

"But first let me take a selfie" - evolution of a lifestyle brand

 By [Nicholas Barenblatt](#)

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We live in an age in which the expression "but first let me take a selfie" applies as much to brand messaging as it does to your average Gen X-er before he heads out for the night.

We are always on, sentiment is fleeting and lifestyle is what is happening now, right now and subject to change in a relative heartbeat. In the hospitality game, the boutique hotel has long given way to the so-called lifestyle hotel, which, in many ways, aims to hold a mirror to the modern age where work and play collide.

The recently opened Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! Menlyn in Pretoria is the third instalment of the lifestyle brand. This outing is proving popular and already the subject of many a 'selfie' with guests who range from the young and achingly on-trend to those who may be greying at the temples but boast eternally young hearts and attitudes.

Among the outstanding design elements of the new hotel are the unusual lighting arrangement in the social areas, where more than 400 egg-shaped lights warm the hotel's heart. Outdoor spaces were designed to make maximum year-round use of the friendly Pretoria weather. The outdoor living room is a natural extension of the hotel's interior, and is bracketed by an Olympic-length lap pool.

The heartbeat of contemporary design

Socialising outside is as easy in winter, as it is in summer, because of the couches arranged around individual fireplaces, above which large mirrors reflect the city's familiar vista and sky. The hotel is designed with the young and young at heart urban traveller in mind. Small design cues featured around the hotel, such as graffiti artwork, showcase the heartbeat of contemporary design, and art, from the local area.

It is interesting to note that with each launch of the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! we have to tear up any rulebook we think we may have amassed simply because of the breakneck speed at which 'lifestyle' is evolving in the wider South African market.

You may recall the brand was first launched in Cape Town back in 2006. Then our 'talkability' elements included shark cage lifts and a smoking room that featured a coffin for guests to sit on. The entire hotel was designed to be irreverent, joyful, and to instigate reaction and conversation.

This was followed in 2009 by Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! Melrose Arch, which boasted a 180-degree style departure with old Hollywood glamour themes juxtaposed playfully against the Jozi reputation for bling and big city excess.

But if each instalment is so visually different, what is it that unifies the brand and makes it instantly recognisable as a Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! to consumers?

Quirky offerings

We have built a reputation and a following for our quirky offerings and uniquely personal service.

One person who has already experienced the impact of this strategy and service culture is a frequent guest, who has a deep fondness for blue Smarties. The staff knew she was returning and decided to surprise her by 'redecorating' her room by removing every piece of furniture in it leaving it completely bare - except for a huge bowl of blue Smarties in the middle of the room.

With that kind of a story to tell, there's no amount of money in the world that will create a better brand ambassador for Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! than this woman has become.

And that perhaps is the most unifying element of the Protea Hotel Fire & Ice! brand - stories. Across every hotel there are always stories unfolding and being told either through a diverse range of events tailored to the local market, fun food and beverage concepts or simply through the drama of décor and design.

The brand remains fresh and evolves naturally and continuously because it's not a predetermined set of brand rules, colours, font sizes and typefaces. It's a pulse. It's a state of being. It's a curious adventure seeker. It's Protea Hotel Fire & Ice!

ABOUT NICHOLAS BARENBLATT

Nicholas Barenblatt is group marketing manager of Protea Hotels, which is part of Marriott International. Protea Hotels has by a wide margin the largest number of branded properties on the African continent and is represented in seven sub-Saharan countries. It is also the largest hotel brand in South Africa.

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