



What's the Deal By Daniel Lesser

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Modular buildings hitting their stride in hospitality

(The views and opinions expressed in this blog are strictly those of the author.)

The Modular Building Institute (MBI), an international nonprofit trade association, defines modular construction (also referred to as prefabricated buildings) as follows: “a process in which a building is constructed off-site, under controlled plant conditions, using the same materials and designing to the same codes and standards as conventionally built facilities – but in about half the time. Buildings are produced in ‘modules’ that when put together on site, reflect the identical design intent and specifications of the most sophisticated site-built facility – without compromise.”

Although modular construction has been available for more than a century, the concept was not well respected and utilized by architects and builders until recently. The use of prefabrication started gaining popularity early in the 20th century when Sears Roebuck & Co. sold over 500,000 pre-fabricated homes between 1910 and 1940.

Modular buildings have been used for both temporary and permanent facilities such as construction camps, schools and classrooms, civilian and military housing, and industrial facilities. Modular construction has also been utilized in remote and rural areas where conventional construction may not be physically and/or financially viable. Other uses have included churches, health care facilities, hotels, sales and retail offices, fast food restaurants and cruise ship construction.

While the process of modular construction has remained relatively unchanged, significant customization options have evolved. Furthermore, construction cranes with larger capacities have made it possible to erect heavier components. However, the most significant change has been in perception, as many now recognize the benefits of modular construction including faster development, which contributes to cost savings when compared with onsite, conventional building construction.

Additionally, while some modular buildings are constructed of green materials, even with those that are not, the materials are more easily recycled because they are not exposed to weather and other outside elements.

Modular construction has a smaller carbon footprint than traditional construction and produces less noise and vehicular pollution onsite. Disadvantages include the fact that module size can be limited due to volume restrictions in transporting completed sections.

Although already a popular choice for hotel development throughout Europe, in the U.S., modular construction is a growing trend in lodging, particularly in connection with low-rise select and limited-service properties. Recent examples include the 142-room [AC Hotel Oklahoma City Bricktown](#) and the 97-room [Fairfield Inn & Suites Sacramento Folsom](#).

With this said, the 20-story, 300-room [CitizenM New York Bowery Hotel](#) in lower Manhattan and the 255-unit [Pod Brooklyn Hotel](#) were recently erected with modular units manufactured in Poland. With higher quality control, faster build times, environmental benefits and cost savings, modular construction is gaining prevalence in the hotel industry. Major hotel brand families including Hilton Hotels & Resorts, Hyatt Hotels, InterContinental Hotels Group and Marriott International have endorsed use of modular construction and during the near term, I believe the concept will evolve into even greater prominence within the sector.

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