

SLEEPER

HOSPITALITY EXPERIENCE & DESIGN



MONDRIAN – IBIZA • WILLIAM HEINECKE • GUNDARI – FOLEGANDROS

Lab to Lobby

TFE Hotels trials a hospitality concept that operates in beta mode, resulting in a stay that constantly evolves in response to guest feedback.

Words: Eleanor Howard • Photography: © Silke Briel (unless otherwise stated)

Modular furniture, app-operated doors and a self-serve bar – these are just a few of the experimental ideas being trialled at MM:NT, a mini-hotel laboratory in Berlin that will operate in an ongoing beta mode, constantly evolving in response to guest feedback.

The concept is developed by Adina Hotels – an aparthotel operator owned by Sydney-based TFE Hotels – together with design strategist Philippa Wagner and German hardware systems and furniture fittings manufacturer Häfele. Located in Berlin’s Hackescher Markt, the compact aparthotel is currently conducting a two-month experiment whereby guests stay for free in exchange for real-time qualitative feedback on the design, public spaces and overall experience. With an agile learning process, the innovative approach to development will allow TFE to adapt and refine the hotel experience to meet customer needs and desires, as well as emerging trends. It will also assist the operator in bringing new brands and hospitality experiences to market faster and more efficiently than a traditional hotel build.

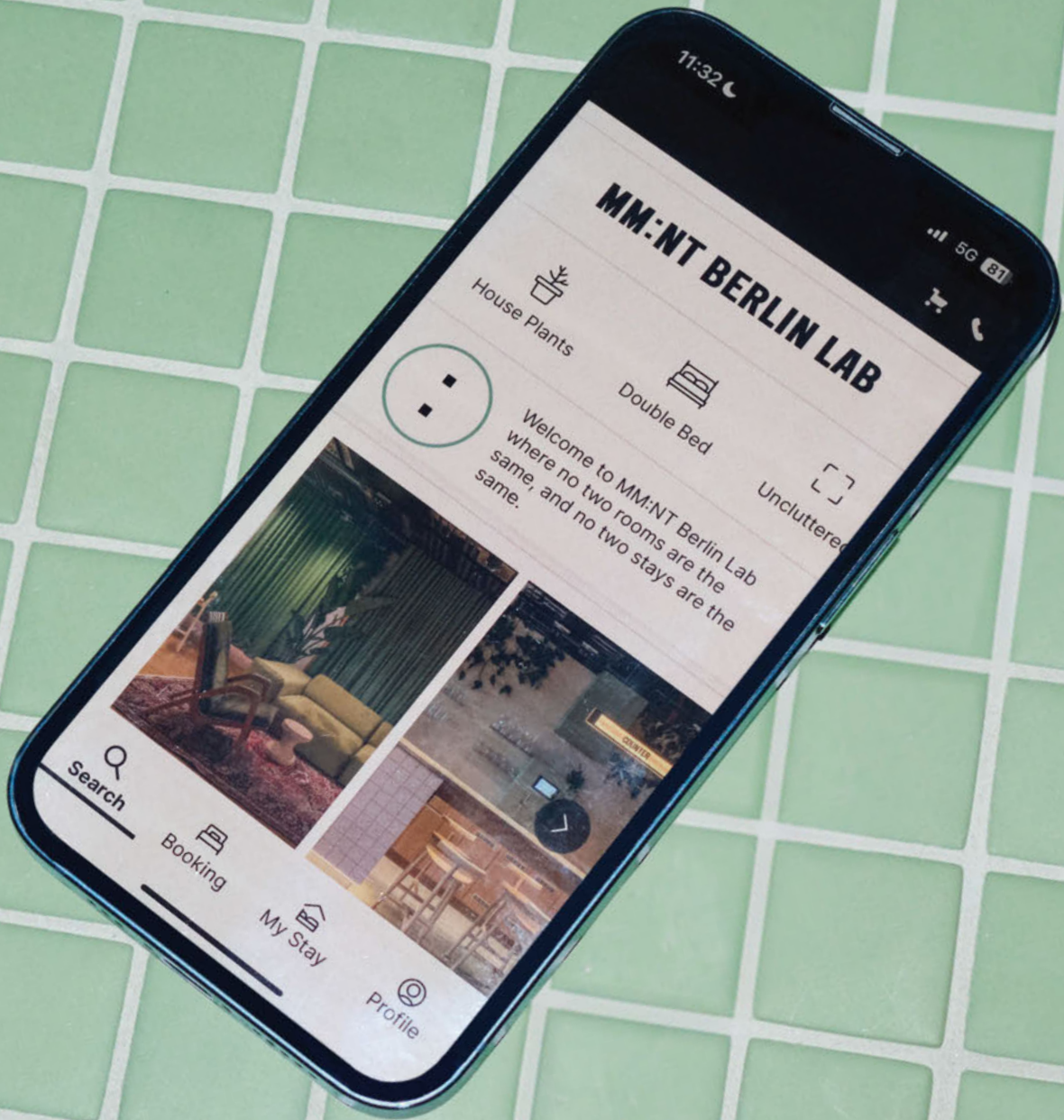
The trial sees guests recruited via social media test out six distinct rooms, each a different interpretation

of the brand manifesto, with variations ranging from design and storage solutions to room flow and bathroom styles, yet all designed using materials within the re-use, return or recycle phase. MM:NT operates with a self-serve model, providing easy-to-use in-room digital functions controlled via a concierge web-based mobile app. For example, tech-savvy guests can check-in, check-out, open doors, access shared amenities and communicate with staff all from their smartphones.

“MM:NT Berlin Lab exists to test market reactions to new ideas and innovations,” explains Asli Kutlucan, CEO at Adina Europe. “Our theory is that there is a cohort of Gen Z and Millennial travellers in particular who are open to new ways of interacting with hotel services. We’re therefore using MM:NT Berlin Lab to explore various hotel interfaces to see how we can adapt to changing behaviours and demands. Berlin is the ideal location for our beta hotel as it attracts the culturally curious and is a mecca for change-makers and creative minds.”

SETTING STANDARDS

Such an out-of-the-box concept begs the question – where to begin? Wagner and the TFE team first set



11:32

5G

MM:NT BERLIN LAB

House Plants

Double Bed

Uncluttered

Welcome to MM:NT Berlin Lab where no two rooms are the same, and no two stays are the same.

Search

Booking

My Stay

Profile



“MM:NT exists to test market reactions to new ideas and innovations. We’re therefore using the lab to explore various hotel interfaces to see how we can adapt to changing behaviours and demands.”

ASLI KUTLUCAN

out to develop a design brief that captured their desire to maximise space without sacrificing experience, whilst also ensuring every aspect comes with consideration and purpose – for both people and planet. They also specified that the interiors should be flexible, with spaces that can adapt as and when required.

The concept is further built on four distinct design pillars: seamless interaction between digital and shared spaces; intuitive and efficient service, supported by enhanced design touchpoints and layout; standardised guestrooms to ensure brand consistency, along with public spaces that are unique to each location; and warm and welcoming interiors that soften the lab’s digital backdrop.

These pillars were presented to lead interior designer Acme – responsible for envisioning four of the guestrooms and communal areas – and to Viennese firm BWM Designers & Architects and Häfele, who conceived the remaining two guestrooms. MM:NT also enlisted London- and Hong Kong-based creative practice HATO to conceptualise the lab’s branding, visual identity and low-impact website.

SOCIAL SPACES

The beating heart of the lab is the Lounge, a public-facing lobby kitted out by Acme with plantlife, vintage pieces and recycled furniture, in line with MM:NT’s conscious hospitality ethos. Offering opportunities for guests to both relax and socialise, the sprawling space is divided into various set-ups.

Upon entry, guests are greeted by The Snug, a cosy corner featuring an olive green sofa upholstered with recycled polyester fabric by Vescom, a vintage tapestry rug in shades of pinks, purples and reds, and a small table made

from recycled materials by Smile Plastics. It is here where guests will first interact with the lab’s unique self-serve model in the form of The Hub – built-in lockers and shelves where groceries, laundry and meals can be delivered. The Häfele-built structure also contains complimentary extras such as toasters, pillows, board games and salt and pepper, as well as paid-for upgrades such as hair straighteners, a steamer, yoga mat and further kitchen equipment, which are available upon request through the web app. “Within a 350-key aparthotel, there could be a toaster in every room, but probably only 20–30% of guests use it,” notes Wagner. “Yet every time someone stays in the room, it has to be cleaned, it will need to be serviced, which adds to costs. Our logic is that guests can have it for free, they just have to request to borrow it via the app as and when it’s needed.” The system helps to reduce consumption, the number of staff required for administrative tasks and the cleaning of unused items, enabling increased focus on delivering a great guest experience.

The self-serve journey continues at The Counter, a multi-purpose bar clad in eco-friendly tiles from Smile Plastics. By day, it functions as a café offering self-pour coffee and sandwiches, before morphing into a bar after 5pm serving locally-sourced natural wine and pilsner. An adjacent co-working area features a bespoke table also by Smile Plastics, surrounded by Snøhetta chairs manufactured using recycled ocean plastic in collaboration with Nordic Comfort Products.

BETA BEDROOMS

In the spirit of simplicity and transparency – two of MM:NT’s brand pillars – the guestrooms

are divided into three categories: Little, Middle and Big, each offering comfort and convenience in equal measure, with minimalist interiors that focus on textured materials. “We want to let the textures speak for themselves and create a soothing atmosphere for the rooms,” explains Wagner. “That way, there’s no need for any accessories, which keeps FF&E costs down – a saving we can pass on to guests.”

Designed by Acme, the largest guestroom comprises a compact kitchenette complete with a Foresso worktop made from recycled woodchip, and an open-plan living and dining area accompanied by a birch veneer table. Walls and flooring are lined with recycled sage green glass tiles, which then transition to bamboo, signifying a designated area for sleep and another for recreation. Acme has also utilised Häfele’s smart systems and lighting control, with three settings: vitality, social and relax. Based on a traditional 19th-century Dutch design, the closet-bed is crowned by a Davide Groppi moon-shaped light suspended above. There’s also an extra fold-down bed for family use; modular and flexible furniture throughout allows the space to transform for various functions, from co-working to dining.

“Calm, uncluttered spaces are essential to the MM:NT Berlin Lab experience. Modular construction and using natural and recycled materials were essential to creating this,” says Friedrich Ludewig, Director of Acme. “Compact rooms with smart storage solutions and built-in features to make the most of the available square metre.”

Befitting of the good-things-come-in-small-packages adage, the two Little rooms, also envisioned by Acme, feature the essentials with modular storage to make the most of the



compact space. The interiors follow a similar design scheme, with bathrooms adorned in either vibrant terracotta or sage green tiles with recycled polyester drapes acting as partitioners. Despite having the most compact floorplates at 11-14m², the Little rooms feature the largest vanities and beds from Swissfeel or Auping, alongside recycled post-industrial plastic waste sinks from Durat and rainshowers. Guests in these rooms also have access to the Little Lounge, fitted with a streamline breakfast bar countertop suitable for eating or working, as well as a selection of artworks by Berlin-based artists rented from agency Artiq.

“We made rich shared spaces possible by re-thinking typical apartment hotel layouts,” explains Ludewig. “For example, instead of each guestroom having its own small table and chair, we created compact bedrooms and a shared lounge, a social space for coworking, and somewhere to enjoy a drink or bite to eat.”

While Acme’s Middle Room takes signature elements such as tiling and furniture from

its larger and smaller counterparts, BWM envisioned an alternative interpretation of the 19m² room category, with a modular design brought to life through pull out seating and foldable wall panels that double as a desk. The compact kitchenette is complete with a Foresso recycled worktop, and drawers and cupboards that are controlled by Häfele locks that can be opened through the concierge app.

Following Acme’s lead, the Viennese firm opted for a similar sage, beige and wood scheme to create a welcoming and calming atmosphere. Ambient lighting fixtures from Nemo Lighting, such as the Lampe De Marseille wall lamp and Flos Bellhop LED table lamps, cast a gentle glow, while soft furnishings add a touch of comfort and Mid-Century style, with the Hay Rey chairs upholstered in Kvadrat Steelcut Trio 416 and a black Normann Copenhagen stool complemented by a pale pink carpet.

Reflecting on BWM’s interpretation of the brief, Partner Erich Bernard comments: “Room 00:02 is not just a space; it’s a testament to

our commitment to innovative design solutions that prioritise both form and function. With its transformative features and sustainable ethos, 00:02 sets a new standard in contemporary living experiences.”

The remaining Room 00.03 was created by Häfele to showcase furniture and digital technologies designed to personalise the guest experience and enhance operational efficiency.

QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS

At the time of Sleeper’s visit, MM:NT Berlin was midway through its two-month trial period, welcoming guests for one, two or three-night stays. As the lab enters the next stage of the experiment, the MM:NT team will begin analysing guests’ qualitative feedback from videos and surveys input through the app and adjust the concept accordingly. With the hotel opening for official bookings in Summer 2024, the lab will continue to operate in beta mode, with future guests continuing to help shape the spaces and services on offer.