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Checking out the guestroom of the future

High-tech hoteliers offer a room with a view — of the year 2010



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A major attraction at HITEC, an annual conference for financial and technology professionals in the hospitality industry was the Guestroom 2010. Featuring 70 new and near-future technologies, it offered a peek at what lodging may look like in the years to come.

The hotel room of the future may be closer than you think.

In fact, it was in Orlando just last month.

The room, officially called Guestroom 2010, was a major attraction at HITEC, an annual conference for financial and technology professionals in the hospitality industry. Featuring 70 new and near-future technologies, it offered a peek at what lodging may look like in the years to come.

Now in its second year, the project is more about feasible technology than science fiction. Some of the technologies on display are already in production; others are prototypes still in search of a viable market. Each was included because it represented an innovation in design, usability, energy efficiency or environmental protection.

The products and technologies in the exhibit promise to reinvent every aspect of the lodging experience. From PDA-based concierge services to motion-sensitive lighting systems, the ultimate goal is to help travelers make better use of their time. "These should be common things," says Deborah Hansen, president of décorus Worldwide, a Guestroom 2010 participant, "and eventually they will be."

In-room amenities

All bed, no mattress: Developed in the UK, the Ammique bed isn't so much a bed as it is a body suspension system. Instead of a mattress, it features a system of linked rods and small plastic-domed caps that move independently to contour to the natural curves of your body. You can currently test ride it for the price of a night's lodging at the Cotswold House Hotel in Gloucestershire.

Time slips away: Correction: with Clocky, a wheeled alarm clock developed by Nanda LLC, it actually rolls away. Hit the snooze alarm and the unit will roll off the nightstand and wheel around the floor until it finds a

place to rest. When the alarm goes off again, you have no choice but to get out of bed and find it. Currently available online and through various retailers, the little devil is ideal for anyone with early-morning meetings — or teenagers.

Wake up and smell the weather: The Smart Mill & Brew Coffeemaker from Melitta combines a programmable, 10-cup coffeemaker with up-to-the-minute weather reports. Capable of handling both whole beans and ground coffee, the unit also features a backlit LCD display that shows the local weather forecast (in 125 cities) via MSN Direct. The product's distributor is currently in discussions with hotels for in-room use.

Fine art in motion: With the LUX-HDA mirage system from LUX Art & Design, guests will be able to choose their own in-room artwork from a tablet PC and then watch it get created on a wall or flat-panel display. The company hopes to introduce the system to luxury and boutique hotels as early as this fall.

Now you see it, now you don't: Switchable Privacy Glass from Polytronix Inc., changes from clear glass to a cloudy, semi-opaque barrier at the touch of a switch. The technology itself isn't new, but this year, the company joined forces with LUX Art & Design to take it to a new level. Someday, say the companies, you'll be able to transform your hotel room window into a work of evolving art in an instant.

Readers send in photos from their worst hotel stays**See yourself on TV:** The Television Mirror from décorus Worldwide features a 15-inch LCD TV embedded in a finely crafted mirror. Turn on the TV and you can catch the morning news while you're shaving or putting on makeup; turn it off and the screen disappears from sight. It's already in place at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas (Skyloft and West Wing rooms) and at several hotels in Atlantic City.

Let there be light: Originally created for a condominium complex in Vancouver, B.C., the Atlantis Vanity from C&C Furnishings features a 72-inch, tempered-glass top and motion-sensitive underlighting. Illuminating the bathroom automatically, it means no more fumbling for light switches, fewer stubbed toes and less wasted energy. The company hopes to introduce it to the hotel market within the year.

Checking in

Handheld concierge: Standardized e-mail confirmations are so last year. Currently being developed by Digital Alchemy, Claire is a browser-based program that lets guests access their reservation, plus a wealth of hotel information, direct from their cell phones before, during and after their stay. Expected to go live this fall, the service is designed to display a guest's personal itinerary — travel plans, meetings, recreation options — from pre-arrival to post-check out.

Ring-a-ding room key: Who needs a key card when you can use your cell phone to unlock your door? Using a phone with a contactless IC chip, like the one displayed by NTT DoCoMo USA, you'll eventually be able to open your hotel room simply by swiping your handset across a sensor outside the door. The technology is currently used in Japan for a variety of retail transactions, with discussions underway for future hotel use.