

DESIGN FOR THE DISPLACED
N° 2

Homeward Bound

Natasha Hussein transforms a HOSPITALITY ENVIRONMENT into a residential experience by considering each traveller's personal interests.



Her background in science and her interest in design and societal stories makes the founder of Laboratory of London – NATASHA HUSSEIN – an interesting addition to 'The Challenge'.

You want to shake up the world of hospitality. NATASHA HUSSEIN: Yes. Traditional hospitality environments are excellent places for resting, recharging and even exploring, but they are often static and grounded in one aesthetic, with broad customer segmentation. The result is an impersonal stay that makes people feel like guests rather than making them feel at home.

How do you propose changing this? With a hospitality concept that invites visitors to leave their mark on a space that also leaves a mark on them: a dynamic 'playground' for external and internal exploration. I'm describing a multisensory hospitality environment that offers a vibrant personalized adventure. Above all else, it makes the guest feel at home.

How have you tailored the concept to the individual guest? Every room – or 'residential experience' – is based on a guest's expressed interests. For example, a residence for the creative guest might include an art studio whose colours and patterns can be altered in accordance with specific desires.

What about other areas of the hotel? The basis is a 'personal exploration menu', a series of activities that allow the guest to try new and unexpected things, such as gardening,

molecular gastronomy and perfumery. In terms of food and drink, they can explore not only novel flavours but also mindfulness. Guests have the opportunity to create new flavours and surprising textures that they can reproduce at home. By selecting cooking, they become an active part of the space.

Tell us about the four values that are key to making people feel at home. Although ideas of home are associated with objects and environments, when we scratch beneath the surface we see that 'home' transcends artefacts, spaces or services. Home is a mental construct composed of four fundamental elements: security, familiarity, community and a sense of longing.

How have you translated these elements in your hotel concept? Security emerges from a feeling of safety that lets you be yourself. I envision an environment that enables a person to feel safe enough to undertake new experiences, like painting or dance. Familiarity lies in elements that are recognizable to particular guests. An example would be an interactive wall in the lobby that displays arabesque patterns or Italian Renaissance motifs, depending on a guest's native culture. Community is fostered in collaborative areas, like a garden where guests can work together and connect through their mutual interests. A sense of longing, or nostalgia, refers to the guest's past, present and future – who they are and what they could be – and, of course, a yearning to come back and stay with us.

Is this a luxury concept or can it extend into every level of hospitality? I think ideas of home and triggers that spark images of home should be on the minds of us all. It's one thing to keep someone safe from external conditions and quite another to make them feel nourished by the space they are in. I hope the essence of this concept can and will be applied to everything from budget accommodation to disaster shelters. – WG

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The various features of Natasha Hussein's hotel concept, adapt to the preferences of individual guests, who can alter spatial patterns and select activities from a 'personal exploration menu'.