

HYB26

Annual Edition

Converging Forces – The Future is
Hybrid by Design



The Hotel Yearbook

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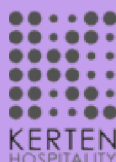
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Intentional Hybridity: Designing with Passion

Hybrid hospitality

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Drawing on Kerten Hospitality's methodology and case studies, Marloes Knippenberg shows how purpose led frameworks, deep local engagement, and embedded ESG can create scalable projects that stay authentic, coherent, and adaptive as guest expectations and societal demands evolve.

Everywhere I look, forces are colliding: digital vs. human, global vs. local, standardization vs. personalization, revenue vs. responsibility. By default, collision leads to friction, but only if we cling to the purity of one side over the other. I see far greater opportunity in intentionally fusing these forces, transforming tension into generative energy.

At Kerten Hospitality, we have been weaving together polarities since our foundation. Intentional hybridity is one of our guiding principles. What follows are reflections on what I've learned and how we put hybridity into practice in an age defined by convergence.

WHY INTENTIONAL HYBRIDITY MATTERS

Convergence is everywhere. Guests expect an automated check-in alongside a warm human welcome. Dining venues must meet global culinary standards with local ingredients. Local communities demand inclusion and benefits from global developers. Social responsibility sits alongside revenue imperatives. These contradictions don't disappear. They intensify.

I think that pure models which are completely tech-led, completely branded, or completely standardized will increasingly struggle to resonate with consumers. And equally, purely boutique, purely artisan or wholly local concepts without systems will battle to survive and scale.

If we allow hybrid models to evolve randomly, we incur dissonance. Experiences feel fragmented, brands lose coherence, communities feel alienated, and staff become confused. Instead, we should cultivate hybridity by design, meaning that from day one we build in the polarities of the spectrum rather than choosing one and hoping the other falls into place.

HYBRID METHODOLOGY IN THE KERTEN LENS

So, how does intentional hybridity play out in practice? Over many years of launching hotels, residences, F&B brands, and mixed-use projects, we've refined a methodology that embeds hybridity into major decisions. Complexity is the medium in which we operate. Here's how we do that.

PURPOSE FIRST, ALWAYS

We start every project by asking: why should this hotel, brand or destination exist? Understanding the "why" before the "how", we set out to find the hallmark of each project, asking ourselves how we can make a difference. Whether it is empowering entrepreneurs, driving sustainability, or creating immersive cultural experiences, the reason must go beyond profit and become the compass for all other trade-offs.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT VERSUS GLOBAL BENCHMARKS

We send our research teams into a location and involve all key stakeholders: owners, investors, developers, architects, suppliers, local government entities, and people from the local community. We deep-dive into questions such as: what are your wishes for this development? How can we add value? What does the local community need?

At the same time, we bring in global standards around management, guest service, sustainability and technology while aligning with overarching government and country visions and regulations. This ensures that while the experience is locally rooted, it also meets the benchmarks that owners, investors, and international guests expect. We engage deeply, invite pushback, and reconcile conflicts. That's how we marry global vision with local pulse. It's also how we detect friction zones early.

FRAMEWORK VERSUS CURATION

Rather than a rigid formula of processes and procedures, we use a hybrid structure: a framework of guidelines on top of which we curate bespoke features for each project. This is a complex process because every destination we build and concept we launch is deeply rooted in a human-centric purpose to support the local community and serve as a catalyst for a new ecosystem. We have spent years meticulously building the framework, so it strikes a balance between guidelines on the one hand and the disruption which inherently comes with curation on the other hand.

This framework is reinforced by a "Story Document," a living blueprint which outlines the concept vision, guest experience and operational approach and serves as a reference for aligning all teams and stakeholders throughout the entire project. It helps keep coherence as we scale, while letting each project shine with its unique personality.

REVENUE VERSUS RESPONSIBILITY

For us at Kerten Hospitality, revenue growth and social responsibility are not opposing forces. They advance together. ESG principles and revenue performance are integrated within our business model to ensure long-term value creation. Through UBBU (United Building a Better Universe), our ESG framework, we embed social responsibility into operations and governance, moving beyond compliance to deliver measurable impact on all fronts.

We are a UN PRI signatory, the world's leading advocate for responsible investment, and when we launch projects, we integrate carbon reduction, local sourcing, and social impact into the DNA rather than bolting them on later. Guests notice when sustainability is an afterthought versus when it is the backbone.

Unlike traditional hotel groups, we don't replicate templates; we build purpose-driven spaces that deliver strong returns and long-term value. Because of our hybrid methodology, we can launch hotels, residences, workspaces and F&B brands without losing coherence, and enable rapid, scalable execution without sacrificing the bespoke element.

HYBRIDITY IN PRACTICE

Nothing illustrates intentional hybrid design more clearly than ***Dar Tantara The House Hotel*** in AlUla, Saudi Arabia. Rather than building a new boutique hotel, the hotel was shaped entirely by the destination's history and cultural fabric. The hotel was born from centuries-old mud-brick houses, restored with great care to preserve authenticity, while simultaneously installing discreet modern comforts. The design language draws from local materials, earthy tones, organic forms, but upgraded with operational systems, digital management, and quality protocols. Guests are invited into experiences that go beyond a typical stay: candlelit pathways, traditional rituals, and sensory storytelling, transforming the hotel into a cultural gateway where the brand's identity is inseparable from its setting.

The property is a microcosm of hybridity: rooted in locality, but global in standards; ancient but modern; immersive but efficient; environmentally responsible but revenue driven. It demonstrates that hybrid design isn't a compromise. It's convergence with intent.

The same concept can be applied to other hospitality projects including F&B. An example is ***Nakhati***, a purpose-driven gelato brand, designed to empower women entrepreneurs and foster sustainable business ownership across borders. Nakhati is as a social movement, blending sustainability, cultural craftsmanship, and scalable business potential. Each Nakhati location adapts flavors to local ingredients, infuses cultural motifs, sources locally, and co-creates with local artisans. At the same time, a global franchise framework ensures consistency, efficiency, training, and quality. Nakhati is a powerful demonstration of how social responsibility and business success can go hand in hand to drive meaningful impact.

FUSING FUTURE CONTRADICTIONS INTO COHERENCE

From where I stand, here's how hybridity is likely to evolve in the near future.

Travel and living will converge further. We will increasingly design lifestyle destinations where residents, locals, and visitors coexist fluidly in mixed-use ecosystems, integrating serviced residences, collaborative workspaces, F&B, retail, and entertainment into one seamless experience of hybrid living.

Buildings, interiors, and services will be designed for adaptation. Modular design will mean that walls, rooms, tech modules etc. can be reconfigured over time to meet new operational needs. Communal spaces can evolve in response to changing cultural and guest expectations, keeping the destination relevant and engaging. Partnerships with local creators, artists, and entrepreneurs will bring a dynamic layer of renewal with rotating experiences that continuously refresh the sense of place.

Sustainability, social goals, community benefits and impact metrics will cease to be optional. They will become design constraints, enforced by regulation. Future developments will be evaluated not just for yield, but for social impact, local sourcing, and heritage preservation. Every roof, water system, procurement process, and staff structure will embed ESG principles as core architecture, not afterthoughts.

Finally, I expect governance models to become more hybrid, combining centralized oversight with local stakeholder advisory councils, citizen input and adaptive boards. The tension between control and autonomy will be built in by design. We will see new business models emerge in the form of social franchises, co-ownership, participative ventures with locals, and impact partnerships that align investors with community-driven operators. Blending capital and community will become the new normal, as investors increasingly seek purpose that is aligned with profit.

Where does this lead? To a future where hospitality isn't rigid, where places are not simply hotels or residences, guests aren't simply consumers, and culture isn't décor, but where all these layers intersect intentionally and meaningfully.

We are in the age of convergence where complexity is no longer a challenge to be solved but a medium to be shaped. With a multitude of convergences in hospitality, the question is how we choreograph it. Intentional hybridity offers the blueprint: a way to design with tension, not against it, and to create destinations that are as adaptive and alive as the people they serve.

