

## The Branding Story Behind IHG's Hotel Indigo

11.30.2004

*A retail design approach to hospitality branding*

What hotels do you remember most? In most cases it's those whose architecture, stunning lobby or sheer elegance fixed them in your memory. Almost certainly, they are high end establishments—perhaps a

Michelangelo in New York, the Savoy in London, or the Bellagio in Las Vegas.



Now think of all the other hotels you've visited—why didn't they resonate with you? In all probability you were subjected to a beige, non-descript lobby and remarkably unremarkable room.

Enter Hotel Indigo, a mid-market hospitality concept with a difference. Created by the design team of Barton Mills and Tracey Barker of Back Lot Productions, an Atlanta-based brand development and retail design firm, Hotel Indigo revolutionizes the travel experience for those seeking a more relaxing and nurturing experience without the premium price tag.

"This marks a departure from 'hotel-beige' properties, industry sameness and lack of a brand story," said Kirk Kinsell, senior vice president, Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG). IHG owns 3,500 hotels in over 100 countries, including such brands as Intercontinental, Crowne Plaza and Holiday Inn. The dynamic pair behind Hotel Indigo's design and design strategy had already made its mark in the field of retail design. Mills, an architect by trade, and Barker, a graphic designer, originally joined forces seven years ago while building Hollywood Video into a national brand. Since then, they have worked together as Back Lot Productions on a variety of projects—most recently, Hotel Indigo.

“We approached the Hotel Indigo brand design concept with storytelling, visual merchandizing and environmental principles that have worked well in retail design,” says Mills.

Back Lot’s design process always begins with discovering the “heart and soul” of the brand. Once determined, Back Lot carefully selects a design system that can translate that heart and soul into the built environment. That’s when the storytelling begins.

“From that point, everything that touches the customer and employee alike speaks back to the brand,” adds Barker. “It’s never design for design sake.” At the core is the hotel’s blue/indigo color scheme, along with open plan layouts to invoke the outdoors, wall-sized murals in each room, custom designed furniture, a musical score and retail design concepts such as quarterly change-outs of reception art and signage to keep things fresh.

It all starts in the lobby, which is starkly different from typical hotels. Pergolas are utilized to bring the outdoors inside. The result is an inviting open-plan look that very much goes against the grain of today’s compartmented mid-market hotel space plans. But it’s the rooms themselves where people stay, and it’s here the designers have introduced some startling changes. Gone are wall-to-wall carpeting, mass-ordered bathtub units and boring beige. In its place: hardwood style flooring and glass spa-like showers.

Perhaps the biggest “wow!” factor is the giant photo mural in each room. Taking up the entirety of one wall, they feature over-sized and impinging images, each one speaking back to the brand in its own way. A few examples include giant blueberries, huge mosaics of beach glass, and four foot tall indigo iris blossoms.

The first property of this new hospitality branding concept opened in Atlanta this fall, followed by another that will open in the spring of 2005 in Chicago. Eventually, IHG plans to continue the roll out of Hotel Indigo franchises. “We’re targeting the upper mid-scale customer who is looking for a different experience, said IHG’s Kinsell. “This is all about affordable luxury.”

By: Back Lot Productions at 770-604-5713

ORGANIZATION

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG)

<http://www.ihg.com/>

Three Ravinia Dr., Ste. 2900

USA – Atlanta, GA 30346-2149

Phone: +1 770-604-2000

Fax: +1 770-604-5403

Reprinted from Hospitality Net™

<http://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/154000320/4021425.html>

November 30, 2004