



The sound of a place has enormous power



Meet Rob Wood: Creative Director and founder of Music Concierge

Our regular blog readers know that sensory branding, besides being one of our key areas of expertise, is something that truly makes our hearts beat faster. In times of growing competition, functionally interchangeable hotel products and ever more demanding guests, hotel brands must deliver and wow all five senses. It's no longer enough to appeal to just one or two. Your guests need to experience your hotel brand on every single level. Therefore, as you might already have guessed: we couldn't be more excited to meet the founder and creative director of Music Concierge, Rob Wood. Music Concierge specialises in creating sounds for brands and spaces.

So, let's kick this off and dive deep into the world of sound. Learn from Rob how music influences the way your hotel guests think, feel and behave, as well as how Rob and his team can tell your hotel brand's story through music.

Dear Rob, thank you so much for taking the time for this MA people meets. To begin with, can you explain our readers what Music Concierge is all about and what made you start your company back in 2007?

I have always loved collecting music ever since I started buying records around 8 or 9 years old. Hand in hand with that I have also always been passionate about sharing music – helping people discover music that they didn't know they love. Both of those things led me to a very happy career as a DJ collecting records, selecting them for different audiences, and working as a music journalist investigating even more artists and tracks and then writing about these wonderful pieces of music to give them exposure. I was literally writing about music during day, and playing it during the night. It took me all over the world interviewing bands and musicians, DJing at clubs and festivals.

By the time I was editor of a cult music magazine called Jockey Slut, different brands started approaching me asking me to choose music for their marketing communications in line with their brand and audience. One such company was Mr & Mrs Smith/Smith Hotels. They asked me to put together a CD series as they thought music and travel were natural bedfellows. The CDs were well received and I started being asked to DJ in boutique hotels.

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I quickly realised that boutique hotels were all about the individual personality of the hotel and way it appealed to the human senses. Most hotels I came across were using music very poorly, often in an annoying or clichéd way. So I conceived an agency with a rich music knowledge, which understands how to define a brand through music, whilst emotionally appealing to an audience. Such an agency could help brands stand out and sound amazing. Hence the birth of Music Concierge.

Getting the sound of a hotel brand right is as important as its design and service. How does music influence the hotel atmosphere and the behaviour of guests?

From the moment you cross the threshold the music should set the scene for the arrival experience. In this area we might be looking to relax people after their long journey with calming music, or depending on the design ethos and architecture looking to heighten a sense of awe or wonder as people take in an incredible lobby design. For hip brands we might be trying to convey a sense of surprise or credibility through tastemaker music choices; whilst for an elegant 5 star we may well be looking to evoke the essence of the building and brand's heritage.

In F&B (food & beverage) zones we are usually trying to make people comfortable with an inviting atmosphere. Sometimes that might be relaxing, at other time stimulating, depending on the time of day and F&B concept. Ultimately we want to create atmospheres people love hanging out in and coming back for more. That would even apply to library or gym experiences. The perfect subtle pensive playlist for browsing through a wonderful book collection; or an energising uplifting gym soundtrack that gives the fitness experience a difference. It is all about setting the right tone and being tasteful, whilst creating a memorable listening experience that puts people in the right mood and emotionally connects with them.

Sound impacts our mood and psychological state, music is a great tool to create unforgettable experiences and long-lasting memories for guests. Considering this fact, why do you think that hotels and brands in general often put so little thought into their music selection? Since 2007, do you see any changes/improvements in regards to this?

Historically I don't think hotels knew how to handle music beyond paying a pianist or putting a Café-Del-Buddha Bar clichéd CD on. They know that music lifts the spirits and encourages people to have a good time and dwell for longer, but they do not have the budgets to put on a great band or really good DJ every night. So hotels often end up with tired, clichéd music via a pianist doing covers of awful pop songs, or a lame jazz trio who look completely bored, or the bar manager has put some entirely inappropriate music via his CD or ipod.

The truth is music needs to be carefully considered curated by someone who knows what they are doing. Everyone has an opinion on music of course, but that does not mean they can curate music around the hotel's brand character, a restaurant's concept, or its trading pattern. We all like food, but we should leave the design of menus to the chef! When a hotel has found a good music consultant, it is then important to make sure they have the licensing and technical solutions for delivering, managing, updating and supporting that music. Hotels are waking up to this – they know they need a music solution but are they choosing a high quality one that supplies music perfectly tailored to the brand and guest experience – that is the key question, especially as the F&B and hotel markets get ever more competitive. They need to stand out with amazing design, great brand character, and brilliant sensory experiences – that should be their mission!

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You work with some amazing hotel companies such as Swire Hotels, COMO Hotels & Resorts as well as luxury brands as Mulberry and Harvey Nichols. How do their music concepts differ? What makes each one unique?

Our music team spend time with our client stakeholders to understand and break down the brand DNA, the design ethos, the audience, and each specific space or proposition. We want to understand the vision and the type of customer experience they are looking to create. So for existing properties that means visiting on the ground, or for pre-opening it means working closely with the marketing, design and operations teams to understand the project in depth. We then use that research to create a unique music concept for each brand that is broken down into different zones and times of day. Hence the music for COMO Uma Paro in Bhutan has an understated beauty relating back to the COMO brand alongside an authentic essence of the magical kingdom of Bhutan itself. Whilst the music at The Middle House in Shanghai fulfils Swire's brand promise of creating a forward-thinking take on contemporary luxury that appeals to a new generation of affluent Shanghai millennial tastemakers and entrepreneurs. Every project is different!

We at MA people are specialised in crafting innovative hotel concepts and brands: what makes a hotel experience a truly outstanding one for you personally?

For me personally I want a hotel experience to be an escape from the every day. It needs to have a sense of discovery whether that is through the design, food, art, books or indeed music. That needs to be done on a human level rather than through opulence. So that might translate as warm and friendly service which is very on the ball, or wonderful design without being garish or elitist. The whole experience needs to be utterly intriguing and special, but also approachable and open-hearted.

Rob Wood, former DJ and music journalist, is the founder and Creative Director of Music Concierge – a company that specialises in using background music to create unique atmospheres and distinct brand identities for clients all over the world.

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