond the hotel experience. Programmatically, the project consists of 150 branded condominiums that are whole ownership, and owners have the option to rent them out under the Pendry rental program. A two-bedroom condo, or even a four-bedroom condo depending on how large a family may be and the number of guests, delivers an experience more akin to a mini residence, with a kitchen, ample storage space for ski gear, and access to a spa and restaurant. Places that operate like a hotel but offer condos as hotel rooms will be able to tap into the celebration travel trend, as families and small groups seek to make up for the missed graduations, birthdays, and anniversaries of 2020.

We designed [The Villa](#) at The Estate Yountville, Napa Valley's 22-acre village-within-a-village, as a private 6,600 square-foot, five-bedroom residential-style accommodation, providing a signature Wine Country experience for up to ten people. The living room features 20-foot ceilings with expansive walls of windows overlooking a private pool, pool deck, hot tub, and outdoor seating area. The gathering area has a separate gaming area with its own designer pool table and entertaining kitchen. This space resonates with families who desire more space and privacy than a traditional hotel setting might offer. In addition to the complimentary car service, a customized playlist, private yoga, in-room movies, and dive-in pool movies are unique, complimentary experiences that represent the kind of amenities with a personal touch that resonate with today's travelers.



Integrating the Fabric of the Local Community

With the ability to stay in a location longer, people have the time to immerse themselves in their location and connect with its community and culture. At the core of hybrid hospitality is community and creating spaces where people can connect, collaborate, and feel at home, together. It is important that communal spaces exude a feeling of vitality and energy to draw people out of their rooms or from surrounding neighborhoods to indulge in the services and amenities that the property has to offer. At SB Architects, we are conscious of infusing the fabric of the local community into our designs, both by including local businesses like a local florist or coffee shop onsite, and by integrating local materials into the foundation of our designs.

At [Pendry Residences Park City](#), the hotel and residences are lined up to become the new social hub of the revitalized Canyons Village, serving as a vibrant basecamp for guests to revel in its ideal ski-in, ski-out location, après with friends, signature dining, and shopping experiences. While Pendry Hotels is conscious about the expectations of guests and residents, who desire simplicity, luxury, and comfort, the brand disrupts traditional hospitality by offering accommodations and experiences a bit more out of the ordinary, immersing visitors and residents in the surrounding fabric of a city.

From the onset of leading Pendry Park City's design, we worked to connect the project back to the village, both from an aesthetic and functional perspective. Comprised of three buildings that sit on a shared podium, the project extends beyond Pendry, with an elevated bridge that will connect the adjacent properties while integrating the rest of the village into a compelling anchor.

Pendry is a ski resort that diversifies its attractions, bringing people in by adding non-ski related attractions that complement year-round opportunities for outdoor and indoor activities, luxury resort-style services and

amenities, and curated art experiences that expose guests and residents to contemporary artists local to Park City.

At a project we are working on in the Mojave Desert, an area known for its high desert vistas, starry skies, outdoor recreation, and fun and funky vibe, we are creating a luxurious, yet approachable resort focused on exploration of the unique setting. The resort is contemporary and in tune with nature, blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor. Art and architecture are blended to create a bold simplicity authentic to the area – like repurposing waste to make sculptural art.

We aim to bring the local community inside, whether through partnerships with local businesses or by opening our walls and inviting locals to indulge in the more upscale dining and experience offerings. To build up the community and provide an authentic experience for guests, coffee beans and baked goods will be sourced from local cafes, high-quality products will be sourced from neighboring towns, and classes and tours will be made possible through partnerships with local outfitters.

Every guestroom unit, even if it is internal looking, will have a breathtaking view of the desert landscape so guests always feel connected to their surrounding environment. Blending privacy and community, guestrooms offer intimate arrangements for larger groups through connecting units that can accommodate up to 16 people, including the option for a Suite Cluster – one-bedroom suites with courtyard connection between units. Traditional guestrooms are 500 square foot units with a backyard or large balcony. Casitas are one-bedroom suites with private amenities, including yards, an outdoor tub and shower, hammocks, and firepits. Upper units and Casitas will have a star gazing platform or rooftop access to galvanize the eyes with skies so clear you can see the Milky Way.

The resort will have incredible outdoor activation, encouraging spontaneity and exploration and providing authentic, special experiences for everyone. Complimentary bikes, endless bouldering, mountain biking, and trails are all at guests' fingertips. Children will be endlessly entertained with a themed play area with zip lining and climbing, a separate pool area from the adults, and educational moments to learn more about the local history, culture, and flora and fauna. Meanwhile, adults can sip on craft cocktails and play lawn games or gather around community fire pits or adults-only pool.

Wellness amenities weave themselves into the entire property, providing a passive wellness program that encourages guests to connect to the natural setting. By leveraging the local community's connection to the great outdoors, wellness is seamlessly integrated into the guest experience with treatment rooms – including in-room massages, wellness casitas for spa services, and a fitness center with spa facilities – and outdoor wellness programming – including a reflexology path, an aromatherapy garden, and an indigenous herbal garden.

Concept and Experiential Driven Design

Experiential concepts that reach the target market are very important to the types of hospitality projects that we are working on today, not just for millennials travelers, but for the whole family. Luxury amenities and service used to be a main selling point for high end hotels, but today's buyer and guest now see this as a sort of baseline expectation and are in search of something more. With more time to travel purposefully, people are looking for hyper-local environments where they can immerse themselves authentically into the surrounding locale and have experiences creatively tailored to a specific ethos and set of interests.



At [Omni PGA Frisco Resort](#), we created a destination golf resort that could service the elite-level golfers of the world as well as make the sport fun and approachable for families, beginners and all levels of abilities. The design for the destination golf course, 501-room resort and premier golf and retail experience will usher in a new era for the sport, repositioning and modernizing golf in America. By coupling an inviting and accessible hospitality-driven design, inspired by Texas Modernism, with state-of-the-art golf courses and technology, the resort will introduce golf to a whole new generation of golfers and serve as an exciting benchmark for future development.

With golf as the focus of the design, the rooms at the Omni PGA Frisco Resort are positioned to prioritize views of the championship courses. In addition to the 501 guest rooms, golf foursomes, families and groups who are looking for a more personal, residential feel can stay in one of the resort's private four-bedroom golf villas located along the promenade, with private putting facilities.

Sonoma is a favorite of cyclists, many of whom choose Healdsburg as the perfect base for a California Wine Country tour. At [Mill District](#), a forthcoming 10-acre mixed-use project in the heart of Healdsburg, California, SB Architects, along with a group of internationally renowned innovators, were enlisted by Replay Destinations to transform the former Nu Forest lumber mill site into a transit-oriented, mixed-use community where good food, wine, and roads ideal for biking intersect.

Guided by Replay's credos - mindfulness about the project's impact on the environment and surrounding community and playfulness in active living, outdoor loving and building relationships - we leveraged Healdsburg's renowned cycling, culinary, and wellness attributes to design Mill District for the human experience and make tangible connections to the community's past, integrating mill artifacts and using wood to honor the agrarian roots, provincial charm, and woodworking heritage of the former mill site.

Our client hired [pro cyclist Ted King](#) and his wife Laura Cameron King to develop an authentic cycling program at the property. With a Velo Club on the property, King leads rides from the Mill District through Sonoma County's

vineyard-lined roads, creating unforgettable arrival experiences into Healdsburg. King is extremely well-known in the cycling world and has built an incredible community of like-minded cyclers through events he hosts with his wife and through social media. By merging this program with the local fabric of Healdsburg and the idea of adaptive reuse – using aspects of the existing lumber mill and some of the existing old barn buildings – we created a hyper specific ethos of place to attract local buyers. By identifying the archetype of our target audience early on and engaging them creatively, there was already incredible interest in the development and an understanding of what it is going to be even before Mill District’s groundbreaking.

With the increased ability to not only ‘work from home,’ but to work from anywhere, a trend that is here to stay, the hospitality world must adjust to the needs and desires of the transformed bleisure traveler and buyer. They can now travel anytime, anywhere and demand flexible space, comfort, and access to authentic experiences from their workation destination or second home. This adjustment can be made through hybrid hospitality models that allow users to get the most out of their relationships with family, friends, and colleagues while getting work done, feel an authentic connection to the local community and culture of the destination, and not compromise their ethos and desired lifestyle during their stay, but instead embody it.

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