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With Hotels Becoming Social Spots, More Private Spaces for Guests

Lobbies and rooftop bars are popular with people who don't book rooms. So properties are creating spaces like libraries that are open only to guests.



The guests-only library at the Faena Hotel Miami Beach. Todd Eberle

By Elaine Glusac March 23, 2018

In an industry challenged by Airbnb and other home-sharing competitors, hotels are happy to attract local laptop tappers and cocktail crowds to their lobbies. But public popularity risks frustrating guests, who may be forced to retreat to their rooms, leading to an expansion of [guest-only areas](#) including meeting spaces, libraries, quiet rooms and bars.

For hotel operators, these private spaces are similar to the concierge-floor perks, where guests pay a premium for access to a lounge with business facilities and food, but expanded and fee-free.

“It’s similar to when hotels offer a ‘club level’ lounge, but in this case, the ‘club’ is open to all guests,” said Henry H. Harteveltdt, a travel analyst and the president of Atmosphere Research Group. “Business travelers, in particular, enjoy these facilities as they can provide a quiet place to meet, away from the hotel’s public spaces.”

Some also function as private clubs in the [Soho House](#) mold, making amenities enjoyed by club members, such as private restaurants and meeting spaces, available to overnight guests.

“We’re big believers in creating a sense of exclusivity,” said Michael Achenbaum, the managing partner of the new [Curtain](#) hotel in London, which also functions as a membership club. Its meeting facilities, available to guests and members, includes a boardroom and work tables. “You see people sitting in hotel lobbies working in spaces not designed for the purposes of work. We set up the space functionally.”

Other hotels are opening less defined spaces for quiet time. The Kimpton Hotel Monaco Portland in Oregon hosts a [Quiet Room](#) available to guests who request the key for 30-minute timeouts. There’s no fee to access the room, furnished with an armchair and reading lamp, which provides “a moment of privacy,” according to the hotel general manager Ryan Kunzer, for guests to pray, meditate, nurse or read.

Hotel libraries stake out territory between boardrooms and meditation rooms, exclusively giving guests a shared residential-style room to relax in. [The Betsy-South Beach](#) in Miami Beach added a library in December 2016 when it expanded. The [Kimpton Hotel Palomar Philadelphia](#) furnishes its 25th-floor library in a 1929-vintage building with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, binoculars and tufted leather chairs. The guests-only library at the [Faena Hotel Miami Beach](#) includes cocktail service.

“Libraries provide a ‘third space’ for a guest to go to work or read,” Mr. Harteveltdt said. “I see the libraries as a small way that hotels can attempt to compete with home sharing.”

Pushed by overcrowding, some hotels are forced to take public amenities private. When [the Silo Hotel](#) in Cape Town opened in March 2017, crowds flocked to the rooftop, home to a pool and bar, for views over the waterfront. Shortly thereafter, management closed half of it just to ensure that guests of the 28-room hotel could have access.

Thronged by afternoon tea takers and bar goers in Ireland's capital, [the Shelbourne Dublin](#) hotel plans to open a private bar for guests only this spring.

The new [Duniway](#) in Portland, Ore., plans to make its rooftop guest-only beginning in May. Management will offer yoga classes there on Saturdays, and guests will be able to text for food and drink while sitting around the fire pits.

"The space is intended to be very Zen and relaxing which is a nice alternative to our bustling lobby, which is open to the public," wrote Eric Walter, the general manager of the hotel, in an email.

Credit the trend to millennial travelers, said Chekitan S. Dev, a professor of marketing at Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. Millennials, he said, "are interested in what I call 'private public' spaces where private spaces can be secluded giving them a feeling of exclusivity while, at the same time, public in that they can socialize with a group of friends."

Luxury hotels have a freer hand to cordon off spaces for guests only. [The Ivy Hotel](#) in Baltimore makes its spa and ground-floor restaurant available to the public, but reserves the majority of the 1889 property, including a conservatory, library, game room and bar, for residents of its 18 rooms.

"The concept was always to have the feel of a private house," said the hotel's general manager, Rob Arthur. "With that, you don't want random people traipsing through the mansion."

Not all private spaces are hushed. The [Eldorado Hotel & Spa](#) in Santa Fe runs a nightclub, Casa España, on Friday and Saturday nights open only to members who pay an annual fee and hotel guests.
