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Remodeling old Structure to Boutique and Budget Hotel: Case Study: I River Chiang Mai Hotel, Thailand

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how to achieve in the hotel business, especially by designing with the method of renovation. Because of the exaggeratedly high price of the land in Chiang Mai, a new hotel founder must look at the long-term lease model to get a piece of land for doing hotel business. Choosing an existing building in a piece of land where its location is perfect for the tourists is the right choice for the hotel investor. Also, 3-Star or budget hotel is a popularly alternative answer for a hotel in Chiang Mai, because of the manageable size of the hotel for hotelier, reasonable and affordable price for the clients. For inbound tourists, a good location is the first priority to choose any hotel. Followings are price and services. Though small facilities covering their needs come later, charming ambiance or so-called "boutique" still influential. Therefore, this study is intended to discover how to remodel the old building to respond to luxury design with adequate facilities, also meet the requirement of budget hotel guests. However, on the contrary, this doing renovation and decoration should compromise to the limitation of the budget of doing business. The study will be data analyzed through the actual case study of "I - River Chiang Mai" hotel, located in Chiang Mai province, the northern region of Thailand. Measurement of guest satisfaction can be accepted through the reviews and results in statistics collected from online travel agencies, such as Booking and Agoda. The factors of renovation and 3star hotel requirements are revealed and organized to consider how to make possible design decision and actual construction. Secondly, what were practically done and not to be done are demonstrated how the chosen design was finished and what it was, each by each, respectively. Thirdly, a consequence of design and renovation was judged by the guests' satisfaction that speaks out mainly through the internet reviews from several trustworthy online travel agencies, also social media reference. Studying the method of renovation through an authentic case study of "I-River Chiang Mai" discovered that "Comfort Bedroom" is the first priority to achieve "Must be Quality." Design practice to have "Comfort Bedroom" included 1) building all panels, doors, and windows to be soundproof, 2) finding a set of good quality of bed base, mattress, pillows, curtains, furniture, lamps, washbasin, shower and faucet, and sanitary wares, and 3) offering good standard with design of room amenities including safe and hotel lock, "Lifestyle" by providing free-Wi-Fi, shared space to chill out, and mixed inter-local buffet to experience comes the second. Last but not least, "Decoration" is yet influential to tourist's satisfaction because today's tourists are always seeking for a newer discovery in new travel.

Keywords: Remodeling, hotel design, Chiang Mai, I-River, boutique hotel, budget hotel, architecture

1. Introduction

The number of newly established hotels in Chiang Mai has increased rapidly from year to year. Now there are more than 3,000 hotels and more than in 2014 about a thousand in number. In the past ten years, the hotel business of Chiang Mai has been long struggled to survive. Some has left. Some are still alive. Running a hotel business is challenging for owners, but designing hotel is challenging for designers.

Renting a piece of land and adapting an old structure to become a hotel has been a practice challenging any hotel entrepreneurs. Because of the exaggerated land price in Chiang Mai, a new hotel founder must look at the long-term lease model to get a piece of land to do hotel business. Choosing a piece of land including existing buildings if its location is extremely fit for the tourists is the right choice for an investor. The pattern of 3-Star or budget hotel is very popular in Chiang Mai, because of the manageable size for the hotelier, and reasonable price for the clients. Therefore, this study is intended to conclude how to reshape old building to respond to luxury design with appropriate qualities, adequate facilities, also meet the requirement of hotel guests. However, on the contrary, this doing renovation and decoration should compromise to the limitation of the owner's budget. The study will be a real practice analysis through a

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model of a case study of "I - River Chiang Mai" hotel, which can be accepted the success through the result shown in the statistic of online travel agencies, Booking, Agoda, TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Google.

The "quality" is the key word that can prove many things. In the hotel business, any facilities, services, and ambiance can improve through "design," but in contrast, the "quality" can be measured to give feedback to "design" as well. There are three levels of "Quality hotel guests' demand" helping designer and owner prioritize and balance between "attraction" and "budget."

Lin, Nie, and Li (2014) acknowledged the three levels of quality hotel guest's demand as

- **1. A Must-be quality:** These are necessary services such as security, privacy.
- **2. One dimension quality:** This quality satisfaction is a linear with the service performance. If staffs provide a higher quality product or service, the customers will get more satisfactions vice versa.
- **3. Attractive Quality.** This quality has a significant effect on customer satisfaction. It always refers to surprise especially for some guests which lead to satisfactory.

The factors of renovation and 3-star hotel requirements are revealed and organized to consider how to make possible design decision and actual construction. Secondly, what were practically done and not to be done are demonstrated how the chosen design was finished and what it was, each by each, respectively. Thirdly, a consequence of design and renovation was judged by the guests' satisfaction that speaks out mainly through the internet reviews from several trustworthy online travel agencies, also social media reference. This study uses statistical information from "Booking.com" and "Agoda.com" to justify the score of each issue, which lead to define quality. Qualitative data getting from reviews of hotel guests were collected and summarized to determine how the design responded to guests' satisfaction.

2. Objectives

This study aims to discover the keys to remodeling the old building to a budget hotel, particularly in Chiang Mai where the tourism market has its own identity, through a real practice of design and construction.

3. Materials and Methods

- Step 1: Determining the design factors of 3-Star boutique hotel
- Step 2: Introduction to the case study for renovation and design
- Step 3: Data analysis from guests' feedback after renovation and being used
- Step 4: Discussion and Conclusion.

3.1 Step1: Determining the design factors of budget & boutique hotel design

Design and all decoration items must have been charming and unique to identify a brand. Branding image will be recognized and remember through the social network. The standard of property, from facilities to services, was judged by the reviewer score of property given by customers from online travel agencies. The new concept of hotel management and marketing has been recently changed to emphasize at small and budget hotel with an economical price. "Budget Hotel" was classified by reducing some unnecessary facilities such as meeting rooms, restaurants, coffee shop, bar, and some services as room services. "Boutique" word has come to replace the "Luxury" word. "Luxury" means for 4 or 5 Star while "Boutique" frequently uses for small, cute, and well-decorated, instead.

- a) "New Luxury" Hotels: The suggestion summarized from "Research: 'New Luxury' Hotels Are Evolving Design" posted on the www.hotelbusiness.com (2018), was a new set of priority of "New Luxury" hotels, mainly achieved by eliminating superfluous details and refocusing on amenities, placemaking, and lifestyle experiences. They have curated brands to capture the future new luxury hotel guests.
- 1. Streamlining Facilities & Services: Hotels now target their offerings to match priorities and eschew the decadence of traditional luxury offerings, with properties with smaller standard rooms, minimalist designs, and fewer in-room services.
- 2. Physical Product & Amenities: Design should reveal a shared ethos across distinct properties unique to each destination.

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- 3. Community & Localization: By allowing each property to manifest the hotel brand in its own way, new placemaking opportunities arise by expanding the experiences to visitors as well as guests, such as food and beverage offerings, public spaces.
- 4. Eco-Credentials: Environmentally conscious hotels are increasingly favored among travelers, and brands have numerous opportunities to display their green efforts.
- 5. Stakeholder Returns: Numerous operational efficiencies can achieve through the new luxury model. Smaller rooms at more competitive prices help drive occupancy rates up.
- **b)** Hotel Business in Chiang Mai: As the hotel business of Chiang Mai city is highly competitive, the room rates are quite low that also lowered the cost of investment per room. Chiang Mai has its own long history, culture, and characteristics. It attracts many travelers to visit from all over the world; therefore, the standard of facilities and services must have a worldwide quality. Then that quality will be approved by the clients and feedback will be reviewed through social media means. Online Travel Agencies now play a vital role in the hotel business everywhere.
- c) Summary of Design Briefs of Boutique and Budget Hotel: In general, the demand factors of 3-star hotel design are 1) reasonable price 2) streamline service and facilities, and minimalist 3) experience in localization and 4) millennials' lifestyle. These issues lead to a list of design briefs which affect those demand factors as follows,
- 1. Smaller Room and fewer in-room service but tasty choices. Minimal design that is easy to keep cleanness.
 - 2. Technology & Green concerns: Internet Bluetooth Wi-Fi full scheme. Green/Eco Concept
 - 3. Express some local experience, especially Chiang Mai. Brand identity to play with or share
 - 4. New lifestyle fit by offering shared space to hang around for work, fun, relax, or socialization

3.2 Step 2: Introduction to the case study

a) The Case Study "I-River Chiang Mai"

The case study of this study was the "I river Chiang Mai" 3-star hotel located on the riverside piece of land on Chiang Mai-Lamphun Road. This hotel has recently been renovated since 2017. It has just operated its hotel business for a short time enough to a representative of 3-star hotel in Chiang Mai of today.

There are many distinct attributes of I-River hotel that make it has success and can be accepted to be the "prototype" of 3-star hotel in Chiang Mai such as location, price, and design environment.

Location: I-River hotel's distance to the city's center is about 2 Kilometer. The proximity area has many restaurant and supermarket. One can walks to the night market just across the iron bridge which is also a landmark of Chiang Mai city and takes only 10 minutes. It means that I-River hotel belongs to a good location, peaceful riverside but close to everywhere for tourists.

Price: The price of a standard double room of 20 Square Meter is 1,700 Thai-Baht per night with breakfast for two persons. Essential hotel components inside a room have provided nearly all as 4-5 star such as mixed-tap shower from a central boiler, silent air-condition system, steel bed based with an excellent quality mattress, key card hotel door, flat-screen TV, and free Wi-Fi.

Built Environment: Minimalism with a few decorative items of retro style ware placed through the hotel. The natural environment of the riverside terrace and garden is calm and peaceful.

b) The Design: Design Concept of Interior, Exterior, and Landscape

I-River Hotel is a small boutique hotel in Chiang Mai, a major city of the northern region of Thailand. Main target customers are foreign travelers who stay only 2-3 night coming to visit Chiang Mai and neighborhood provinces. It can be defined as a budget or break and breakfast hotel as well because its room rates do not so expensive compared to a luxury 5-star hotel. This hotel was aimed to well decorate and characterize because the trend of hotel selection was changed that hotel customers always want to get a new experience in a new trip, try and change. Also, people's lifestyle has changed to that travelers want

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something accessible but acceptable, and reasonable price because they have many choices to choose. If they are pleased, they will share to friends and the public, by words of mouth and social media.

There are 17 hotel guest rooms at I-River Hotel which are divided into two sections as they were two existing buildings before having renovated, namely Hotel and Villa Section. Hotel-section consists of 12 hotel guest rooms, 5 Small Doubles, 2 Twins, 4 Standard Doubles, and 1 Triple Bed. Villa-section has 5 guest rooms which are two Family Deluxe with River View for 4 persons, one Family for 3 persons, one Suite for 2-3 persons, and one Standard Double.

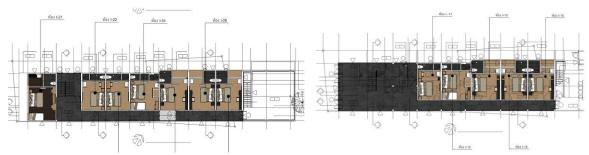


Figure 1 "I-River Chiang Mai" Hotel Plans of Ground and 2nd Floor of "Hotel section" consists of 12 guest rooms

Guestroom Interior: Minimum but comfort was the key design for the renovation of this hotel. In the room, using few furniture and decorative items, painted with grey and brown color scheme, was the goal to keep the environment clean and simple, allowing guests to be the color of its scene. Having no closet was aimed to avoid any personal belongings lost in the room. Room lighting was romantic and dramatic by using Indirect and down-light to fondle and stroke to the panel, no ceiling light at all. The natural touch of wooden pattern on the surface of furniture and metal finish of pendant helped room ambiance softer and retro-classic. Washbasin placed out of the bathroom was intended to reduce the waiting time of the bathroom using in a morning rush. However, this hotel supplied all complete set of amenities, safe, hotel key card, like 4-5 star. The color scheme of guest rooms in Villa-section was designed to be brighter, aiming to please family members who are various in age. Because rooms in this Villa-section are all family and suite rooms







Figure 2 Guest room interior: Rooms were painted in grey and brown color scheme with natural touch of wooden pattern on surface of furniture and metal finish of pendant. This helped room ambience softer and retro-classic.

Public area: Stairs and corridor were designed and renovated to keep free-flow, simple touch, to let graphic letters of wayfinding and room numbers play the most important role. Graphic design of room number playing with light and shadow was very intentionally designed. Decorative finishing and furniture in reception and lobby were in a retro style by using metal and leather skins. All paints were plain in greyscale that allows the "I-River" logo of this hotel to be fully dominant.

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Figure 3 Public Areas of "I-River Chiang Mai": Lobby, Corridor, Breakfast in retro style using wood, stone, leather, and decorative wall paint, mixing Thai Lanna and "street art" modern language to tell hotel's story.

Breakfast Area: This dining area was designed to accommodate 12 persons at a time. The counter bar-like table was placed in the middle of the room. A corner of the table was separated lowered to be a station of coffee and tea. Keeping only existing reinforced concrete beams and columns was done in this renovation process, brick wall and metal sheet roof were installed to complete. The style of the industrial loft was applied here by using a brick pattern on panels and real wood on furniture. Built-in cold cabinets made from 4 refrigerators containing free water and cold-serve foods in breakfast menu were built from steel frames and aluminum composite. Two existing columns were clad by copper-color aluminum composite that was made high door frame-like, defining it as river entrance of the hotel.

Swimming Pool and Riverside Garden: Outdoor area in this property was developed to have many functions swimming, sunbathing, dining, and hanging around served all day. Infinity edge pool with 1.20 M. depth was installed to have water surface at 0.60 m above ground level. There were many big trees at the backyard garden since the renovation began. The designer tried to keep all existing tree with the hotels that make lots of shade and shadow from them creating an alternative place to sit and lay down during the daytime. One massive brick wall made to imitate an ancient brick wall of Chiang Mai that one can see when traveling into the city. It can be characterized as a local identity and give cognitive reminiscence to the hotel and Chiang Mai.



Figure 4 Brick wall imitated from Thapae Gate wall, as a symbolic of historical prefecture of Chiang Mai was an effort of localization.

c) The Remodeling: Analysis Problems of renovation and limitation of design by budget Restriction

At the very first start, the owner had the right to occupy this piece of land by the rental condition. Owing to its rental program forced the owner not to invest too much into the property. It had two existing buildings on the plot; one was a shop-house that extended backyard to be a car garage and another one was a house that had been adapted to be a restaurant and a guesthouse with 4 rooms. These two buildings became a design problem to solve from the start. Initial project requirement of the owner was to change these old building and utilize all open space to be a Budget 3-star hotel with about 16 to 20 guest rooms,

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breakfast area and swimming pool and backup service area. A goal of the project also aimed at a design quality to attract a client with the first impression and then created a wider possibility to return by excellent facilities and amenities. However, the limit budget of the project was an important obstruction.

Before starting design for renovation, there were two existing buildings on the compound, one was a car garage with a spare part shop, and another was a restaurant with guest house rooms previously changed from a house. The car garage building had a shape of a commercial row house that was a typical and traditional standing right close to the road. From the evidence of slightly different structure, one could assume that this building was expanded to two times in the past. Its structure is a conventional concrete slab on the beam which has been long adopted nationwide in Thailand since 50 years ago because it was easy to building and cheap. On the ground floor, the former garage building, its floor was built of the concrete slab, but the upper floor was bind columns by concrete beams, but floor structure and finish were wood, which was also conventional and popular at that time. Another existing building before renovation which was former house and restaurants had the concrete structure of foundations and column. The ground floor was made of concrete slab on beam. The rest from beams, floors, panels, doors, and windows were mainly constructed from wood. Although making survey and measurement of existing helped design and drawing of renovation clearer, more accurate dimension; these existing buildings had many unpredictable findings along the way of renovation because so many adaptations were made to this property.





Figure 5 Outside shape form and character of two existing buildings before being renovated (2017)

d) Problems of Renovation and Solutions in practice

- 1. Trapezoid shape and the inconsistent grid of structure. Firstly, the design for renovation of the former garage was intentionally proposed to have a plan of small hotel occupying 12 guest rooms which not much different in layout planning but profoundly different in size of interior space that could be mainly categorized into 3 types which were "Small Double Room" "Standard Double/Twin Room" and "Three-Bed Room." Because of the long trapezoid shape of the existing garage that narrow side and wide side were different about 2 Meter. Consequently, rooms on the backside closer to the riverside garden were bigger room in the interior functional area. The roadside half part of the hotel could set only small double rooms because of its existing structural condition. The backyard half part could contain standard room that the width of the guest room was approximately 3.6 m. The "Small Double Room" and "Standard Double Room were able to insert furniture items equally, different only the narrow spacing among them (see figure 1.2)
- **2.** A new location of the stairs. Because these old building functioned only for working space at below and living space above; the circulation system was not fit to place systematic of hotels in terms of using and fire escape. New positions of stairs of both buildings must have been organized.

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Figure 6 Show pictures during renovation period newly added floor and wall structure were prepared before finishing

3. Lightweight supporting structure. Floor structure was too weak for public use as hotel requirement. Adding more supporting steel beam and wall frame needed to be done. Then using artificial wood to be flooring and panels was necessary owing to minimize all possible weight that might happen because there was no structure drawing or calculation to confirm the load of existing. Nonetheless, on the bathroom location, covering all bathroom floor boundaries by thin concrete needs to be done so that ceramic tiles can attach to them, also to be waterproof.



Figure 7 "Villa Section" pictures of being renovated. Adding structure for new stair and panels to wrap old wooden house with a layer of wall was intended to block noise from street and create new face for building (on the right)

- **4. Insufficient noise control**. As this compound is situated right on the street side where loads of traffic occur all day and night; the sound protection was extremely concerned. Moreover, existing building envelop was so vulnerable that this renovation needed to attach at least one layer of the panel or built new ones with bricks. Noise also comes from the roof and leakages or gap between old roof and panel at the above ceiling level.
- **5. Swimming Pool**. As there was plenty of garden and terrace at the beginning, finding a place for a swimming pool was done the pool length needed to be as long as the space of existing had. Finally, the 8 m long x 4 m wide x 1.2 m deep was constructed in a design that infinity edge was set on 2 sides and pump under the terrace. Brown sparkling glazed 10 x10 cm ceramic tiles were selected to be the surface of this pool.



Figure 8 Swimming Pool was placed structural reinforce concrete forms during construction and when completed.



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3.3 Step 3: Data Analysis

Information of today's hotel is publicly revealed to the public's eyesight on the internet. Whenever tourists access and search for a travel destination, they will find tons of information offering them accommodation that may fit their need. The choice is theirs. Online travel agencies are now running on a big race; so that, they disclose everything the tourists need to know about the hotel they would like to stay. Big data have been well arranged, classified, and demonstrated. Feedbacks and reviews are opened up for them to give score and comment. The concept of communication between the hotelier and customers has changed from "phone call" to "interact" on the internet, feeling much more comfortable to comment. In contrast, the hotel entrepreneur must be aware of doing displeased to guests and always maintain quality. This study makes use of information from online travel agencies to measure the quality of facilities designed and renovated in the case study of "I-River Chiang Mai" hotel.

"I-River Chiang Mai" hotel earned 9.2 points of overall from about 702 reviews in 2018 from an online travel agency (OTA) "Booking.com." This hotel got 9.1 points overall from 186 reviews in 2018 from "Agoda.com." Topics that guests have to give score were Staffs, Facilities, Cleanliness, Comfort, Value for the Money, Location, and Free Wi-Fi respectively. Giving a value concerning "hotel design" focused at both "Facilities" and "Comfort." The points of these two topics in Booking.com were Facilities = 9.0, Comfort = 8.9. It earned Facilities = 8.7 in "Agoda." It could roughly calculate that the average score for "Facilities" would be 8.9 from 10 and for "Comfort" would be 8.9 from 10. Looking into narrative comments in reviews through all "in-room facilities matter" revealed that most positive reviews mentioned "modern and clean," "comfy bed" "good air-conditioned," "nice hot water and shower," and compliments of "Stylish" "Boutique" "Minimal." On the other hand, negative comments would be "Noise from the street," "Noise from the Bar on the opposite side" "No closet" "Few hangings" "No window."



Figure 9 Overall score of Reviews in 2 main online travel agencies "Booking.com" could be proved that I-River got score 9.0 on facilities and 8.9 on comfort issue and got score of facilities 8.7 from "Agoda.com."

4. Results and Discussion

After finishing remodeling "I-River," the hotel has accommodated guests since 2017. The purpose is to acknowledge which facilities and services are actually at which level; therefore, any future hotel design will be learned from this.

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Table 1 Level of Quality of Services and Facilities Provided in I-River Hotel

Facilities/Services	Must Be	One dimension	Attractive
Soundproof	yes		
Comfy Bed and Pillow	yes		
Hotel Key Card	yes		
Hot Shower	yes		
Interior Decoration			yes
Free Wi-Fi	yes		
Free 24/7 Fruit and Water			yes
View from Room		yes	
Shared Space			yes
Swimming Pool			yes
Breakfast		yes	

After having analyzed data receiving from the feedback of hotel guests reviewed in "Booking.com" and "Agoda," the fact has shown that "I-River" hotel could be concluded to match quality levels and design for renovation in real practice. Here are the most influential factors in determining for remodeling design of a boutique hotel, respectively.

- 1) "Comfort in Room" is the first key. Soundproof to reduce noise was a must to do. Windows with natural light are demanded which lead to having gaps between frames. All gaps need to be sealed properly, otherwise light and sound can penetrate the room. Curtains must be opaque enough to block light from outside. Lightings in the room should not disturb the guest's eyes. Air-Conditioner using in the room must choose a good brand which is silent and low maintenance. The hot water system is necessary to choose an excellent boiler that supply hot water in pipeline passing through a mixed tap would be preferable from guests. In case of renovation, all building system concerning this comfort must be well-planned, because the pipeline will join along panel ceiling floor; moreover, the position of boiler needs to be set correctly, not so far, hidden, and easy to maintain. Firm bed base, high-quality mattress, pillows, and linens are also extremely significant to a satisfactory score.
- 2) "Minimal design" can help rooms clean and easy to maintain. Use fewer items but achieve more (Less is More) is a key to decide interior decoration, and exterior architecture too. While "Cleanliness" is also a serious topic that can reflect the quality of the hotel, choosing the minimal design is the right answer because there are fewer small niches for dust.
- 3) "Localization" was done by using retro/loft style of modernity mixed with local identity such as an orange brick wall, and Thai painting in an abstract art telling the story of nearby city's landmark bridge. It was a sublime indirect expression, not like Lanna style (Northern Thai Tradition) of design from the 80s' to 90s.'
- 4) "Shared space" is the concept of today's people lifestyle. Today's budget hotel should consider more public space for digital nomadic, work traveler, and so on. Owing to having much space along the riverside, I-River had benefited from that to create many kinds of activities for guests, such as co-working space, hanging out space, sunbathing, chilling in the night, having breakfast, dining on the table. A variety of doings bring this hotel success.

The second part of the result to discuss is that the "Remodeling Design" could not do even better than this with the limitation of the budget such as;

- 1) "Small rooms and no window" emerged from trapezoid shape of an existing building worsen hotel quality that affected to the reviews from some guests. Many guests considered them too small and dark. Even though, these rooms are sold at lower prices. During construction, the designer tried to utilize every inch as possible to include a window in the room, but then space for toilet and shower was sacrificed.
- 2) "Room arrangement" was quite difficult to avoid noise from the street because the existing building stood facing right to the street. There were 3 rooms in "I-River" that face to the street; so that, room layout of these rooms turn solid brick wall facing to the street and made a compartment in the room

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such that the opening was just at the bathroom compartment. However, there were still complaints about noise.

3) "Noise Control" What were the most criticized issues of this facility that are "Noise" from the traffic, bar, and corridor. According to "Must be Quality," noise is an important factor to create "Comfort" in the room. Although many attempts to install more layers on the panel such as fiberglass insulation, double brick wall, fiber cement board, had done; noise could still leak into the room. Noise has been the most difficult treatment to cure this problem for "I-River" since it opened.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the key attraction of tourist to decide to choose any hotel is only "value for the money" which means staying in that hotel is worth paying. These keywords lead to many relative actions ranging from choosing the best location, creating the best vibe, offering the best services, but on the other hand, selling at the most competitive price. All these practices need to be well-balanced.

In real practice, how to remodel the old building to be a hotel was studied through an authentic case study of "I-River Chiang Mai" hotel. it can conclude that using clever "hotel design" to obtain a good score from guests need to understand what kind of services and facilities are demanded most, more, or less. Designer and owner can set the highest priority to the design and budget for the "Must be Quality," then set higher priority to "One dimension Quality." For one dimension quality, the hotelier can compensate designed facilities and service imperfection by increasing quality by staffs or extra services. The "Attractive Quality" really surprises guests when arriving but if there is no such these services and facilities, nothing happen. It can certainly increase the score in reviews, but one should be aware of "misunderstanding" or "mislead" concept because people's perception is different from one to another

6. Acknowledgements

I would like to thank to "I-River Chiang Mai" hotel and staffs who contributed me useful information. Many thanks to design team who helped me finish this job. Also thanks to "my family" who gave me support.

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