

PROJECT: BUSINESS PLAYGROUND
DESIGNER: MATHIEU LEHANNEUR
CLIENT: PULLMAN HOTELS AND
RESORTS
FIRST LOCATION: LONDON
CAPACITY: 12

RAISING THE STAKES

A conference room for Pullman Hotels and Resorts, by Mathieu Lehanneur, elevates the meeting and makes it as engrossing as a poker game

By Giovanna Dunmall / Photography by Didier Delmas





← On the coffee nook wall, Curiosity Boxes display custom knick-knacks.

↖ Corian ToolBoxes on the conference table provide visual interest and conceal clutter.

↑ Canopy Break caps the intimate lounge area and animates it with a projection of rustling trees.

MEETINGS CAN BE BORING, because conference rooms are often dull. When Paris designer Mathieu Lehanneur conceived the Business Playground for Pullman Hotels and Resorts, he asked himself, “How can I design a space that helps people have new ideas and behaviours, as well as smart, efficient meetings?” His first move: make the boardroom table more like a poker table at a luxury casino in Las Vegas or Macau. By edging the Corian top with leather-clad foam armrests, he managed to transform the participants’ posture and, he believes, their psychological dispositions. “It makes you lean forward rather than sit back in your chair and mentally check out.” The leather carries on beneath the table, adding an invisible layer of detail that Lehanneur says “is fundamental to the overall mood.”

This heightened ambience reflects French hotel group Accor’s desire to reposition its upscale Pullman brand, and make it more appealing to a new generation of tech-savvy travellers. The first conference room opened on the 15th floor of the London St Pancras location last November, and more will be rolled out in 2014 and beyond. “The frontier between business and pleasure is disappearing,” explains Xavier Louyot, Accor’s senior vice-president of global marketing. The group conducted an Ipsos survey, which found that many respondents attend to personal tasks during work hours, and the majority take their professional devices with them on holiday.

In choosing Lehanneur, Pullman opted for a designer known for

combining technology, psychology and nature to change a room’s atmosphere. In his Paris office for the global advertising agency JWT, the meeting rooms resemble caves, with plants that play music whenever someone brushes against them; and his products – including the soothing weather station Tomorrow Is Another Day – have been known to affect users’ emotions. This sensibility shines through in his faceted light canopy for Pullman, which integrates a white screen that projects an animated video of rustling trees. The canopy caps a more intimate lounge area, set against the backdrop of London’s skyline and furnished with Jaime Hayon’s loungers for BD Barcelona Design and a custom leather table. It takes you far away, if only for a moment.

Curated details throughout the space – including faceted Corian ToolBoxes on the table that conceal clutter, and mirrored Curiosity Boxes on the wall that can be filled with fruit, books or decorative objects – break up the conventional monotony of the boardroom landscape, and allow people to engage with the space and one another in new ways. “Often what they say before and afterwards, or during the breaks, is more interesting than what they say during the meeting itself,” observes Lehanneur. Defying the soulless nature of most hotel conference rooms, the Business Playground enhances every aspect of the meeting experience, including those vital in-between moments. **AZ** mathieulehanneur.fr