

Nashville's Hutton Hotel develops unique coffee service differentiator

By BRUCE SERLEN

NASHVILLE, TN—When executives of developer/owner/operator Amerimar Enterprises, Inc. set out to create the new 248-room Hutton Hotel here, their objective was to create a stylish independent boutique hotel that would appeal to guests seeking an experience that would be anything but rookie-cutter. With this in mind, they built into the hotel a number of differentiators—in the public spaces, but in guestrooms as well—that they thought guests would find memorable enough for them to book repeat visits and tell their friends.

To most hotel operations managers' minds, the in-room coffee service would hardly qualify as one of those memorable services or amenities at the Hutton, which opened in mid-February. But because Amerimar's senior vp, Stephen Eckley, and the Hutton's general manager, Steven Andre, and their teams ended up creating what is really a two-part offering with one part complementing the other, the coffee service turned out to be what Eckley described as "probably one of the hotel's single biggest, most successful differentiators."

Part one is the single-serve coffee maker that's complete with packets of coffee and tea and guests can use to make their own hot beverage. The hotel chose to use a Cuisinart model and to stock it with a selection of Allegro caffeinated and decaffeinated coffees as well as teas. The tea selection typically includes a mix of familiar and exotic varieties on the order of a black tea like Earl Grey, a green tea like Himalayan Green, a white tea like China White Citrus and a caffeine-free herbal tea like Chamomile Mint.

The coffee maker sits on a custom made piece of furniture that includes the mini-bar, the safe, the ice bucket, glassware and additional shelf space. "The coffee machine is the only item sitting on the top of the piece, so it's likely to draw the guest's attention," Andre explained.

Andre further noted that, as in hotels generally, Hutton guests who stayed in the hotel during its first two months of operation have reported appreciating the convenience of the in-room coffee maker. "They're able to make their own cup of coffee the first thing in the morning while they're getting dressed and getting ready for the day," he said.

Privacy comes into play and guests

don't have to wait for room service to deliver a pot of coffee, nor incur a room service charge.

Part two of the coffee offering at the hotel is a self-service espresso machine that's available in an alcove on each floor of guestrooms in the hotel. "A lot of hotels offer coffee service in the room, but very few, if any, hotels are doing coffee service supplemented by equally complimentary espresso service. So we may well be the first," Eckley said.

While not availing guests of the same degree of privacy as the in-room cup of coffee, guests can simply walk down the hallway—in a bathrobe, for instance—and prepare themselves a cup of espresso to their liking.

The hotel selected Nestle Nespresso espresso machines and Nespresso espresso that comes in a range of single-serve blends.

"We actually wanted to make the service a bit more upscale, so in addition to the espresso we added some flavored syrups, including French vanilla, caramel and hazelnut," Andre reported. "We found a

milk dispenser that's refrigerated, alleviating our concerns about the milk being served fresh. Then we complement that with a variety of sugars, etc."

Flavor Organics provides the flavored syrups, while the milk dispenser is manufactured by Freehling.

The hotel's housekeeping services each floor's espresso station twice

a day to make sure it's clean and that the supply of items is replenished. Typically, an alcove like this on each floor of a hotel would be used to house an ice-making machine, which can be quite noisy. At the Hutton, the espresso service sits on top of a freezer compartment that holds bagged ice, so guests are still able to obtain ice.

Eckley noted that guests' response to the two-part coffee service "has been unbelievable." When planning the hotel, he said he thought it would be viewed as a relatively small item, "a nice touch, but customers so far are like 'wow' over it."

To a certain extent, guests seem to be using the espresso as a substitute for the coffee avail-

able in their room, Eckley noted. "There are more options with the espresso service. In many cases, they've even begun going out to the hallway to prepare their morning coffee versus making it in their room," he said. "They can get regular coffee in other hotels. Here we're offering them not only espresso, but flavored espresso."



An alcove on each Hutton Hotel guestroom floor offers complimentary espresso service (top). In-room beverages at the hotel include single cup coffee and tea service (above).