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Wellness resort design requires specialized approach

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GUEST COLUMNIST

As the global landscape is adjusting to new post-pandemic parameters, becoming increasingly complex and burdened by over-population, wellness resorts are growing in importance by providing spaces where people can disconnect, heal and regain personal vitality.

In order for these spaces to have a consistently meaningful effect, a specialized design approach, aligned with the needs of wellness resort guests, must be followed. The approach should guide the design of spaces, ensuring that they support intrigued but potentially apprehensive guests in achieving their personal transformation goals.

Developing a wellness resort design that serves the previously indicated purposes requires adopting a three-layered approach, one that considers the master plan, internal and external adjacencies and individual facilities.

The first layer of the wellness resort design development approach, the master plan, requires a focus on the following elements:

■ **Location of the components:**

While isolation and privacy are key to creating a calm and soothing environment for guests, it is essential for the master plan layout to foster a sense of community by implementing opportunities for meaningful interaction between guests.

■ **Community:** For larger wellness lifestyle real estate developments (i.e. wellness-oriented residential assets or communities), a wellness resort can become the key anchor, acting as effective and highly engaging center point for the community.

■ **Circulation of people:**

Nonvehicular connectivity and comfortable walking distances between different areas of the resort are essential. An extensive circulation system that incorporates walking, running and biking trails will make it attractive and convenient for



Successful wellness resort design considers the master plan, internal and external adjacencies and individual facilities.

guests to add this activity to their lifestyle.

■ **Landscaping:** This element is crucial because it supports the therapeutic effect of being close to nature and raises the inherent lifestyle benefits of daily interaction with the destination's curated landscape. Overall, the key to success in this area is to keep disturbances to the existing land to a minimum.

The second layer of the wellness resort design development approach, the adjacencies, needs to enable seamless operational flow, maximizing guest service levels and financial performance. In order to achieve this, certain key guidelines should be followed and adapted to the unique elements that define each project:

■ **Arrival:** The main resort arrival should be smaller than that of traditional resorts because it supports minimal function. In wellness resorts, guests who normally remain in-house throughout their stay may only visit the main arrival during the check-in and checkout process.

■ **External guests:** If the resort concept includes components that are accessible to external

day users, a clear separation needs to be implemented between the resort's private inner core and the semipublic facilities.

■ **Wellness center:** As the focal point of the wellness resort, this facility is the most visited by guests on a daily basis. Thus, it should be easily accessible and within comfortable walking distance for all in-house guests.

■ **Meetings and events:** Wellness resorts typically feature more intimate meeting spaces that are part of the private inner core. Such spaces typically are less formal and consist of a library or gallery, dialogue rooms and smaller seating and workshop areas.

■ **Dining:** Often, the all-day dining food-and-beverage outlet of a wellness resort includes a community table that serves as a place for guests to exchange and bond. In addition, given that most wellness program guests will be enjoying three meals a day within the resort, it is important to have a second outlet with a different style and perspective to ensure that guests do not become bored of their surroundings.

■ **Children:** For family-oriented wellness resorts, purposely allocated kids and

family facilities should be thoughtfully separated from other resort components in order to ensure that all guests are able to enjoy their experience without disturbance.

The third and final layer of the wellness resort design development approach consists of the detailed design of individual facilities from an architectural and interior design perspective. Overall, there is an opportunity to incorporate wellness and sustainability-focused elements at this level, including:

■ **Orientation and form:** Buildings should be positioned and designed in a way that maximizes the use of environmental resources. This includes light, airflow and views, and harnessing natural ventilation for increased cooling or warming effect, thus optimizing energy consumption and creating more natural comfort.

■ **Materials:** To reduce the carbon footprint, materials should be, where possible, locally sourced, natural and durable; require minimal maintenance; create a sense of warmth and be soft to the touch.

■ **Biophilic design:**

Incorporating nature into the buildings may increase the sense of connection to the natural environment. Biophilic design can be achieved with internal or external vegetation walls, designs that mimic natural forms and patterns and the presence of water features.

The three layers of wellness resort design guidelines presented here serve as an introductory framework only, to help guide the development of spaces that are aligned with the needs of wellness resort guests. In order for these guidelines to result in appropriately designed spaces and an authentic product, they need to be adjusted to the specificities of each project from a location, land topography, site area, wellness concept strategy and expected guest demographic perspective.

The power of a well-designed wellness resort environment not only supports a personalized healthy and active experience, but also has the ability to foster likeminded wellness guest interactions. **HM**

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