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MAPS OUT SHARP-NOSED STRATEGIES TO FACE THE  
CHALLENGE AND OPEN SAFELY FOR BUSINESS

WIN

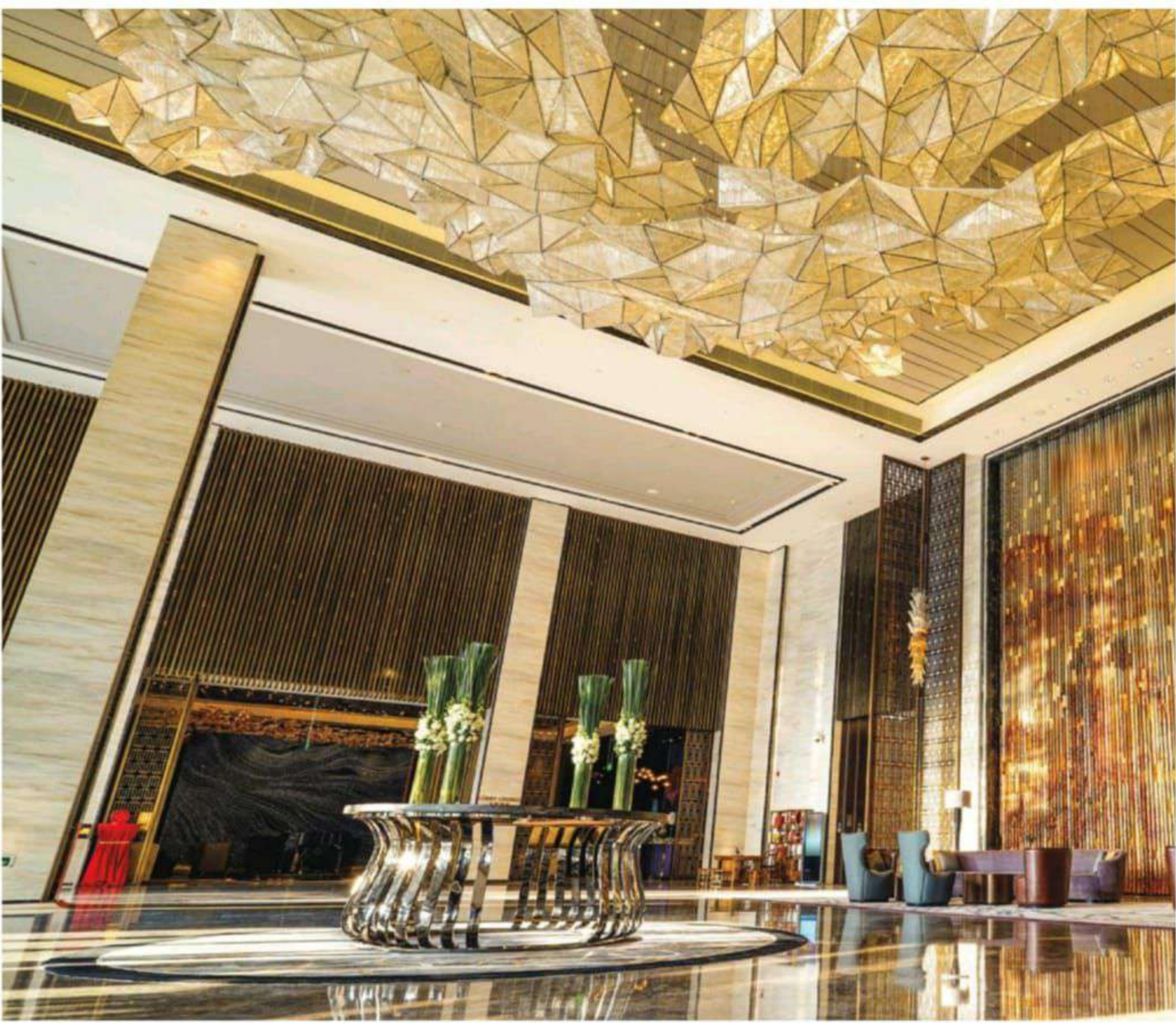
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# RETROFITTING HOTELS FOR A POST-COVID OPENING

Architects suggest a blend of design tweaks and technology to deal with issues of hygiene and social distancing, without investing heavily in redesign for the immediate future, and a game plan for the long run

BY NISHA SHUKLA

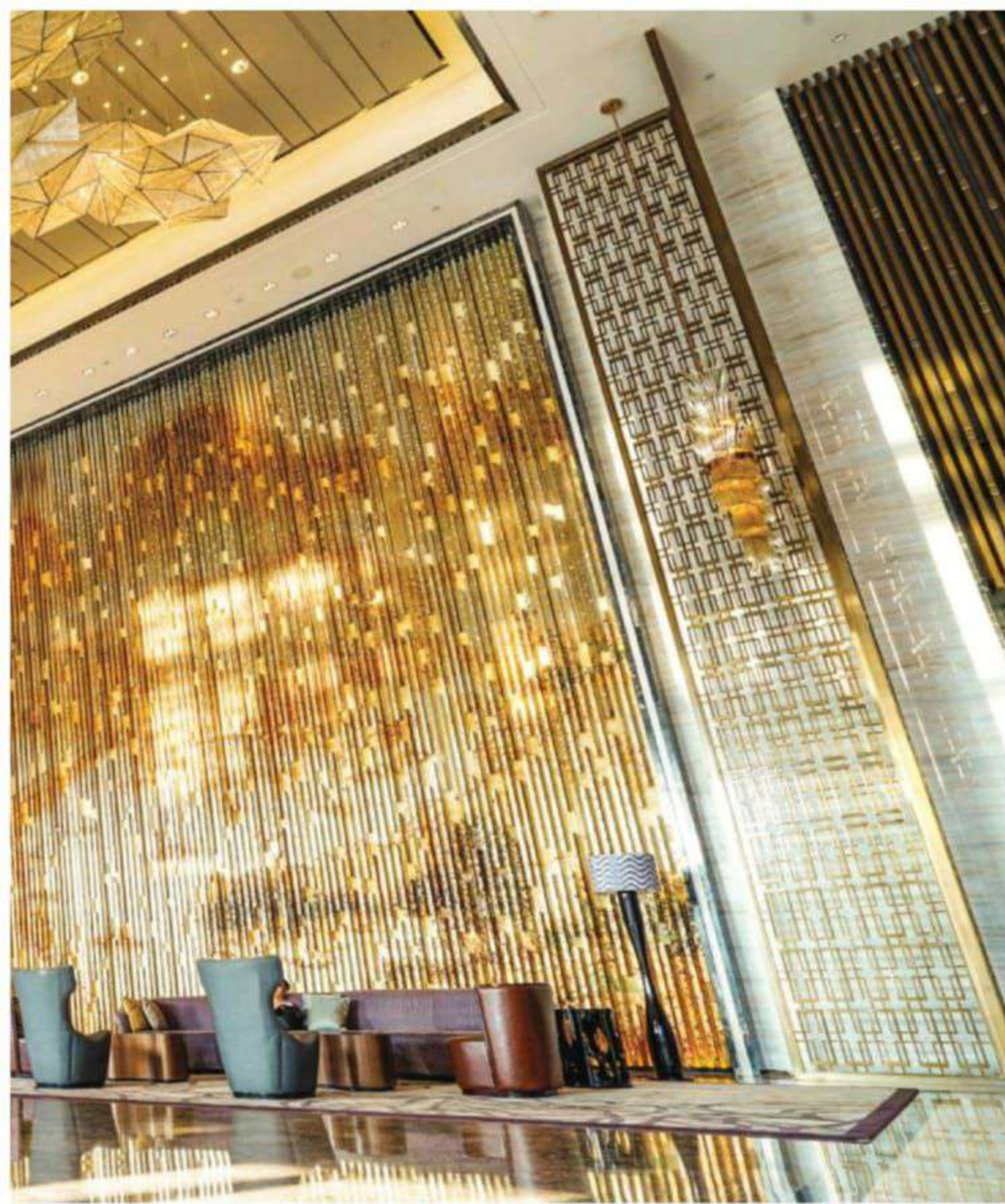
**E**ven as social distancing will be the new norm soon after the world opens its borders, and airlines and hotels gear up to fly and receive people, how we experience hotels and travel will change perhaps for a rather long time to come.

To start with, hotels have to put in place an infrastructure that allows social distancing and ramp up hygiene practices. For a while, the contactless experience will be the new normal. Hotels across

the globe are altering their existing design layouts to implement the measures spatially.

## Reimagining the spaces

The coronavirus pandemic has brought about a sea change in hotel operations and will hugely impact



As a short-term measure, the furniture in the high traffic areas such as F&B outlets should be placed at a certain distance to follow social distancing norms.

the way various spaces in the hotel will be designed and imagined. Architects and interior designers have been called upon to introduce short-term measures and new concepts for built spaces in hotels, in a bid to practice the new norm.

An industry that is already highly conscious about its hygiene practices and often measures its quality of services on sanitation levels will see a gradual shift towards adopting clinically hygiene standards. Several hospitality brands have incorporated certain SOPs that include maintaining considerable amounts of hygiene levels and social distancing. These SOPs and evident transformations will also result in amendments in design.

"The alteration will be manifested in habitual changes; sterilization may be subsumed as a part of the design itself and we may need to introduce pre-sanitisation areas in hotels. Also, the current air-conditioning systems, return air quality, indoor air quality and other technical aspects would need major attention to ensure that apt standards are maintained," says Architect Khozema Chitalwala of Designers Group.

He suggests it should be intelligently assimilated in the existing design and typology of the hotels, including in guest houses, budget hotels and luxury hotels, without jeopardising the aesthetics. "Designers should look at interior spaces with accommodation functionality or limited areas, where practicing social distancing can be problematic. Spaces such as banquets, F&B outlets, meeting rooms, dining spaces, especially sections where buffets are served, bar areas and even the public areas with similar regime out of hospitality, should be looked at," he adds.

#### Social distancing and space-saving measures

For the short term measure, hotels should focus on making some retrofits within existing layouts. Bobby Mukherji, Principal Architect, Bobby Mukherji & Associates (BM&A), suggests that the furniture in the lobby

area should be placed at a certain distance, with chairs that display cross mark indicating that those have to be left empty to follow social distancing norms, for the short term.

An optimistic Mukherji says that coronavirus will be a thing of the past in a year or two, once a vaccine has been developed or a cure discovered, and hoteliers should focus on implementing temporary measures rather than considering a design overhaul of the hotel.

De-cluttering hotels will be another measure for the immediate short-term. Vivek Singh Rathore, Design Principal, Salient Design Studio, says, "The only solution to overcome this conundrum is through de-cluttering of surfaces that obstruct natural light and air circulation, to avoid stagnation of microbial particles over contactable surfaces."

He recommends that hotels must tweak some spaces to set up isolation zones, sanitization zones and spatial buffers between each activity to have low operational and maintenance costs to accommodate commercial immunity in fluctuating occupancies. "The design of dining spaces, which are potential areas for germs to spread actively, should offer isolated and protected decontamination areas before each activity. Assurance of hygiene is the need of the hour for the hospitality industry to withstand the post-pandemic economic deflation," explains Rathore.

Creating spaces that allow for social distancing could lead to unnecessary wastage of space. So, it becomes essential for architects to zero down on a design that not only helps to maintain the required distance but also to utilise the spaces judiciously. "One cannot envisage what the post-pandemic situation would look like, nor has the government come up with any specific guideline for social distancing. When China reopened, they provided each desk at the schools with face guards, which are not viable in case of a hotel restaurant, an all-day diner or a coffee shop," explains Chitalwala.

Even, installing screens between two tables may also not be a



◉ Khozema Chitalwala, Principal Architect, Designers Group.



◉ Bobby Mukherji, Principal Architect, BM&A.

**“An optimistic Bobby Mukherji, Principal Architect, BM&A says that coronavirus will be a thing of the past in a year or two, once a vaccine has been developed or a cure discovered, and hoteliers should focus on implementing temporary measures rather than considering a design overhaul of the hotel.**

viable option as it may disintegrate the functional regime of hospitality space. "The solution to this problem," says Chitalwala "is that we divide the foot traffic into different areas, like the banquet area and coffee shop, at the time of buffets to follow social distancing and use the spaces efficiently."

Primarily, "the meals could be served in the rooms in a systematic and pre-packed manner depending upon the category of the hotel. All the existing spaces will go for a toss to incorporate social distancing in everyday life, as accommodating even 50% of the guests would not be possible for them," he adds.

#### Future-ready

However, if the virus continues to stay amidst humans and there is no cure found, it would enforce big changes in the overall planning of the hotel. In such a scenario, states Mukherji, "Spaces such as restaurants and entrance lobbies will be designed in a much bigger manner as compared to existing layouts. Besides, the furniture in these spaces will be placed at a minimum gap of six feet." Citing an example, he says, "For a 100-cover restaurant, earlier 2,000sq.ft of space was sufficient. With social distancing norms to be followed, the same restaurant will now call for a 4,000sq.ft space."

In the future, most new resorts that will be constructed will put nature at their centre. Rathore suggests that the design for the resorts should consist of minimum technological influence, while the city-stacked hotels should be designed flexibly, keeping in mind the times of emergency. "The new design alterations in the hotel should ensure wellness and have low operational costs. Practices such as isolated modular units and open common area formats should be introduced. The hotel design should be flexible so that in time of emergency, it can be effortlessly converted into quarantine facilities," he adds.

#### The contactless experience

The 'contactless' experience will be a requisite for hotels opening up once



◉ The Swig bar and lounge, designed by Salient Design Studio, aptly denotes social distancing norms. Post-COVID, chairs without armrests will be an ideal option, as they help reduce contact with the surface.