



Enter through *the gift shop*

THE ONCE-HUMBLE HOTEL GIFT SHOP IS BEING TRANSFORMED INTO AN ATTRACTION IN ITS OWN RIGHT. AT THESE SAVVY DESTINATIONS, YOU MAY COME FOR THE SUN AND SAND BUT YOU'LL STAY FOR THE SHOPPING.

WORDS • MICHELLE BATEMAN



Should you be dining in the restaurant at The Slow, a hip new hotel in Canggu, Bali, and find yourself distracted by the earthy dinnerware handmade locally by the brand Cisco and the Sun, rest assured you can simply add a few pieces (or an entire dinner setting) to your account for when you check out.

Ditto the artwork in the dedicated gallery space and the exclusive menswear fashion brand, NON-TYPE, that hangs in Room 14. Soon, hopes The Slow co-founder George Gorrow, versions of the hotel's furniture and soft furnishings will also be available for guests to order. "I like the idea of the whole place being a shop without feeling commercial, allowing guests access to new things in an honest way, and also allowing artists, makers and designers to be

displayed with complete authenticity in a non-commercial setting," he explains.

As for the traditional hotel gift shop? "As I recall it had soft drink and sunscreen. The only traditional element we embraced is the convenience of having retail within the walls of your stay."

It seems that all those headlines screaming about the demise of retail have been greatly exaggerated: according to the latest research from Monash University Business School's Australian Consumer, Retail and Services (ACRS) research unit, 65 per cent of Australian consumers still prefer to shop in store. And, says the ACRS, it's a similar scenario in the US, where nearly 80 per cent of shoppers purchased more than half of their items in a physical store in 2017. »





Within this, however, the nature of what makes a good retail experience is undergoing nothing short of a revolution – and hospitality is not exempt from the changes. As Gorrow notes, in many luxury hotels, the stale gift shop concept has been left far behind in favour of a fresh and curated experience that might include hard-to-find fashion brands and carefully sourced artworks alongside cool and covetable mementos of a destination.

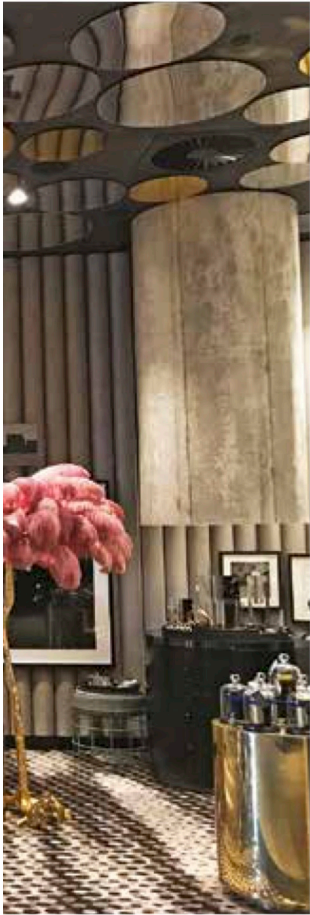
In Berlin, Soho House has teamed with London boutique The Store to kit out two levels with furniture, books, art and fashion, all available to the discerning traveller. Meanwhile, Ace Hotels have become so well known for their exclusive brand collaborations – including leather Converse high-tops, MOSCOT sunglasses and Pendleton blankets – that the range has been parlayed into its own ecommerce store (visit shop.acehotel.com for an eclectic assortment of beach towels, books and bedding).

It's a clever move because really, what better time and place to entice new

The traditional holiday memento has evolved *from a printed baseball cap or T-shirt to something fashionable types are keen to wear back home. The Slow's Gorrow says it's surprising how many leather trench coats he sells in tropical Bali.*

customers than when they're on vacation? "We believe that when people are in holiday mode, they're shopping because they're happy," agrees Mauro de Riso, General Manager at the very buzzy Halcyon House at Cabarita Beach, on the NSW north coast. "When you're comfortable and happy, you want to buy a beautiful linen shirt from Italy or a bathing suit to wear by the pool." Halcyon House opened its boutique in December 2017 with a focus on fashionable, resort-friendly products, such as Lucy Folk sunglasses and luxurious Sodashi skincare. It helps that the hotel's owners also operate one of Brisbane's high-end fashion boutiques, Camargue, so they already have a well-heeled foot firmly in that camp.

But what of those hotels and resorts that don't have in-house fashion expertise? An increasing number of them, including several of the Four Seasons, are turning to the LA-based Maris Collective. Retail-industry veteran LeeAnn Sauter had something of an epiphany more than a decade ago, when she decided that the



Retail is only one component of the new hospitality experience. Halcyon House curates Spotify playlists to help guests remember their stay.

future of retail lay in marrying the product offering found in the best boutiques with the attention to service that comes with a five-star hospitality experience. Her company now works with luxury destinations to plan, design, staff and buy for their own in-house shops. But this isn't a chain-store model: each store is a complete custom build, from the fixtures to the labels hanging on the racks, and every behind-the-scenes decision is informed by the hotel's data and guest profiles. "We know if people are coming from Chicago or New York, or from Paris or Amsterdam," says Sauter. "We have to use a different set of intelligence to make sure that guests feel the boutique is curated completely for them from the second they walk in the door – because it has been."

Today, Maris Collective works with more than 50 destinations globally – many of which have multiple shops – and Sauter says her company turns down around four requests for each one that gets the green light. When considering new partners, she says she looks for, "Great clients and people who really care about what they're doing. There's a really interesting moment in time that's happening in hospitality right now, where the owners really do care about their properties – we look for those kind of partners."

Having honed her business model for more than a decade, Sauter says she knows what works and has a cohort of 'superfan' customers to prove it. These are the guests who not only pick up a swimsuit or a hat, but who demand to

know the name of the wallpaper used in their favourite Maris Collective store so they can have it grace their own homes (for these customers, the company also offers a personalised interior design service).

Australian company Becker Minty also straddles the world between retail and design, through its much-loved boutique in Sydney's Potts Point. Earlier this year, it was tapped by the W Brisbane to bring its particular style of "unexpected" discoveries to the hotel in a new partnership: W The Store by Becker Minty. The name is a bit of a mouthful, but it reflects the fact that the venture is a true partnership, says Jason Minty, managing director at Becker Minty. "We are the creatives but it's really important that we work closely with W Brisbane to develop products specific to the store and its clientele. Blending the two brands is critical to its success." As is perfecting certain logistical concerns that come into play when the goods on offer include a "vintage 1970s lifesize brass kangaroo sitting under an ostrich-feather floor lamp".

Indeed it's become a necessary service for these hotels and resorts to help guests ship their purchases home, which can also be useful for covering one's tracks. "We have to sell luggage in all our stores," confirms Sauter at Maris Collective. "We have so many clients who say, 'You can ship it to me and nobody needs to know'." ■