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Co-sponsored by Hospitality Style and HOTELS magazines, the 32nd annual Gold Key Awards for Excellence in Hospitality Design redefine what it means to be creative.

BY MARY SCOVIAK

/// Now in its third decade, the Gold Key Awards for Excellence in Hospitality Design are as much a barometer of the health of the design industry as they are a showcase for innovation. Based on this year's entries, the outlook is bright on both fronts.

Even before the judges began their review, it was clear that the hospitality design community at large was a winner in 2012. "The sheer quantity of submissions was exciting. The 25 percent increase in "So Cool."

entries from 2011 to 2012 brought industry is turning around," says Gold Key judge George Scammell, vp of global design, Wyndham Worldwide.

Scammell and his fellow judges-Ed Bakos, principal, Rockwell Group; Ted Brumleve, vp of architecture and technical services, Virgin Hotels; and Ron Kollar, chief design officer, Tishman-reviewed nearly 200 projects in 23 countries that were completed within the last 18 months. From that field, they selected innovative winners and finalists in 13 categories. New to the list of awards this year are the best midscale/upscale hotel; best midscale/upscale guest room and

What impressed the judges most was design that helped guests feel connected with the project. They liked sensory concepts: touchable textures, mood-enhancing lighting and visually exciting patterns. The ultimate compliment was that a submission was "memorable." But it also had to be relaxed, approachable and sexy.

Anything that looked contrived went straight to the bottom of the list. "There were a number of formulaic, generic luxury solutions that were technically fine. But, from a design standpoint, they were predictable," says Bakos. "What projects need now is a spark of creativity, a sense of style, something that conveys a bit 'more' without feeling forced."

Although the judges identified "electrifying" submissions in all categories, Brumleve says,

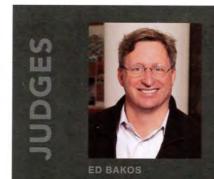
changed" honors. "We're moving "The clearest innovation is in the away from the transitional public food and beverage venues. They space with check in/check out have the clear, appropriate, wellfunctions. Now, the lobby and executed 'big idea' that reveals the restaurants flow together. Their soul of the space." Kollar agrees looks have to support each other. on F&B's leadership in design but Design is shifting away from decoadds, "Spa was the most competirating a space that people just tive category. We saw a lot of very pass through to crafting a series of good projects." Guest rooms were integrated experiences guests will

That's exactly what the Gold Key and Designer of the Year dirtying the lovely white carpet, and honors are all about. So, turn I need a place to set down my bag. the page to get a look at what's

remember," says Scammell.

of luxury hotel design.

The 13 projects that earned Gold Key honors this year cover the stylistic spectrum. But what they all share is the ability to make the guest look and look again. Whether it's a material used in a new way or lighting layered to enhance the mood, there's something unique in each of these spaces. FF&E is becoming as much a part of the art program as the functional design intent. Forget about rooms or areas; winning design is all about environments and experiences.



the biggest disappointment. "We

need comfortable guest rooms,"

says Brumleve. "I live in fear of







Harmonize historic luxury with an unpredictable, fresh attitude in a mountain manor that would impress the brand's originator, John Jacob Astor.

THE GENIUS

As part of a \$40 million interior/exterior renovation, the floor plan was completely restructured to provide panoramic mountain views from anywhere in the hotel. Astor would love the nods to the Gilded Age—the reception area chandeliers, the antiqued oak flooring and details like the dark metal door frames in the lobby. But he'd also appreciate the touches relevant to modern tastemakers, including the leather bed and desk designed by fashion legend Ralph Lauren and a bold, contemporary art collection.

"I love the use of texture and the amazing level of detail. The consistent level of refinement across the public spaces makes it a standout."-Ed Bakos

