

Never judge a hotel by its cover

Alto Hotel on Bourke is Melbourne's newest, 4 star CBD apartment hotel.

Its early 20th century façade masks a contemporary interior that features cutting-edge, environmentally friendly technology.

Alto Hotel's 'eco design' and sustainability principles have delivered both business advantages and recognition.

It has achieved a 4 Green Stars rating with the RACV and the AAAT and it received the "Business 3000" Award for 'Community Responsibility' from the City of Melbourne in 2006.

Alto Hotel has 50 rooms, ranging from studios to 1, 2 and 3 bedroom apartments and employs 22 people.

KEY SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES

Alto Hotel owners, Suzanne and Ricardo Krauskopf, are committed to running a business that is commercially viable and environmentally sustainable.

Prior to opening Alto Hotel in 2006, the couple redeveloped a heritage component and constructed an entirely new wing. Throughout this process, they wanted to minimize the overall 'footprint' of their business and sought to address issues such as

- Energy use;
- Water use; and
- Waste management, including the safe use and disposal of chemicals.

APPROACH AND RESULTS

The Krauskopf's looked to both technology and improved systems to achieve their goals.

The couple estimate that their 'eco' approach increased initial building costs by \$450,000 but can clearly see the return on investment, including;

- Savings of up to \$50,000 per year in terms of expenses related to electricity, water, gas and chemicals, and;
- Increased good-will, resulting in increased revenue and profit.



They approached their key challenges as follows:

Reducing energy use

- Hot water is heated by gas "on demand", creating enormous energy savings. Despite having 57 bathrooms and a commercial kitchen, the Alto only holds 630 litres of hot water in reserve. Most suburban household tanks hold 200 litres !;
- 100% of electricity used at Alto Hotel is "Green Earth Electricity" purchased from Origin Energy. While this costs approximately 20% more, Suzanne and Ricardo consider it affordable due to the enormous energy savings made through other management efforts. It also impresses guests which translates into good-will, i.e. return guests!
- All rooms are fitted with energy saving key-tags that switch off all lighting and A/C on leaving the rooms;
- Normal air-conditioners have 2 star energy consumption rating; the inverter technology used at Alto Hotel delivers 6 Star energy consumption rating. The Hotel's air-conditioning units also have a "movement sensor technology" which sense if the room is occupied. If there is no movement, it switches itself off;
- Alto Hotel's windows open – a feature that reduces demand for air-conditioning. All windows are double-glazed and those windows facing north and west have an internal glass panel which lowers heat penetration in summer and restricts heat loss in winter. An added bonus is noise abatement;
- 95% of all primary light globes - ceiling lights in rooms and public areas - use only 18 watts or less. More than 50 % of secondary lighting uses 11 watts or less.



Reducing water use

- Showers and taps have water flow restrictors [and Alto Hotel still receives compliments for its showers!];
- Washing machines are "Front Loading";
- Toilets have a "AAA Water" rating;
- A 1500 litre rain-harvesting tank is used for all gardening and yard cleaning

Improved waste management

- The Hotel only uses recycled paper, including printed items, toilet paper and tissues;
- Guests can opt to not have their toweling and linen changed daily,
- Recyclable rubbish is separated in the same manner as in residential homes; by glass, paper and general waste - a practice not normally associated with commercial hotels;
- Guests can contribute by sorting their refuse into recycling and non-recycling bins located in each room;
- A 1500 litre rain-harvesting tank is used for all gardening and yard cleaning;
- An Eco-Organics bin to compost all vegetable matter from the commercial kitchen;
- The Alto Hotel has installed re-fillable pump-action toiletry dispensers to reduce waste resulting from disposal of miniature shampoo & conditioner bottles and their chemical contents – often up to 30% full !

MOTIVATION

Suzanne and Ricardo believe their childhood on farms influenced their commitment to care of the environment. Their twenty-year 'love affair' with worm composting also created a ripple effect in their decision-making.

"We're not fanatics. We're just genuinely interested in sustainability and can see that it will deliver business advantages and minimise damage to future generations", said Ricardo.

INSIGHTS

Every business and every industry faces particular challenges. According to Ricardo, Hoteliers should not spend time trying to fix problems that are beyond their scope.

For example, Alto Hotel is not able to install solar energy.

While the Hotel is only six floors high, most neighboring buildings are above 30 floors, allowing for very few sunny hours on any one day.

The hospitality sector also threw up particular challenges.

Alto Hotel hoped that its close proximity to trains and trams would encourage staff to use public transport – another way of reducing our overall impact on the environment.

But shift work and work practices proved to be a barrier. The Hotel's employees can start work early and finish late – times when there are reduced public transport options.

THE FUTURE

Ricardo and Suzanne hope to further reduce their energy consumption and CO2 emissions by introducing sensor technology into their internal corridors.

Alto Hotel is also keen to support and progress B2B programs that will encourage like-minded businesses to support each other.

"By matching up companies with similar philosophies we can create amazing commercial opportunities for each other. Care for the environment and profits are not mutually exclusive !," concluded Ricardo.

Alto Hotel has become a mentor for "*Grow Me The Money*" – a program that seeks to encourage other businesses to start environmentally friendly practices. Mentors act as a point of reference to interested businesses and provide advice on how to get started.

CONTACT DETAILS

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The Alto Hotel is a member of the Hotel, Motel Accommodation Association (HMMA), the peak body for the accommodation sector in Victoria, representing establishments ranging from 5-star hotels and motels through to B&Bs.

HMAA is a dynamic organisation whose main aim is to protect and advance the interests of its accommodation members at local, state and federal government level. HMAA also supports members in areas relating to the operational needs, profitability and the sustainability of the accommodation industry.

For more information please contact HMAA Executive Officer on (03) 8662 5140 or email: hmaa@vecci.org.au.