

HIP to be Here

What does it mean
to be hip? Let us
count the ways

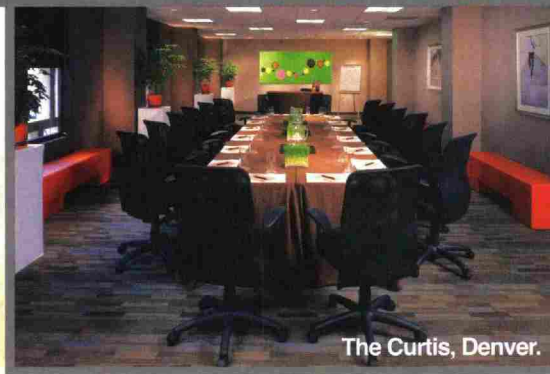
By Nikki Gloudeman



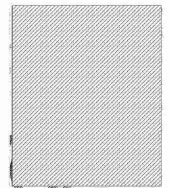
Hotel Diva, San Francisco.



Avalon Hotel, Beverly Hills, Calif.



The Curtis, Denver.





Pop quiz:

Which of these is hip?

- A) An opening bash for a modern art museum, with avant-garde paintings on the walls and a local DJ spinning tunes.
- B) A party at an Art Deco L.A. pad, with guests nursing brightly colored cocktails by the pool.
- C) A brand-new high rise in downtown San Francisco, with glass ceilings and a lobby decorated entirely in black and white.
- D) All of the above.

If you answered D), congratulations—you are officially a purveyor of cool, because those in the know understand that hip can mean a lot of things, so long as the attitude is fresh and the approach is outside-the-box.

Need proof? Take a look at the many hotels in the West that exude coolness. No one spot is the same as the next, but in their own distinct ways, each stands out from the crowd. For meeting planners, this means an experience like no other.

Just consider this your cheat sheet to hip meetings.



Avia Long Beach, Calif.

Hip to be...Retro

Lava lamps. Red Cadillacs. Jukeboxes. Bell-bottom jeans and giant sunglasses. These throwback images are retro because they evoke nostalgia for trendy times of the past. And so, too, do a string of retro hotels.

At the Sahara Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, visions of The Strip circa the mid-1960s spring to mind, when martinis were *du jour* and the dapper Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra ruled the scene. The venue is currently hosting a Rat Pack revue, and its outdoor pool—which provides 13,000 sq. ft. of event space—is surrounded by palm trees and cozy cabanas. Multiple rooms and suites are on tap for events, which can accommodate anywhere from 10–500 retro-loving attendees.

Over at the Avalon Hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif., the aesthetic inspiration is the so-called “patio lifestyle” of Southern California in the mid-20th century (think: poolside parties, colorful prints and California Modern architecture). The venue also has cabanas accented with bright wallpaper and retro mirrors and lamps, where attendees can kick back like cool kids from the Nifty Fifties. There’s also an intimate and swanky conference room for up to 20.

For a mix of old-school cool and the timeless allure of the ocean, the Surfer Beach Hotel in San Diego is a hard-to-beat choice. A bright Sunset Deck can accommodate up to 125 attendees, with first-

rate cuisine and views of the crashing waves. In addition to its retro-chic vibe, the Surfer Beach Hotel also includes an outdoor pool to swim in or (if you’re really hip) lounge by.

Hip to be...Funky

To understand *funky*, it’s best to think of funk music and its pulsating, off-rhythm vibrancy. Whether it’s the bluesy growl of James Brown or soulful verve of Sly and the Family Stone, funk music is always colorful, fresh and offbeat—in the best possible way. The same can be said of the West’s funkiest hotels.

Three cities in the West feature one of the innovative Avia hotels: The Woodlands, Texas; Napa, Calif.; and Long Beach, Calif. The boutique chain includes several lively flourishes, including splashes of purple throughout the Woodlands property and a brightly covered rooftop terrace at the Long Beach location. Moreover, the hotels are hip with what makes their surrounding areas unique.

According to Cheryl Gilliam, Avia’s vice president of brands and marketing, the developers in Long Beach “let the sun, sand and

surf influence the design aesthetic.” The Napa spot is rustic and refined, like the town and rolling vineyards around it. And the Woodlands property integrates the limestone that has long defined Texas properties.

Jessica Tullman, manager of product communications for Subaru of America, says Avia hotels are perfect for hip events. She would know—she hosted about 30 employees at the Long Beach property over New Year’s Eve, to correspond with a record-breaking rally-car jump in a Subaru vehicle. “With this over-the-top event, we didn’t want to be at a boring place,” she says. Thanks to Avia’s hip décor, lighting and rooftop terrace, she adds, it was anything but. For planners, Avia venues offer between 400 and 4,500 sq. ft. of meeting space, including cabanas, kitchens, courtyards and more, as well as between 70 and 141 rooms and suites.

Another hotel chain with a funky vibe is Aloft, a division of W Hotels with properties in California, Colorado, Oregon, Texas, Arizona and Canada. The hotels are awash in pinks, greens and other fresh hues, and come with an uber-trendy lounge featuring original artwork, a bright billiard table and board games. They also supply plenty of distinctive meeting space, which can accommodate intimate gatherings or larger events; highlights include flat-screen plasma TVs, flipcharts and easels.

While Avia and Aloft hotels derive their funky vibe from an eclectic color scheme, The Keating in San Diego relies primarily on one hue: red. Lots and lots of red. The shade, the boldest of the color palette, permeates everything from ultra-modern chairs in the suites to monochromatic artwork in the lobby.

Not surprisingly, it’s also a standout in the meeting spaces. The Keating has two Italian-inspired facilities for events: the 850-square-foot Gran Turismo and 400-square-foot Maranello, both of which feature crimson touches alongside such other fresh facets as exposed brick and high ceilings—plus Wi-Fi and



Aloft Portland, Ore.

The Keating, San Diego.

state-of-the-art A/V.

Since funkiness often comes down to originality, the Ace Hotel chain can be described as one of the funkiest around; the *The New York Times* recently dubbed it the "country's most original new hotel." With meeting space properties in Portland, Ore., and Palm Springs, Calif., Ace stands out like its eponymous card in the deck.

Where to begin? First, there's the aesthetic, which revolves around artfully placed parcels of color in otherwise softly colored spaces. The wallpaper integrates original artwork. There are vinyl record players and amenities culled from a local barbershop. For a funky event at the Palm Springs location, there's The Commune, a 3,000-square-foot space with walls that open out onto a pool and views of the surrounding mountains (bonus: dogs are welcome). In Portland, Ore., there's Room 101, a conference space with a world map that can host up to 15, and The Cleaners, a 1,200-square-foot venue with up-rolling blinds and 15-foot-high windows.



Hip to be...Artsy

If you know someone who writes music, sculpts or designs clothing, you probably think of them as

hip. That's because we've long associated creativity with trendiness. Need further proof? Check out the hipster movement, a contingency of artistic young



Kimber Modern, Austin, Texas.

people with “hip” right there in the name. So it’s safe to say hotels with an arts focus are part of the hip scene. And a bonus for meeting planners is these spaces often inspire creativity in attendees.

At Hotel 43 in Boise, Idaho, guests are given complimentary arts passports, which provide free admission to the Boise Art Museum, and free or discounted tickets to the local Philharmonic, ballet, opera, jazz festival, Shakespeare performances and more. The venue offers two meeting rooms with a combined 1,750 sq. ft. of space, and is conveniently located near the Boise Centre, which has 45,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. Alexis Hotel in Seattle, meanwhile, displays original artwork throughout its guest rooms and public spaces; it has multiple meeting rooms, which can accommodate up to 150 attendees.

One of the artsiest spots around is the small, new Kimber Modern, in Texas’ creative hub of Austin. Its equation for ingenuity looks like this: One part Mid-century Modern architecture; one part original paintings of rabbits in each room; and one part hand-crafted, multicolored boxes sprinkled throughout the property.

The hotel is so hip, it’s forsaken keys in favor of a code given to guests upon arrival, which they can punch in to enter their room. For meeting planners, there’s the option to rent out the entire hotel, including five rooms, one suite, a common area and a courtyard, which collectively can accommodate up to 60.

As Kimber Cavendish, co-owner of the property, puts it, “We’re a different breed of hotel.” And of course, it’s always cool to be different.

Which leads us to...

Hip to be...Unique

Coco Chanel once said, “In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different.” The trailblazing designer would no doubt be proud of the various hotels that have dared to be unique—providing an experience for guests and meeting attendees that is truly memorable.

The Hotel Avante in Mountain View, Calif., emphasizes what it calls a “spirit of invention.” Guest rooms come equipped with yo-yos, Etch A Sketches and Rubik’s cubes (retro alert!). In the lobby, there are copies of the techie, oh-so-hip magazine *Wired*. And the property inspires individualism by providing moveable furniture that can be custom interior-designed.

For planners, the Silicon Valley property offers a boardroom and music-listening lounge with more than 700 sq. ft. of combined space. Both spots are heavily accented with wall art, and in the lounge, attendees can listen to the music of their choice.

In Denver, The Curtis is a true standout. The focal point is generation-spanning pop culture references. Head to the lobby, and check out a huge Lite-Brite installation. Look along the walls, and colorful plastic flowers evoke *The Dating Game*. Each room at the hotel also comes with a theme. The Big Hair floor, for instance, features a large picture of Marge Simpson and other dramatically coifed icons. The One Hit Wonder floor has a per rock and photo of lip-synch legend Milli Vanilli. And the 13th floor plays the ominous “duh-duh-duh” strains as you walk off the elevator.

The Curtis’ 20,000-plus sq. ft. of meeting space is collectively known as The Playground, with spots that speak to the kid in all of us. Each of the 15 rooms is named after a game. For instance, there’s a Marco Polo ballroom, and a trio of smaller rooms called Rock, Paper and Scissors. Planners can enjoy the space in a tra-

ditional way, or opt in for a Play With Us setting, with butcher paper, crayons and individual Play-Dohs, or Think Big, with giant office supplies and calculators.

Jon Troshynski, who works at Community Interiors and helped plan an event at The Curtis for Denver Gay Professionals last December, says his experience at the spot was like no other. In addition to the outstanding décor, he says the staff was witty and professional, and the food exquisite. Troshynski says the hotel is “all about a good time—about creating an event that’s playful and professional, but where you also get your meeting done.” Or as Kim Corrigan, The Curtis’ general manager (aka “Queen Bee”) says, it aims to “bring a smile to customer’s faces.”

Finally, no discussion of unique properties would be complete without mentioning the iconic Madonna Inn in San Luis Obispo, Calif. Each room at the property is elaborately decorated to evoke a distinct theme. In the Caveman room, for example, you’ll find animal prints, stone-age clubs and a waterfall, while The Jungle Rock room includes a tree-and-vine canopy and stone pathway. And that’s just two of the 110 one-of-a-kind rooms available.

Luckily for planners, the inn didn’t scrimp on creativity with its meeting spots, either. Six banquet rooms can accommodate 40–250 guests. For a classy event, try The Venetian Room, with a koi pond, pillars and murals on the walls. For something funkier, there’s the Gay ’90s Room, with bright red walls and a music-and-dance focus. The property also includes the Alex Madonna Expo Center, the largest event facility on the central coast of California, with more than 20,000 sq. ft. of space that can accommodate up to 2,600 people.

Hip to be...Modern

Classical art museums will always be popular, but the trendy crowd has long gravitated toward the modern art museums in town. That’s because Pollack, Lichtenstein, Warhol and Co. define hip with their minimalist, bold, distinctly cutting-edge pieces.

This same focus is also present at several properties in the West. Two of the most popular modern spots on the scene right now are the Wynn and Encore in Las Vegas. The exteriors of both buildings eschew the flashier elements of The Strip in favor of curved glass



Madonna Inn, San Luis Obispo, Calif.



Guest room at the Wynn Las Vegas.

and clean lines. Inside, posh restaurants, night clubs, bars and suites marry upscale amenities with sharp design. Hipness is available to a bevy of attendees; the Wynn provides 200,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, while the Encore has 60,000.

For a smaller but similarly sleek experience, the aptly named Hotel Diva in San Francisco is a good bet. The property's meeting facility and breakout room, which can accommodate 75 reception-style or 25-30 conference-style, was recently renovated by its original architect and designer, and exudes style with a white-on-white aesthetic and mod furniture. The hotel also has five small Internet lounges created by local artists, including a DLX lounge co-designed by renowned skateboarder Pete Colpitts. Says Erin Finnegan, "marketing diva" for the property: "Hotel Diva is great for smaller boutique companies that want an out-of-the-box meeting."

The Hotel Valencia, with properties in San Antonio and San Jose, Calif., is another modern gem. An apt description for the hotels is "contemporary elegance": The aesthetic is bold and colorful, but sleekly understated, with lots of red, gold and fine wood touches. The San Jose location provides 4,000 sq. ft. of stylish meeting space, while the San Antonio spot has 7,000 sq. ft.


Hip to be...New

When the iPad came out, everyone wanted it. Ditto the Kindle, Audi and Wii. That's because these items came with the cachet of being new. And at the end of the day, people always desire The Next Big Thing.

Across the West, a string of brand-new hotels offer the allure of freshness, while also providing their own unique, compelling features. Last June, the Hotel Maya opened in Long Beach, Calif. The property blends Latin American touches with Southern California beach chic for a global brand of cool. It provides 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, with stunning views of the ocean. Another new surf-and-sun spot is the Shorebreak Hotel in Huntington Beach, Calif., which debuted last May. It integrates various hip elements, such as artsy (modern artwork in the rooms) and funky (flower-print chairs and photos of surfers). It has 8,000 sq. ft. of event space, including a courtyard terrace with fire pits.

In January, a property from the chic W Hotels chain opened in stylish Hollywood, providing a double whammy of hipness. The brightly colored property has more than 25,000 sq. ft. of event space, and includes a swanky rooftop bar, views of the glittering downtown skyline and a luxurious spa.

And about a year ago, a Hotel Indigo opened in the popular Riverwalk area of San Antonio (there's also a property at the Alamo). It can accommodate a group of up to 150. On the horizon is a Hotel Indigo in Vancouver, British Columbia, slated to open next January.

So, what does it mean to be hip? We've learned it can be fresh, funky, retro, innovative or sleek. It can come down to aesthetic choices, locale or amenities. It can come in big or small spaces, and be luxurious or quirky. But really, when it comes to hotels in the West, hip means just one thing: Where you want to be. 

Resources

- Ace Hotels**
acehotel.com
- Alexis Hotel**
alexishotel.com
- Aloft Hotels**
alofthotels.com
- Avalon Hotel**
avalonbeverlyhills.com
- Avia Hotels**
aviahotels.com
- Belamar Hotel**
larkspurhotels.com/collection/belamar
- The Curtis**
thecurtis.com
- Encore at Wynn Las Vegas**
encorelasvegas.com
- Hotel 43**
hotel43.com
- Hotel Avante**
jdvhoteles.com/avante
- Hotel Diva**
hoteldiva.com
- Hotel Indigo**
hotelindigo.com
- Hotel Maya**
hotelmayalongbeach.com
- Hotel Valencia**
hotelvalencia.com
- The Keating**
thekeating.com
- Kimber Modern**
kimbermodern.com
- L'Auberge Del Mar Resort & Spa**
laubergedelmar.com
- Madonna Inn**
madonnainn.com
- Sahara Hotel & Casino**
saharavegas.com
- Shorebreak Hotel**
shorebreakhotel.com
- Surfer Beach Hotel**
surferbeachhotel.com
- W Hotel Hollywood**
whotels.com
- Wynn Las Vegas**
wynnlasvegas.com