Wellness:
Designed to Feel Good

How independent hotels designed for the wellbeing of guests, teams and places, from sleep, scent and light to calm operations and belonging.

5–6 October 2026

Olympia London

REPORT STRUCTURE

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This report is organised by the ideas inside the wellness thread, not by session or stage. Content from the Innovation Stage and the Hotel Business Stage of Independent Hotel Show London has been filtered for what speaks to the wellbeing of guests and teams, and grouped into six sub-themes.

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01 · EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wellbeing Was Treated as the Whole Stay.

Independent Hotel Show London 2026 returned again and again to how a hotel feels. One Innovation Stage panel took wellbeing head on, a Hotel Business Stage power hour covered sensory design, and the rest arrived sideways, from sessions on luxury, teams, technology and resilience.

A speaker in the session said, as a personal view, that a hotel does not need a spa or a sauna to offer wellbeing. Gerri Hansen of BrandSensory said 85 to 95 percent of our thoughtless decisions are driven by the subconscious. Christine Skaar of KVIST named sleep, ventilation and smell as hidden tests.

Paul Sadler of Calcot Hotels said what a good team looks like is "I just like nice people", and described a strong probation. Sandrine Zechbauer of RMS reported that 83 percent of those surveyed said they faced increased operational stress due to technology not necessarily working as it should.

85–95%
Of our thoughtless decisions driven by the subconscious
Gerri Hansen, BrandSensory

83%
Of those surveyed facing more operational stress, technology not necessarily working
Sandrine Zechbauer, RMS

40 days
Reaching 30 degrees this summer
Sarah Duncan, Sleeping Lion

35%
Of Calcot's workforce with ten years or more, by the speaker's estimate
Paul Sadler, Calcot Hotels

17 sec
For AI to build a daily housekeeping room list
A panellist from The Headland Hotel

SIX WAYS WELLNESS TOOK SHAPE

1. **Wellbeing moved beyond the spa.** A speaker in the session said, as a personal view, that a hotel does not need a spa or a sauna to offer wellbeing, and Michael Jacobi of Scally Hotel Collection said it is important to think beyond the spa, to mental health and the circadian rhythm in the rooms.
2. **The senses became a brief.** Hansen starts with how a property should feel, and Dee Gibson of Kalukanda House uses an uplifting scent in the morning and a muskier one in the evening.
3. **Sleep, quiet and heat became design tests.** Skaar said, without recalling the statistic, that the majority of complaints after a stay relate to sleep, and Sarah Duncan of Sleeping Lion described tropical nights above 20 degrees.
4. **Teams were part of the experience.** Sadler described a probation signed off by several levels of management, and Jacobi said culture would probably be the one takeaway.
5. **Calm became an operating goal.** A panellist from The Headland Hotel said an AI room list takes 17 seconds and gives the head housekeeper an extra hour for coffee chats.
6. **Belonging was designed in.** Ben Harper of Watergate Bay Hotel said accessibility sat at the heart of the SeaSpace design, with the pool hoist one very small example.



We want everybody to leave feeling just that little bit better.

MICHAEL JACOBI · Managing Director, Scally Hotel Collection

02 · THEME FRAMING

What Wellness Meant on Stage.

Independent Hotel Show London did not run wellness as a track. It surfaced in a design panel, a power hour on sensory branding, a talk on summer heat, a luxury panel, a happy-team panel and a technology panel, usually without the word itself. This page sets out what the thread meant when speakers did describe it.

Four ideas recur. The feeling of a stay comes first, then the place that carries it, then the team that delivers it, and finally the systems that either protect or drain that team. The tiles below give one anchor for each, taken from the sessions that follow.

THE FEELING

Hansen starts from how a property feels, smells, tastes and sounds, and how guests should feel.

THE PLACE

Dee Gibson wants guests in Sri Lanka reminded they are rooted in a different place; Susan Lake, a lighting designer, described a spa garden designed to feel private and secluded.

THE TEAM

Sadler: "I just like nice people." Jacobi: building a hotel is easy, building a culture is very complicated.

THE CALM

RMS reported 83 percent of those surveyed under increased operational stress; a room list at The Headland takes 17 seconds.

Source · Cross-session synthesis of the Innovation Stage and Hotel Business Stage transcripts, Independent Hotel Show London 2026. Speakers are cited on the sub-theme pages that follow.

Two moments framed the thread. On the Innovation Stage, a speaker in the session said wellness is everything you see and everything you don't, and that interior designers have perhaps been a little blinkered by beauty. Michael Jacobi, on a separate luxury panel, referred back to a panel on wellness design and said it is important to think beyond the spa to mental health and the circadian rhythm in the rooms.

The thread also included hotels investing in facilities. Ian Taylor of Kaleidoscope Hotels was finishing a spa garden, and Paul Sadler said Calcot has moved slightly away from food and beverage and into fitness and wellbeing. Wellness is therefore read here broadly: as the feeling of a stay and of a workplace, with the spa as one expression among several.



...for a lasting feeling, not a look.

CHRISTINE SKAAR · Founder, Creative Director, KVIST

HOW THIS REPORT READS THE THEME

Where a session was only partly on theme, only its on-theme portion is used. Figures are given as the speaker stated them, with their hedges. Where a recording does not make clear who was speaking, the statement is attributed to the panel or its role, not to a named person.

03 · KEY SUB-THEMES

Six Ideas Through Which Wellness Took Shape.

Filtering the transcripts for the theme produced six recurring ideas. Each was raised by speakers in more than one session.

THE WELLNESS THEME MAP · SIX SUB-THEMES

01 · BEYOND THE SPA
Story, place and presence as wellbeing, with the spa as one answer among several.

02 · THE SENSES
Scent, light and sound across the day, starting from how a guest should feel.

03 · SLEEP, QUIET AND HEAT
The comfort a photograph cannot show, and a summer that tested it.

04 · LOOKED-AFTER TEAMS
Probation, thanks and culture as part of the guest experience.

05 · CALM OPERATIONS
Technology judged by the stress it removes from a team.

06 · BELONGING
Accessibility, community and recognition without intrusion.

Source · Thematic filtering of the Innovation Stage and Hotel Business Stage transcripts, Independent Hotel Show London 2026.

The Evidence Behind Each Sub-Theme

SUB-THEME	ON THE RECORD	SPEAKER
01 Beyond the Spa	A red light therapy bed, the first in the UK, with a payback projected over three years	Ian Taylor, Kaleidoscope Hotels
02 The Senses	85 to 95 percent of our thoughtless decisions driven by the subconscious	Gerri Hansen, BrandSensory
03 Sleep, Quiet and Heat	40 days at 30 degrees in one summer	Sarah Duncan, Sleeping Lion
04 Looked-After Teams	An estimated 35 percent of the workforce with ten years or more	Paul Sadler, Calcot Hotels
05 Calm Operations	83 percent of those surveyed facing increased operational stress, technology not necessarily working as it should	Sandrine Zechbauer, RMS
06 Belonging	A pool hoist, one very small example of accessibility at the heart of the design	Ben Harper, Watergate Bay Hotel

The map is a sequence, not a ranking. Sub-theme 01 sets the frame: wellbeing beyond the spa. Sub-themes 02 and 03 are the design half, the senses a guest can name and the comfort a guest cannot photograph. Sub-themes 04 and 05 are the delivery half, the team and the systems behind the feeling. Sub-theme 06 asks who is welcome in the room.

WHAT COUNTED AS ON-THEME

Content was counted as on-theme when it described how a stay or a workplace feels, or a design, people or operating choice made for wellbeing, comfort, calm or belonging.

SUB-THEME 01 · BEYOND THE SPA

Wellbeing Beyond the Spa.

Several speakers placed wellbeing beyond the spa, in story, place, presence, time and human connection, while one hotelier was investing in a spa garden.

On the Innovation Stage, the Designed to feel good panel brought together interior designers and a hotelier. A speaker in the session said telling a narrative is part of the wellbeing story, that, personally, a hotel does not need a spa or a sauna to offer wellbeing, and that a hotel grounded in its sense of place is hugely valuable. Dee Gibson, a designer and hotelier at Kalukanda House, said guests arriving in Sri Lanka should be reminded they are rooted in a different place, and that a hotelier thinks about who they want to come into the space and what they want them to experience.

Michael Jacobi of Scally Hotel Collection said, on a luxury panel, that today's luxury guest probably has everything at home, and that what most of those guests do not have is time, a disconnect from their busy lives, and maybe human connections and deep conversations. Christine Skaar of KVIST agreed that the experience is not just a spa facility in the basement or on the sixth floor, but being able to be present and not having to book things. Asked what luxury would be if it were free, Skaar answered time and rest.

Not everyone set the spa aside. Ian Taylor of Kaleidoscope Hotels described a spa garden nearing completion, with a new pool, a hydrotherapy pool, an outdoor sauna and a cold plunge, and, separately, a red light therapy bed, the first in the UK, that Taylor called a lot of money and projected should pay for itself over three years.

WHAT THE LUXURY GUEST HAS, LACKS AND CAN BE GIVEN

AT HOME	IN SHORT SUPPLY	WHAT A HOTEL CAN GIVE
A beautifully designed house and bathroom, fantastic cars, and perhaps a private chef (Jacobi).	Time, a disconnect from busy lives, maybe human connections, deep conversations, maybe a little time in nature away from a device (Jacobi). Time and rest (Skaar).	Being present, with nothing to book (Skaar). This report reads the gap as an opening: time, presence and conversation. Jacobi also said it is important to think beyond the spa, to mental health and the circadian rhythm in the rooms.

Source · Michael Jacobi, Scally Hotel Collection, and Christine Skaar, KVIST (The Michelin effect: What's shaping luxury travel today). Derived from transcript.



What most of those guests do not have is time is a disconnect from their busy lives, is maybe human connections, deep conversations.

MICHAEL JACOBI · Managing Director, Scally Hotel Collection

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

One hotelier was building a spa garden, while other speakers placed wellbeing in time, presence and human connection. Jacobi framed that offer as an opportunity for hotels.

SUB-THEME 02 · THE SENSES

Designing for All the Senses.

The senses were treated as a design brief rather than a finishing touch, from the first sentence of a brand to the scent on the way down to breakfast.

Gerri Hansen of BrandSensory said brand design sometimes drops the human factor, and that a brand is a world guests should feel they belong in. Hansen's roadmap starts with two questions: how the property feels, smells, tastes and sounds, and how guests should feel. Once the emotional narrative is set, palette, logo, soundtrack, materials and fabrics become easier choices. Because 85 to 95 percent of our thoughtless decisions are driven by the subconscious, Hansen said, and a multisensory experience is easier for the brain to retrieve, Hansen said guests in multisensory environments are more likely to return, spend more and advocate.

Hansen advised hoteliers to pick four or five things they can truly own as multisensory brand assets. Earlier in the talk, Hansen described a signature biscuit at one of the properties the consultancy works with, with notes of estate flowers, honey and dark chocolate. Dee Gibson showed the same logic at one hotel: windows and doors designed around the sun's path, a morning scent and a muskier evening one, and a preference for warmer light from lamps over harsh overhead light, while adding that Gibson personally does not think there should be a formula for design, which is very situational.

Susan Lake of Susan Lake Lighting Design, the lighting designer, described a spa garden designed to feel private and secluded, with established planting and, in a dark-sky location, star lights in the base of the main pool so a swimmer sees stars above and below. Ian Taylor of Kaleidoscope Hotels called lighting a silent force.

A DAY IN THE SENSES · WHAT SPEAKERS DESCRIBED

MORNING	DAYTIME	EVENING
An uplifting scent as guests come down for breakfast (Dee Gibson). Blue-toned light to revitalise, from circadian lighting (a designer on the wellbeing panel).	Windows and doors placed around the path of the sun, so shadows move like artworks (Dee Gibson). In Q&A, music described as never one playlist, with peaks and troughs (The Feeling Factor).	Something much more musky, with light levels dropped (Dee Gibson). Warmer amber light to prepare for sleep (a designer on the wellbeing panel).

Source · Dee Gibson, Kalukanda House, and a designer on the panel (Designed to feel good: Putting wellbeing at the heart of hotels); Q&A at The feeling factor. Derived from transcript.



We use a scent in the morning, which is quite uplifting. So when people kind of come downstairs ready for breakfast, they feel like they're ready for the day.

DEE GIBSON · Designer and Hotelier, Kalukanda House

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Sensory design started from emotion, not decoration. Hansen's two questions come before palette, logo and soundtrack, and Gibson's hotel shows one example: a morning scent, a musky evening one, lowered light levels, and thought given to the sound of the gardens.

SUB-THEME 03 · SLEEP, QUIET AND HEAT

Sleep, Quiet and Heat.

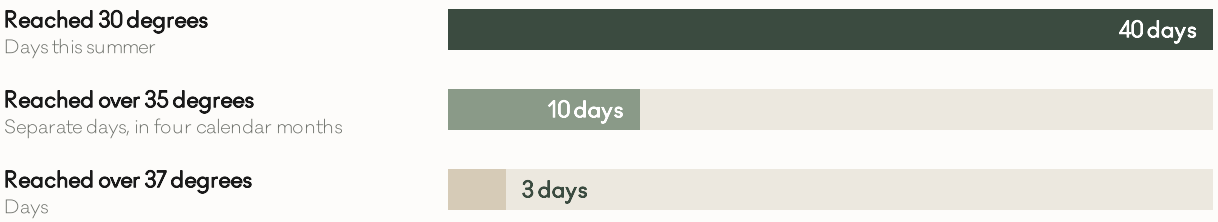
Comfort that does not show in a photograph came up repeatedly, with sleep the clearest case. Speakers raised sleep, acoustics and heat as things that decide how a stay feels.

Christine Skaar of KVIST said the majority of complaints after a stay relate to the quality of sleep, though Skaar could not recall the statistic. A beautiful bed and linen do not help if the mechanical ventilation, the smell in the room, the journey from check-in, too big a dinner or bright, blinking lights get in the way, so designers have to design for the hidden things.

A speaker in the session listed the sleep non-negotiables as proper blackout, acoustic privacy, a great mattress and bedding, pillow choice, temperature control, ventilation that avoids overnight CO2 build-up and a simple lighting strategy that supports circadian rhythms. A speaker in the session added that sound-absorbing materials and fewer hard surfaces are often an easy technique. Dee Gibson said technical sleep systems suit dedicated, medical-style hotels, while a normal hotel can automate less and think more about touch points and textures. Matt Hulme of Dynargh Design advises clients to strip technology out of rooms, so a one or two night guest is not confused about how to do the lighting.

On the Hotel Business Stage, Sarah Duncan of Sleeping Lion said the tropical nights above 20 degrees that the UK is not used to affect comfort for all of us, listed guest comfort and employee wellbeing among the physical risks of climate change, and asked the businesses in the room whether they had run a proper climate risk assessment.

THIS SUMMER · DAYS REACHING A TEMPERATURE, AS STATED



Source · Sarah Duncan, Sleeping Lion, Power Hour: Business Resilience. Bar length on a 40 day scale.



You do not want someone at checkout saying, it was beautiful, but I just didn't sleep well.

CHRISTINE SKAAR · Founder, Creative Director, KVIST

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Speakers named sleep, acoustics and heat as things that can affect guests. The fixes they described ranged from basics, such as blackout and sound-absorbing materials, to technical sleep systems for dedicated hotels.

SUB-THEME 04 · LOOKED-AFTER TEAMS

Looking After the People Who Deliver the Feeling.

Several speakers tied the guest experience to how a team is chosen, thanked and prepared. The advice included choosing carefully, thanking people, training before promoting, and leaving people time to talk.

Paul Sadler of Calcot Hotels, where Sadler said there are 250 staff at Calcot itself, said what a good team looks like is simple, "I just like nice people", with everyone pushing in the same direction. New starters go through a strong probation and are signed off by their heads of department and managers, the food and beverage and duty managers, and finally Sadler. Sadler added that hospitality is bad at handing someone keys and saying they are now a manager, so Calcot runs an aspiring managers programme and promotes people by moving them to a different site, so they are not managing their friends.

Michael Jacobi of Scally Hotel Collection said culture would probably be the one takeaway: building a hotel is easy, building a culture is very complicated and takes time, and design strategy does not matter if the person at the front door does not feel empowered to have a two minute conversation, or the housekeeper in the corridor has no time to stop. Nuno César de Sá of Grantley Hall said the hotel runs 550 staff without an SOP, employs by characteristics, persona and behaviours, and does not tell staff how to pick up a phone.

A panellist from The Headland Hotel described a Boomerang Club for staff who have left, with, the panellist thought, 11 now back in the business after anywhere between two and 12 years away.

THREE FORMS OF RECOGNITION · AS DESCRIBED AT CALCOT

THANKS

Simply thanking people. Intranet shout-outs, with people mentioned by name in reviews, emails or letters.

SMALL GESTURES

A bottle of fizz, and magic moments for going beyond the role. A Hotel of the Year mug for everyone, which Sadler called really simple, at a cost of about a thousand pounds.

LONG SERVICE

A 10 year plus party, held by closing one of the hotels. An estimated 35 percent of the workforce have been there ten years or more.

Source · Paul Sadler, Calcot Hotels (The happy team advantage: Empowering managers, empowering teams). Derived from transcript.



We as the, the managers, we write the script, we dress the stage, but we're absolutely dependent on the actors doing their job day in, day out.

PAUL SADLER · Hotel Director, Calcot Hotels

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

The tools Sadler named for looking after a team were thanks, attention and preparation, and the one cost Sadler gave was about a thousand pounds for a mug for everyone. Sadler also said it matters that the whole team buys into each new hire.

SUB-THEME 05 · CALM OPERATIONS

Technology That Lowers the Stress.

A recurring test of technology was whether it makes a team's day calmer. The evidence on stage was mixed: Zechbauer said hoteliers are not yet seeing simplification, while a Headland Hotel panellist described time handed back to a team.

Sandrine Zechbauer of RMS said that, while the show floor talks of simplification, 83 percent of those surveyed said they faced increased operational stress due to technology not necessarily working as it should, and nine in ten rated their data below 3 out of 5 for AI readiness. On the skills panel, the survey was described as reaching something like 500 respondents around the world in May 2026. Respondents were said to report incorrect room rates between the revenue manager, the PMS and the channel manager, duplicate data and incorrect reporting, and to spend upwards of seven hours a week fixing it, which the speaker said was not even AI related, just day-to-day.

A panellist from The Headland Hotel described the other side. The hotel looked for the really boring data and admin jobs a team has to do, and an AI system now builds the daily room list in 17 seconds, across a hotel and a cottage village, using each housekeeper's room preferences and start times. The head housekeeper no longer spends an hour in the morning on room lists, and that time goes to coffee chats and looking after the team, and the housekeeping team, the panellist said, feel listened to. The hotel has not incurred any costs yet because it is a test site for an AI company, and the panellist added, "I'm sure those costs will come at some point."

Rebecca Prizeman of The Watergate Bay Group said technology is not always the hardest part, it is bringing the people along, and that nobody wants to feel a system is being imposed on them that they do not fully understand.

THE STRESS OF TOOL SPRAWL · RMS SURVEY PRESENTED ON THE SKILLS PANEL



Source · Sandrine Zechbauer, RMS (The new skills stack for the future of hospitality). Survey described as reaching something like 500 respondents, as stated on the panel.



If the guest experience is a positive one and a clean one, the team experience of that system also has to be as frictionless as possible.

REBECCA PRIZEMAN · Group Head of Digital and Systems, The Watergate Bay Group, Another Place and SeaSpace

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Calm was described in a team's hours. The Headland panellist described time given back to the head housekeeper each morning, while survey respondents were said to spend upwards of seven hours a week fixing data. One is a single hotel's own account and the other a survey.

SUB-THEME 06 · BELONGING

Wellbeing Includes Who Feels Welcome.

Belonging was the quietest of the six sub-themes, and the most concrete. Speakers described who a hotel makes room for, and how it recognises guests without intruding.

Ben Harper of Watergate Bay Hotel was asked who decided to introduce a pool hoist at SeaSpace. Harper said it was a clear lobby from the head of impact, and that a brand with the community at its heart had to open the door to the whole community. Matt Hulme said that last year it won for accessible design at the Brit List, for the apartments and the swimming pool. Harper said teams at SeaSpace are told not to worry about people nursing a flat white in the café, because they are the community and the brand's advocates.

Dee Gibson was candid that accessibility was not at the forefront at first: the first guest was Gibson's own family, with Gibson's father in a wheelchair at the time, and Gibson realised quickly that access to the bedroom had not been thought through. Wide doorways, ramps and accessible bedrooms are now part of the design process, though Gibson said the hotel has not been asked for a booking by people with a physical disability since, and that there are always things to improve. Gibson defined wellbeing in hospitality as the relationship across the whole supply chain, from ethical sourcing and fair pay to equity, inclusion and local craft.

Recognition had a limit. KK Prabakaran of The Wellesley Knightsbridge said there is a line between recognition and intrusion, and asked whether a hotel needs to use all the data it has to show guests it knows more about them. Kathryn Haskins of the Alexandra Hotel and Restaurant said its guests look for comfort, care and cuisine that cosset them into a really relaxed time.

WHO THE DOOR WAS OPENED TO · WHAT SPEAKERS DESCRIBED

GUESTS WITH A DISABILITY

A pool hoist, one very small example of accessibility at the heart of the design (Harper); wide doorways, ramps and accessible bedrooms (Gibson). An accessible design award at the Brit List for the apartments and the swimming pool (Hulme).

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

A health club with 450 to 500 members in the first six months, an accessibly priced café, and a welcome for the local co-working community.

GUESTS WHO ARE NOT DRINKING

A speaker on the F&B session said restaurants were doing homemade sodas and non-alcoholic pairings, so that guests who are not drinking can join in with the other people.

Source · Ben Harper and Matt Hulme (Spaces without boundaries); Dee Gibson (Designed to feel good: Putting wellbeing at the heart of hotels); a speaker on the F&B session (What's the secret ingredient to profitable F&B?).



We believed that if we were building a brand that had the community at its heart, then we couldn't, we had to open the door to the whole community.

BEN HARPER · CEO, Watergate Bay Hotel, Another Place and SeaSpace

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Belonging was specified, not declared: a hoist, a doorway width, a non-alcoholic menu. Gibson's candour that accessibility came late is part of the evidence, and Prabakaran's line between recognition and intrusion is its limit.

10 · STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

Reading Across the Sessions.

Certain arguments only appear when the sessions are read together. These are the author's readings across sessions; no single speaker made them.

INSIGHT 01 · THE SPA IS ONE ANSWER, NOT THE QUESTION

A speaker in the session, Skaar and Jacobi pointed to sleep, presence and conversation, while Ian Taylor was building a spa garden. Both can be true: Taylor called a red light therapy bed, which had gone in only a couple of weeks earlier, a lot of money, projected it should pay for itself over three years, and said it is what journalists want to write about.

INSIGHT 02 · THE BRIEF STARTS WITH A FEELING

Hansen's two questions and Skaar's lasting feeling point the same way: decide how a guest should feel, and palette, logo, soundtrack and materials follow (Hansen). Dee Gibson's morning and evening scents are one example of a sensory choice tied to the time of day.

INSIGHT 03 · THE HIDDEN TESTS DECIDE THE RETURN

Sleep and heat came up in different sessions, from Skaar's complaints about sleep to Sarah Duncan's tropical nights. Skaar noted that sleep problems are not in a picture.

INSIGHT 04 · STAFF WELLBEING AND GUEST WELLBEING ARE ONE PROJECT

Sadler's probation and thanks, Jacobi's culture and The Headland panellist's Boomerang Club and head housekeeper's extra time all concern how a team is looked after.

INSIGHT 05 · CALM IS AN OPERATING CHOICE

The 83 percent figure from RMS and the 17 second room list at The Headland put the same question: does technology give time back to a team or take it?

INSIGHT 06 · BELONGING WAS SPECIFIC, AND SOMETIMES LATE

A pool hoist, wide doorways and a non-alcoholic menu were presented as specific choices, and Dee Gibson's honesty about learning accessibility late is part of the evidence, not a footnote.

META-INSIGHT

Some measures were described as simple: Sadler said recognition can be as simple as thanking people, and called the Hotel of the Year mug for everyone really simple, at about a thousand pounds. Others involved larger sums: lighting that Taylor put at about £25,000 rather than the couple of thousand expected, and a red light therapy bed Taylor called a lot of money.

11 · OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Opportunity and Risk Along the Theme.

The six sub-themes are mapped side by side below, with an opportunity and a challenge that speakers raised for each.

Opportunity-to-Risk Matrix · Wellness, IH London 2026

SUB-THEME	OPPORTUNITY	CHALLENGE
Beyond the Spa	One speaker's view: story and place can carry wellbeing without a spa or a sauna. Jacobi: guests may lack time and human connection.	Taylor called the red light therapy bed a lot of money; a spa consultant was appointed late, and a client's massages-per-day target meant relaxation space became treatment rooms (wellbeing panel).
The Senses	Start from emotion; four or five sensory assets an owner can truly own; one scent for the morning and another for the evening.	Gibson personally does not think there should be a formula for design; Taylor put the lighting, expected to cost a couple of thousand pounds, at about £25,000.
Sleep, Quiet and Heat	Blackout, acoustic privacy, ventilation and simple lighting were on one speaker's sleep list; sound-absorbing materials were called an easy technique.	Skaar said, without recalling the statistic, that the majority of complaints after a stay relate to sleep; Duncan said 40 days reached 30 degrees this summer, with tropical nights above 20 degrees.
Looked-After Teams	Sadler: recognition can be as simple as thanking people, and a mug for everyone cost about a thousand pounds; an estimated 35 percent of Calcot's workforce have ten years or more.	Sadler said hospitality is bad at promoting managers with no preparation; Jacobi said culture is very complicated and takes time to build.
Calm Operations	A Headland panellist said an AI room list built in 17 seconds frees the head housekeeper's time.	83 percent of those surveyed said they faced more operational stress, with technology not necessarily working, and respondents were said to spend upwards of seven hours a week fixing data.
Belonging	A pool hoist, wide doorways and a non-alcoholic menu were described as ways of including more people.	Accessibility was not first in mind at one hotel, and no booking from a guest with a physical disability has followed since (Dee Gibson); there is a line between recognition and intrusion (KK Prabakaran).

Source · Cross-session synthesis of the Innovation Stage and Hotel Business Stage transcripts, IH London 2026. Figures as stated by the speakers named on the sub-theme pages.

Two cautions cut across the table. The Headland panellist's room list was a test with no costs yet, though costs will come at some point. Taylor called the red light bed a lot of money and put the lighting, expected to cost a couple of thousand pounds, at about £25,000.

STRATEGIC TAKEAWAY

Each upside in the table sits next to a challenge that speakers raised themselves.

12 · EVOLVING NARRATIVES AND STAKEHOLDER IMPLICATIONS

Where the Old Story Ends and the New One Begins.

The thread can also be read as a set of contrasts. The author draws them from what speakers said; the "From X to Y" headings are the author's, not phrases the speakers used.

CONTRASTS DRAWN FROM WHAT SPEAKERS SAID

- **From the spa to the whole stay.** A speaker in the session said, as a personal view, that a hotel does not need a spa or a sauna to offer wellbeing, and Christine Skaar said the experience is not just a spa facility in the basement or on the sixth floor.
- **From how it looks to how it feels.** Francesca Toman of Ches & Co said that, when creating the space for guests, it is very much about the feeling, and what actually creates it rather than just what something looks like, and Skaar said the aim is a lasting feeling, not a look.
- **From brand guidelines to a sensory roadmap.** Gerri Hansen said a brand is a world guests should feel they belong in, built from how it smells, tastes, feels, sounds and looks, not only from guidelines.
- **From smart rooms to simple rooms.** Matt Hulme advises clients to strip technology out of rooms, and Dee Gibson said a normal hotel can automate less and think about textures and touch points.
- **From a mood to a search query.** Rose Webb of Clermont Hotel Group said recent search insights showed people asking AI "what's the vibe like?", wanting to understand the atmosphere.
- **From time saved to time given back.** A Headland panellist said the hour saved on room lists became time for coffee chats, and that the housekeeping team feel listened to.



I personally don't think that there should be a formula for design. I think it's, again, very situational.

DEE GIBSON · Designer and Hotelier, Kalukanda House

STAKEHOLDER IMPLICATIONS · THE AUTHOR'S READING OF WHAT SPEAKERS SAID

- **Owners and general managers.** Ask whether a proper climate risk assessment has been run (Sarah Duncan).
- **Designers and architects.** Design for the hidden things, from ventilation to smell (Skaar), and consider what creates the feeling for guests, not just what something looks like (Toman).
- **People leaders.** Run a real probation, thank people simply and prepare managers before promoting them (Paul Sadler); Jacobi named building a culture as the takeaway (Michael Jacobi).
- **Technology and operations leads.** Ask whether a system lowers or adds to a team's stress, and bring the people along (Sandrine Zechbauer, a Headland panellist, Rebecca Prizeman).
- **Marketing and brand teams.** Pick four or five sensory assets to own (Hansen), and note that search insights showed people asking AI "what's the vibe like?" (Rose Webb).

13 · STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

What Independent Hoteliers Should Do Next.

Ten moves drawn from the sessions. Each names the speaker whose point it rests on and keeps to what that speaker said.

01 · ASK THE TWO FEELING QUESTIONS FIRST

Ask how the property feels, smells, tastes and sounds, and how you want guests to feel, before choosing palette, logo or soundtrack (Gerri Hansen).

02 · PICK FOUR OR FIVE SENSORY ASSETS YOU CAN OWN

Hansen advised picking four or five things a brand can truly own as multisensory brand assets.

03 · CHECK THE BASICS OF SLEEP

A speaker in the session listed blackout, acoustic privacy, mattress and bedding, temperature control, ventilation and simple lighting as non-negotiables. Christine Skaar named ventilation, smell, a too big dinner and blinking lights as hidden causes of poor sleep.

04 · ASK WHAT CREATES THE FEELING

Francesca Toman said that, when creating the space for guests, it is very much about the feeling, and what actually creates it rather than just what something looks like.

05 · STRIP OUT TECHNOLOGY A SHORT STAY DOES NOT NEED

A one or two night guest should not be confused about how to do the lighting (Matt Hulme).

06 · RUN A CLIMATE RISK ASSESSMENT THAT COVERS COMFORT

Sarah Duncan listed guest comfort and employee wellbeing among the physical risks of climate change and asked businesses whether they had conducted a proper climate risk assessment.

07 · THANK PEOPLE SIMPLY

Paul Sadler said recognition can be as simple as thanking people, with intranet shout-outs and a bottle of fizz; the Hotel of the Year mug for everyone cost about a thousand pounds.

08 · TRAIN BEFORE YOU PROMOTE

Prepare managers before handing them the keys, and promote across sites so nobody has to manage their friends (Sadler).

09 · TAKE THE BORING ADMIN OFF THE TEAM

A Headland Hotel panellist said the hotel looked for the really boring data and admin jobs to remove. Rebecca Prizeman said technology is not always the hardest part; it is bringing the people along.

10 · BUILD ACCESSIBILITY INTO THE DESIGN PROCESS

Ben Harper said accessibility was at the heart of the SeaSpace design, with the pool hoist one very small example. Dee Gibson said bedroom access was not thought through at first and is now part of the design process.

14 · FUTURE OUTLOOK AND CONCLUSION

Designed to Feel Good, and Kept That Way.

A best-read of where the thread is heading, using only the forecasts and plans speakers gave. These are the speakers' statements, not predictions from this report.

WHAT SPEAKERS EXPECTED

- **A golden era for hospitality.** Michael Jacobi said, as a firm believer, that hospitality will enter a golden era, with AI supporting hotels in a very smart way, because there is an opportunity to give people what they most need, deep and meaningful human interactions. Asked about the next ten years, Jacobi was not sure about ten years, because things are going so fast.
- **Talent as the strategic priority.** Jacobi said the priority is to get the best staff, look after them, and make the profession attractive to the next generation.
- **Personalised expectations.** Phillip Allsopp of Classic British Hotels & Resorts thought guests will come to expect recognition of how they want their room to smell and their pillows to be.
- **More integrated design.** Christine Skaar would like hospitality design to become more integrated, with designer, marketing and product development working together, and said independents can do that.
- **Hotter summers.** Sarah Duncan said that "we" are now reasonably expecting 40 degrees very soon, and for temperature increases to go up and last longer.

CONCLUSION

Across both stages, speakers connected wellbeing to how a hotel is designed and run. The thread ran from a decision about how a guest should feel (Hansen), through scent, light, sleep, sound and heat, to the team and the systems behind the stay. One hotelier was building a spa garden, while other speakers placed wellbeing in time, presence and human connection.

The examples were practical: a morning and an evening scent at one hotel, ventilation and blackout in the bedroom, restaurant acoustics (a speaker on the F&B session), a pool hoist, and time for a head housekeeper to talk with the team. Costs ranged from thanks and a mug for everyone at about a thousand pounds to lighting that Taylor put at about £25,000.



It enters a golden era because we have an opportunity to give people what they really need most, which is deep and meaningful human interactions.

Michael Jacobi · Managing Director, Scally Hotel Collection

CLOSING INSIGHT

Across the sessions, speakers tied wellbeing to deciding how guests should feel, to checking what a photograph does not show, and to looking after the people who deliver the stay.

Speaker names and roles follow the official show programme. Figures are as stated by the speakers, with their hedges kept.

INDEPENDENT HOTEL SHOW

Designed to feel good.

Across the Innovation Stage and the Hotel Business Stage, speakers described how independent hotels design for the wellbeing of guests and teams, from sleep, scent and light to calm operations and belonging.

INDEPENDENT HOTEL SHOW LONDON · 5–6 OCTOBER 2026