

The sleep-packaging revolution began with Westin branding its beds.

# Soft beds hard at work

The foremost demand driver for rooms is the need for a good night's rest before meetings or leisure. We explore the sleep solutions that hotels and manufacturers are putting out

BY RAYNAH COUTINHO

Perhaps pioneered by Starwood, way back in 1999, with Westin's Heavenly Bed, the sleep experience has become integral to much of hotel branding, besides of course being at the centre of the guest experience.

According to experts that Westin engaged to create its sleep experience, "Too often consumers believe that ultra-firm mattresses are good for them, but research on patients with back pain found this was not true, rather a supple comforting mattress may lead to better sleep. Consumer Reports recently also found that consumers spent 15 minutes or more testing each mattress at the store."

The very fact that hotels — across the board and across categories — are seeing beds as one of their biggest investments is a movement in itself. "Investments have evolved. Hotels look to buy quality products from trusted

global brands rather than procuring products from China or local brands. For instance, the trend of offering pillow menus, which in turn demands investment in and an offering of an array of pillows, has gained ground. The average is five to seven varieties of pillows on a menu" says Sudarshan Rai, marketing manager, Emirates Sleep

Hotels are willing to invest even up to  
**Rs 2,00,000**  
 for a single mattress.

Systems (ESPL). The company offers synthetic pillows, down and feather products, visco gel pillows and latex pillows. At least at the luxury end of the spectrum, pillow menus are going from seldom to staple very rapidly. "New facilities like the pillow menu which

is again a part of Crowne Plaza sleep experience, are providing guests with a wide choice of old and proven ways to improve the sleep experience. Guests are demanding these options. Our menu includes options such as the grandmother's wheat pillow, an anti-stress millet pillow, an anti-snoring contour pillow, and our range of anti-allergic pillows," says Sharda Sharma, executive housekeeper at the Crowne Plaza Today Gurgaon.

Like everything that hotels procure, aesthetics come into play too, say those who deal directly with purchase managers. "The common grey line fabric mattresses are unappealing and all categories of hotels are moving away from them," says Archit Gupta, director Sleepzone mattresses. In response to shifting preferences, the company has recently unveiled what they are calling the GoldLine Series spring mattresses, which has good looks as its key product differentiator.

Higher investment and an eye on aesthetics point to a greater focus on



Sudarshan Rai

standards, say suppliers to hotels. Deepak Prabhakar, director, Pro Linen says, "We're innovating the most in this area as hotels continue to firm up their standards. Of course, our focus is linen but when a project allows for Rs25,000 to Rs2,00,000 per mattress, then there is obviously investment potential for the whole beddings package and that too, a high quality one. At one point of time, vendors would



Today, sleep packaging extends to the entire environment of the guestroom.



Serta focuses on using foam that is eco-friendly.



Sharda Sharma

and thus minimises the heat built up on the surface. Serta is the only brand in India which manufactures such revolutionary foam and it is used in all Sleep products," Rai says.

Consumer retail is rapidly becoming a part of the hotel bed business. It is seen favourably by the manufacturer, who could potentially increase sales volume, even if by a small margin and for the hotel chain, which reaps brand building benefits. Westin's Heavenly Beds retail already — did you know there is one in the White House? A few years ago, the brand held a promotion across malls and airports in India alongside a radio contest, where winners could win a Heavenly Bed for their homes. Overall, the company has already sold in excess of 30,000 Heavenly Beds, 100,000 pillows, 32,000 sheets, and 13,000 shower heads through a partnership with Nordstrom and on a micro-site on their own website. Here in India, Pro Linen is also working with some hotels to put co-branded beddings on the market. "If nothing, it gives both the benefit of brand leverage," Prabhakar says.

Retail is only one possible extension. For example, Westin very successfully extended the Heavenly tag to its shower and spa experiences and also offers Heavenly Cribs and the works, basically. IHG's idea of an extension remains within the sleep domain, but strives to perfect it. Called the Sleep Advantage, it looks at everything else concerning sleep other than the bed. "Controlling the early morning noise in guest corridor is an important part in providing a good sleep experience

just quote a high thread-count for the linen, but with international chains coming in, now even lower-end hotels are able to tell the separate quality linen from the rest." Pro Linen has seen a growth of about 30 to 40 per cent over the last few years, emerging from both the organised and fragmented segments of the industry.

The green revolution has eased its

way into sleep solutions too, albeit at a slower rate. "A few hotels have started to demand organic cotton," says Prabhakar, however explaining that there are limitations for the product because of hospitality's very nature: "Organic cotton tends to lack that pristine whiteness that hotels demand because of the lack of chemicals in the process. This doesn't bode well for the indus-

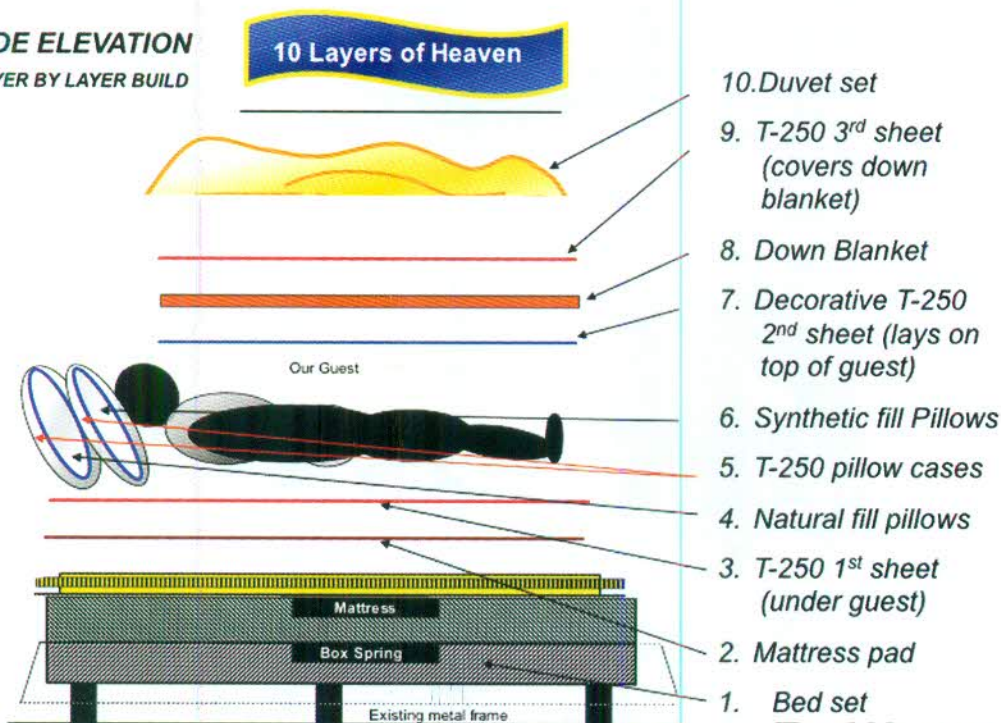
try because it interferes with their image of cleanliness." Serta says it uses, what is known as green foam. "It is manufactured from premium quality raw materials, that are environment friendly. Green foam uses mega foam technology which does not use chemicals that are hazardous to the nature like methylene chloride that depletes the ozone layer. It has an open cell structure

## BREAKING DOWN THE BED

- A 13" Westin Heavenly mattress with its unique pillow-top design with a 8 3/4" box spring
- Two 50/50 mixes of European goose feathers and down for optimal loft. The pillows also have undergone microbial treatment for fresh and hygienic slumber.
- Premium down alternative fiber-fill replicates luxurious goose down, and the loft increases with each washing.
- A Heavenly Boudoir pillow and over – just for a touch of luxury.
- Pillow-cases in 250 count cotton blend, 230 count cotton, 300 count Egyptian cotton and NEW 600 Count 100% Egyptian Cotton Sateen.
- A duvet cover.
- A down blanket that is filled with European premium white down. An anti-microbial treatment keeps it fresh, clean and comfortable after repeated washes. 12" square baffle boxes prevent shifting.
- A top sheet in classic white.
- A decorative middle sheet goes in between the fitted sheet and the down blanket.
- The bottom layer in 200 count cotton blend, 230 count 100 per cent Egyptian cotton and 300 count 100 per cent, also has extra deep pockets to fit mattresses up to 15".
- A bed skirt.



### SIDE ELEVATION LAYER BY LAYER BUILD



to our customer, which is often neglected by hotel managers. We have regular trainings for staff on guest corridor etiquette. Business travellers who book what we call a Quiet Zone, will sleep easy knowing as there is a ban on noise from 9 PM to 10 AM. The rooms are located away from the lifts and service doors. Besides that, there are This Works aromatherapy kits – exclusive to Crowne Plaza – aromatherapy, bath, body and Skincare Company. "This Works has created a sleep kit to help guests unwind after a busy day. With 100 per cent pure essential oils, Breathe In helps clear the head and Deep Calm encourages relaxation and sleep," says Sharma.

The brand also tied up with sleep expert Dr Chris Idzikowski to create a series of five podcasts which offer advice on how to get the best

night's sleep.

Indeed, the biggest differentiation and movement is being seen in the science of providing guests with the best sleep a bed can bring. Westin made tall claims: the brand said its beds would relieve their guests from jetlag and insomnia. So yes, the method behind their bed-madness had to be completely airtight: the brand's beds have a 10-layer-strong logic to them. Gupta says that the industry has majorly is moving towards pocketed spring mattresses, versus its earlier preference for bonnell springs and other types foam combination mattresses.

There are heaps of hotel-centric initiatives doing the rounds too. Pro Linen focuses on less shrinkage for its hotel products because, as Prabhakar explains, "Even five per cent shrinkage, when you are buying sheets for 300 rooms is a huge amount. Also, for hotels we have a minimum of 148 when they are tested for whiteness. Additionally, we give a 00 finish to the fabric." The brand also provides duvet covers with flaps to help housekeepers make beds faster. "For those hotels whose standards demand mattress protectors, we create them in a fashion that makes replacing them easier," he adds. Serta undertakes training programmes for the housekeeping staff on regular basis. "We educate them on how to maintain a mattress," says Rai.

Sharma shares some interesting stats: "I read a very interesting article which stated that as per American Hotel & Lodging Association's annual survey, 57 per cent of four and five-star hotels upgraded their bedding during the last year alone. Interestingly, that percentage actually denotes a decline! But only because the industry leapt into luxury beds with abandon starting in 2005, when the AH&LA reported well over 70 per cent of hotels updated their beds, spending an astounding US\$1.4 billion on mattresses, more than double the total of the previous five years combined, according to an analysis at that time by consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers." Looks like we cannot call it a night on this component of the in-room experience just yet. ■

# 10

layers go into the making of a Heavenly Bed.

**THE WESTIN**

MUMBAI  
GARDEN CITY