

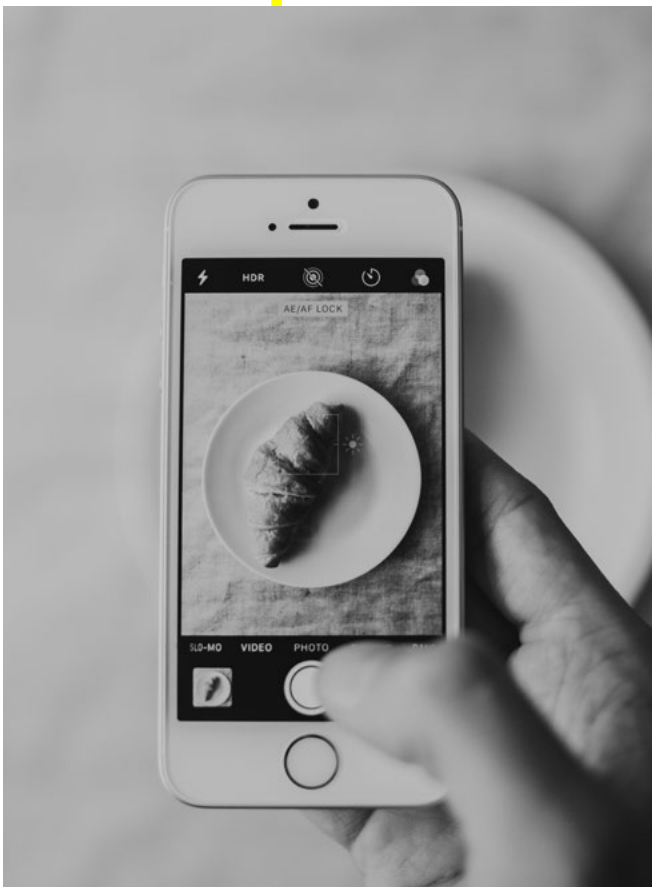
THE POST-PANDEMIC TRAVELLER

A few days ago, I came across a very interesting article on the psychology of perfectionism written by psychoanalyst Josh Cohen. In it, Cohen draws brilliant conclusions about how the pursuit of perfection fatally impacts our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. As I scrolled through the text, I realized that many of the reflections in it will shape the future of hospitality and that incorporating them into our brand strategies today was an urgent, if not crucial, task.



Society’s obsession with achieving a “perfect” life is not a new phenomenon. The multitude of postoperative noses and statuesque bodies under the Caribbean sun that plague social media are just the surface layer of a deep and long-standing problem. In the 1950s, the norms of mass society equated the white American family model with the idea of perfection. It was the age of TV, cars, chiselled masculinity, and demure femininity. Unsurprisingly, perfection in the 21st century evolved into the opposite: an unhealthy obfuscation with standing out from the crowd.

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The hospitality industry has not been immune to this change. Post-war hotel were huge concrete complexes; each room a replica of the room next door, where families pretended to be just like the rest of families. Today, hotels strive to appear unique. They invest millions in making every detail instagrammable and promoting that sumptuous appearance online. Words like “best, biggest and greatest” saturate the digital marketing realm, where consumers find themselves in a state of paralysing indecision.

According to Cohen, whatever the approach to perfection is, the result is, ironically, always the same: the closer we get to it, the less is left of the person underneath. Perfectionism means trying to make our life what we want it to be, rather than living the life we have.

The competitive attitude towards life is a direct consequence of the meritocracy that governs our labour market, Cohen points out. This meritocratic system rewards us for obtaining stellar academic results or having abnormally smooth skin. Society is thus divided into winners and losers, the latter being those who cannot afford perfection. To our despair, whatever our position in this suffocating order is, we are unlikely to be satisfied with what we have and who we are. Instagram likes and AAA grades only give us a fleeting sense of control over our lives and we keep berating ourselves for our ineptitude.

The COVID pandemic, however, has a surprising effect on our perfectionist minds. WFH freed chronic perfectionists from the pressure of constant office surveillance, leading them to embrace simple pleasures like baking, walking, reading, or talking to their loved ones - at least for a few months. Non-perfectionists also joined in on this trend. Rooms became creative havens where people learned to appreciate the joy in the little things.



As we anticipated in our article [“AN AGENDA TO TRANSFORM HOSPITALITY”](#), the post-covid traveller is radically different from the pre-covid traveller. This traveller is more self-accepting, more laid-back, and more open to improvisation.

There are hundreds of cases of hoteliers who invested a fortune to please the 21st century perfectionist and barely made it through the pandemic, if at all. Oppositely, Jolene or P. Franco in the London borough of Hackney, or Brawn in Bethnal Green, are just a few examples of low-key, relaxed spaces that made well and customers are going for.

While the perfectionist spirit of 2019 has surely not died, we have rearranged our priorities. Months of dealing with anxiety and burnout in isolation have unearthed the inherently human desire to seek meaningful relationships, both with other people and with our environment. We have learned to appreciate, and invest in, authenticity, empathic innovation, and socialization.

The hospitality industry CANNOT miss the opportunity ahead. People will be prone to visiting spaces where they feel free from the distorted ideas of perfection that society has imposed on them. Places where feeling humanly imperfect is okay.

New projects should include spaces and practices that tolerate mistakes and celebrate determination. The goal is to build ambitious, competition-free spaces, where group victories are personal victories, thus encouraging a sense of community, camaraderie, and sincerity that are meaningful to people.





Invest in non-hierarchical org charts where communication barriers are diffuse and every opinion counts. Hybrid, unpretentious spaces with, for example, round tables, circular fire pit seating, co-working and co-living areas, common patios, green walking areas, suspended net lounges, workshop rooms, live music basement and conversation engagement atriums.

Spaces built from natural materials such as stone and timber, rich in greenery and water, where touching, trying, and exploring are rewarded.

Laid-back luxury; a movement that is here to stay.

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