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San Francisco's newest hotels are saying bye-bye mini-bar, hello roof bar

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When hospitality veteran Alex Samek moved back to San Francisco in 2010, he was shocked at the opportunities available for enterprising hotel ideas in the rapidly-changing Mid-Market corridor.

Twitter hadn't moved in yet, and the historic Flatiron building between Market and McAlister streets that was to become the San Francisco Proper hotel wasn't even technically for sale.

Still, Samek, principal of Kor Group, knew that it would be worth the wait to get in on the ground floor of what would become a flood of new, amenity-rich hotels catering to visitors and affluent young locals alike.

"You really have to fit into the neighborhood to truly be successful and have acceptance from the local community," said Samek, the Bay Area-based co-founder of the the Proper brand, which is a subsidiary of Kor Group. "You just can't be kind of a cookie-cutter hotel and really expect to do well."

Among the offerings at recently-opened or soon-to-open hotels like Proper, Yotel and a Virgin Hotel are rooftop dining, tech-enabled guest management systems and small-scale event spaces designed for intimate breakouts or receptions. In addition to a steady stream of visitors flocking to the city for major tech conferences and



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other events, many of the venues are looking to use amenities as a way to keep restaurants, bars and other rented space booked all year long.

“We get a tremendous amount of requests for events in that 30-50 (person) range,” Samek said, noting that demand is generated by a mix of area tech companies, swanky birthday parties and event planners looking to book side events for mega-conferences like Salesforce’s annual Dreamforce. “We accommodate them as we can, and we will do some partial buyouts of the roof,” which includes fire pits, blankets and full-service food and drinks.

Just around the corner from Proper is Yotel San Francisco, a soon-to-open local outpost for the U.K.-based hotel company. It’s now booking for after Dec. 1. Self check-in and a second-floor co-working space are among the amenities offered to those who live nearby and guests willing to pay \$200-350 per night for a “cabin.”

“Our rooms do not have some of the more traditional amenities,” said Yotel San Francisco General Manager Isabelle Matter, like analog alarm clocks, room service or mini bars. “We believe that people nowadays want to be out. They don’t want to spend too much time in their room.”

Virgin will offer a rooftop bar hosting DJs and ticketed events for holidays like Cinco de Mayo, along with a restaurant, lounge and the “Funny Library Coffee Shop.”

Meanwhile, at both Yotel and Proper, as well as the Virgin Hotel slated to open on 4th Street later this fall, interior design is also an amenity all its own. While Proper’s space is the brainchild of celebrity designer Kelly Wearstler, Yotel is focused on minimalism.

Indeed, Samek said, amenities are also often a matter of restraint.

The Proper Hotel is “not so hipster that people feel uncomfortable going there, mainly because we want to be able to go there ourselves,” he said, noting that the goal is to attract a “creative class” crowd that reaches beyond the local tech industry. “It really does become a microcosm of what San Francisco is.”

THE HOT NEW THINGS

Hotels have embraced a new set of features designed to attract a younger crowd.

Rooftop venues — As hotels have focused more on providing experiences, they've sought to maximize the views from the top of their hotels.

Self-check in — Just like restaurants, airports, and theaters, some hotels have now added kiosks that allow guests to check-in without waiting in line.

Small event spaces — These are designed to cater to small receptions or break-out sessions.

Co-working space — Yotel offers this amenity for those living nearby as well as hotel guests.

Parties — Hotels have started hosting their own parties and DJ sets in an effort to provide more on-site experiences for guests.