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25 YEARS OF INNOVATION – THE PENINSULA HOTELS' IN-ROOM TECHNOLOGY - INVENTIVE, UNOBTRUSIVE, STATE-OF-THE-ART AND CUSTOM-DESIGNED

The Peninsula Hotels not only has nine of the world's finest luxury hotels throughout the U.S. and Asia, but is also a pioneer and industry leader in the research and development of innovative guestroom technology, as its Electronic Services Department celebrates the 25th anniversary of its founding in 1985.

The only hotel company in the world with its own research and development facilities to design, build and customise equipment to serve the group's guests (versus installing standard available technology used by other hotel groups), all in-room technology is developed and then tested to perfection by the ESD, comprising a team of 27 electronic, software and hardware engineers who are able to respond to guests' every need through a combination of observation, innovation and technological know-how.

Located in Aberdeen on Hong Kong island's south side, ESD General Manager Research and Technology Ingvar Herland and his team of white-coated engineers strive to provide user-friendly, intuitive technology for today's increasingly demanding and sophisticated hotel guests to enhance comfort and the overall hotel experience - whether on business or vacation, the technology is there to assist guests with work or simply to relax and "repair" with the room as their sanctuary.

As technology and guests' expectations continue to develop at breakneck speed, the ESD is tasked to keep abreast of – and indeed ahead of – these requirements. The opening of The Peninsula Shanghai in October 2009 has taken these initiatives to a new level of creativity and invention, while work is currently continuing apace on the in-room facilities for The Peninsula Paris, launching in 2013, and retro-fitting other Peninsula properties.

However, it all started with the first of many "firsts" for The Peninsula Hotels' ESD team – the introduction of satellite TV to Hong Kong. Back in 1985, The Hon Sir Michael Kadoorie, Chairman of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels Limited (parent company of The Peninsula



Hotels) wanted satellite TV channels for The Peninsula Hong Kong's in-house television system, but it was unavailable in HK at the time and he was assured by all that it would be impossible to install as the technology of the day wasn't sufficient. Determined to prove the naysayers wrong and scouring Hong Kong for satellite dishes, he met Australian Fraser Hickox – at that time, a freelance technical consultant – who duly installed two dishes on the rooftop of The Peninsula. As coincidence would have it, the first – and only – channel that was available at the time was ABC, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's national TV station.

Located directly behind The Peninsula, sister hotel The Kowloon Hotel was being built at the same time. Featuring very small rooms, the challenge was to add technology into the limited space, and as Sir Michael was not happy with what was on offer at the time and wanted to take guestroom technology to the next level, he invited Hickox to come on board as a consultant. Hickox put together an innovative concept for the hotel, including a PC in the room which acted both as a computer and TV, plus a fax and printer, and also featured 200 pages of destination, weather and hotel information – common enough since the advent of the internet, but a first at the time.

Proving that the world is indeed very small, Ingvar Herland, the ESD's current General Manager Research and Technology, was working on the same satellite issues in his native Norway at the same time, and designing and producing large quantities of equipment - very complex for the era-which was bought and installed by Fraser and the ESD team.

Opened in February 1986, The Kowloon Hotel was the world's first true "technology hotel" at the time – and received numerous visitors and extensive media coverage on its unique and innovative technological features and design.

Plans were then drawn up to refurbish The Peninsula in the early 1990s. Sir Michael's goal for the in-room technology was that it must affect the guest – that they must "sense it, feel it and touch it" yet it must be invisible and seamless at the same time, with connectivity and interlinking of all inroom functions.



Tasked to deliver what guests want before they know they want or need it, the ESD's twin mantras are "technology is all about people" and "you shouldn't have to think – it just happens", and thus every element must serve guests, help them unwind and keep them connected, informed and at their best.

At its heart, the issue has always been a continual evolution of design – always asking "how does this work" and "what can we do better?"

Since its inception in 1985, ESD have created, designed and developed cutting-edge in-room facilities for the group's nine hotels, and also work closely with manufacturers of off-the-shelf items such as TVs to re-design remote control devices to be as simple and user-friendly as possible for guests. While each hotel has an ESD team in-situ, Herland and the team can also control the electronics in every guestroom around the world from an elaborate control panel in their laboratory at HQ.

The design process for a new hotel starts an average of two years prior to opening. Ideas and functions are envisioned by a committee of senior HSH executives, and are then developed and produced by the ESD team. The technology is installed into the sample room (a complete and fully functional room in a confidential location in Hong Kong), which is then occupied and tested by numerous Peninsula executives in order to perfect the design, flow and functionality of the entire space.

A catalyst to invention, the thought and development process comes from a variety of sources, including intense observation when travelling (in Peninsula hotels and elsewhere) ranging from how travelling companions move around the room to staff efficiency and beyond.

Anecdotal experiences include nail dryers when Hickox observed a lady with wet nail polish in an elevator at The Peninsula Chicago, while the temperature gauge originated from a trip to Paris when he couldn't determine the outside temperature by looking through the window, as some people were



in overcoats and others in shorts. The latest incarnation of this are the panels at The Peninsula Shanghai, which offer humidity, wind speed and U/V readings in addition to the temperature, from gauges positioned on the hotel's rooftop.

An article on hunting rabbits by dazzling them with bright lights led to extensive research on the effect of light on brain waves, and how "invisible technology" - in-room lighting and facilities - can help guests unwind. In order to bring the conscious state to a relaxed level, fading the lights out helps reduce brain waves from the usual 15 Hz to a more relaxed 10 Hz (in comparison, the REM stage of sleep is 8Hz), rather than abruptly switching lights off in the conventional manner. Similarly, the sudden ringing of an alarm clock jolts sleepers awake, causing involuntarily muscle tensing and momentary stress, so Peninsula alarms start gently and then ramp up the volume in order to avoid this.

Ideas come from other sources too – the inspiration behind the bathtub telephone, first introduced at The Peninsula Hong Kong in 1994, came from an Imperial Leather soap TV commercial featuring a couple in a bubble bath on a private jet when the husband calls the pilot to fly to Bermuda.

Telephones are a signature Peninsula feature – unable to source an attractive and appropriate model offering the required functions, The Peninsula phone was designed by the executive committee, with innovations including a rubber grip on sides for the elderly or when hands are wet, "ripples" to grip the phone to the shoulder while talking, VOIP using Skype, Bluetooth to sync in-room phones with mobiles and a home town time and language display. The phone also detects the voltage reversal if a call comes in, mutes the TV or radio and then turns the sound back on when hanging up. The telephone metamorphosis continues, with bedroom wall sconces that light up automatically if a call is received during the night at The Peninsula Tokyo and Shanghai.

The Peninsula Hotels' in-room technological systems are proprietary, and never sold to other companies. Neertheless, The Peninsula can lay claim to the following "firsts" – innovations created by ESD and now found everywhere.....



- "smart switching" the master switch switches all off, but individual freestanding lights can be illuminated
- the celebrated Peninsula bedside panel, which initially controlled all the light switches in the room and affected how the lights themselves worked. The latest models now control every aspect of the in-room ambience
- Weather, temperature and other climate information panel
- Hotel, destination, weather and flight information on TV screen
- Valet box initially a small box for shoes only, which has evolved into a hanging box for full-length garments
- Complimentary internet since the inception of the world wide web
- Internet radio The Peninsula Shanghai offers over 4000 channels
- Complimentary VOIP calls
- Total in-room connectivity, dating from 1990 onwards when Sir Michael had been travelling with his Handicam and required camera memory cards, etc, through to iPods and touch screen technology today

Ingvar Herland – holder of an MSC in Electronic Engineering and Communication from Trondheim University – spent 20 years with the Norwegian company Nera Telecommunications in research, development and marketing before joining The Peninsula Hotels. Having travelled extensively while setting up Nera's office in India to ride the country's cellular tsunami, his wide experience in hotels has proved invaluable since taking up his ESD role in 2006.

"A hotel is like a dance and the control system like a *corps de ballet* – smooth, elegant comfortable and no jerky on/off movements - offering a smooth transition from one operation to the next to avoid stress" says Herland. "The greatest compliment for me and my team is when guests go to other hotels and realise what they miss!"



Incorporated in 1866 and listed on The Stock Exchange of Hong Kong (00045), HSH is the holding company of a Group which is engaged in the ownership, development and management of prestigious hotel, commercial and residential properties in key locations in Asia, the United States and Europe, as well as the provision of transport, club management and other services. The hotel portfolio of the Group comprises The Peninsula Hotels in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, New York, Chicago, Beverly Hills, Tokyo, Bangkok, Manila and Paris (opening in 2012). The property portfolio of the Group includes The Repulse Bay Complex, The Peak Tower and The Peak Tramways, St. John's Building, The Landmark in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and the Thai Country Club in Bangkok, Thailand.

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