

IA

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The Evolution of the Airport Lounge

Design for Luxury & Resilience,
Delivered at Maximum Speed

Airport lounges have evolved from quiet pre-flight retreats and ad-hoc business centers into a **distinct architectural typology that blends five-star hospitality with transit-grade durability, ensuring a consistent and elevated experience whether travelers are recharging or conducting business.**

Lounges serve as airport and corporate brand flagships, drivers of loyalty, and revenue centers operating 24/7 within secure, high-traffic environments. In response to shifting usage patterns, operators are introducing a range of lounge subtypes—flagship, standard, grab-and-go, and smaller bolt-on “sidecars”—to alleviate overcrowding, in some cases adding timed entry and structured queuing.

Delivering these spaces successfully requires early and sustained collaboration among architects, designers, subcontractors, general contractors, program managers, and clients. From project initiation, clear alignment on vision, constraints, and schedule—backed by mutual support throughout—sets the stage for success. Collaborative procurement methods such as design-assist or design-build engage subcontractors earlier in the process, uniting creativity with real-time technical and lead-time insights. When all stakeholders share ownership, design excellence and construction efficiency reinforce one another, achieving the highest standards at maximum speed.

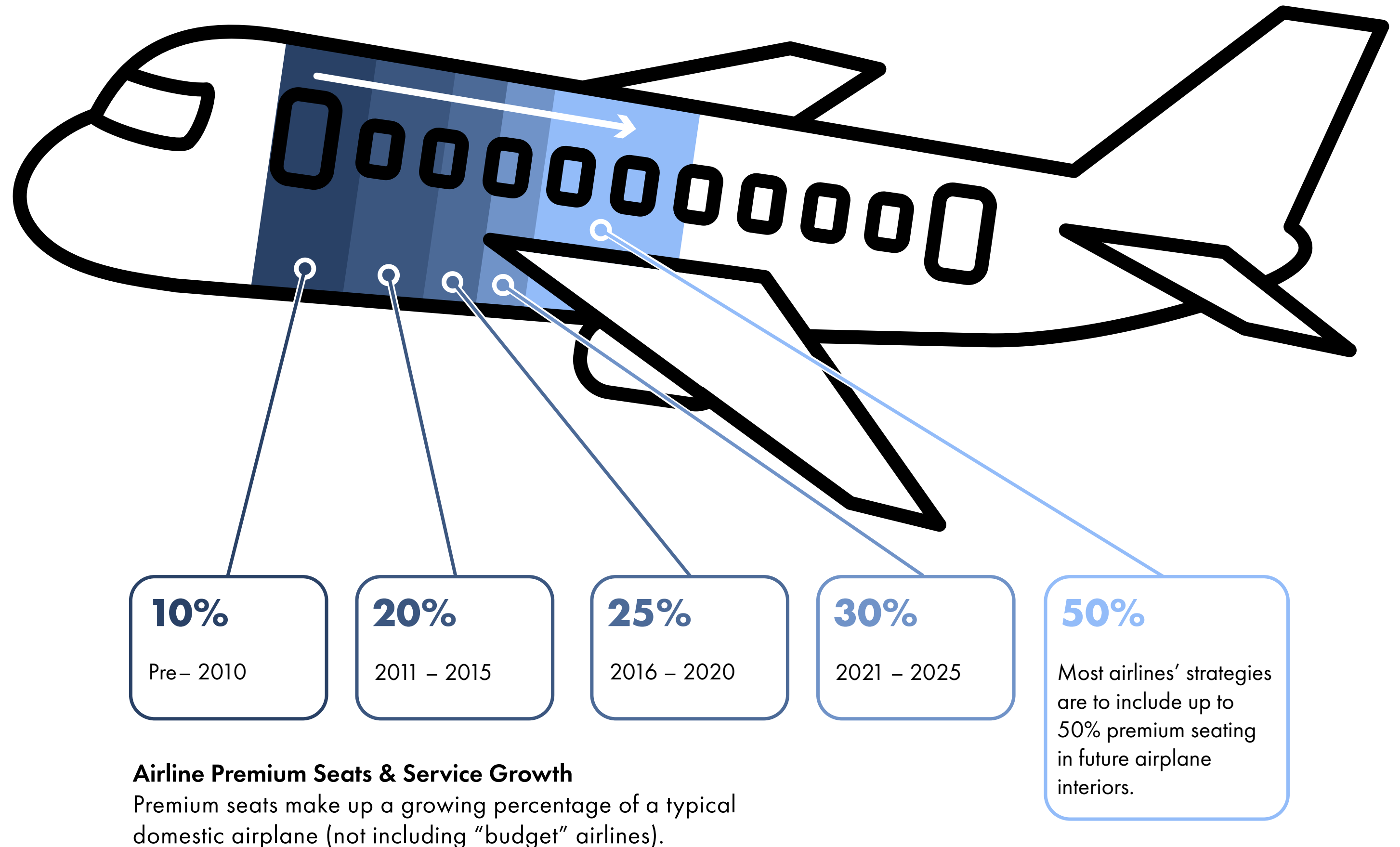
FOREWORD



The Lounge as Business-Critical Infrastructure

For airlines, corporate operators (credit cards, banks), and airports (a growing operator of general lounges), the lounge is more than a customer amenity; it is a key brand touchpoint and powerful loyalty driver. As premium cabins expand and pay-for-access programs proliferate, lounge footprints grow along with passenger expectations.

A flawlessly executed lounge experience can inspire customer loyalty for years, while a poorly delivered experience can quickly erode brand equity, especially on social media, where negative impressions travel with lightning speed. In this environment, design, construction, and project management are strategic investments in brand reputation, ensuring marketed opening dates and long-term revenues are achieved, making lounges more than just operational line items.





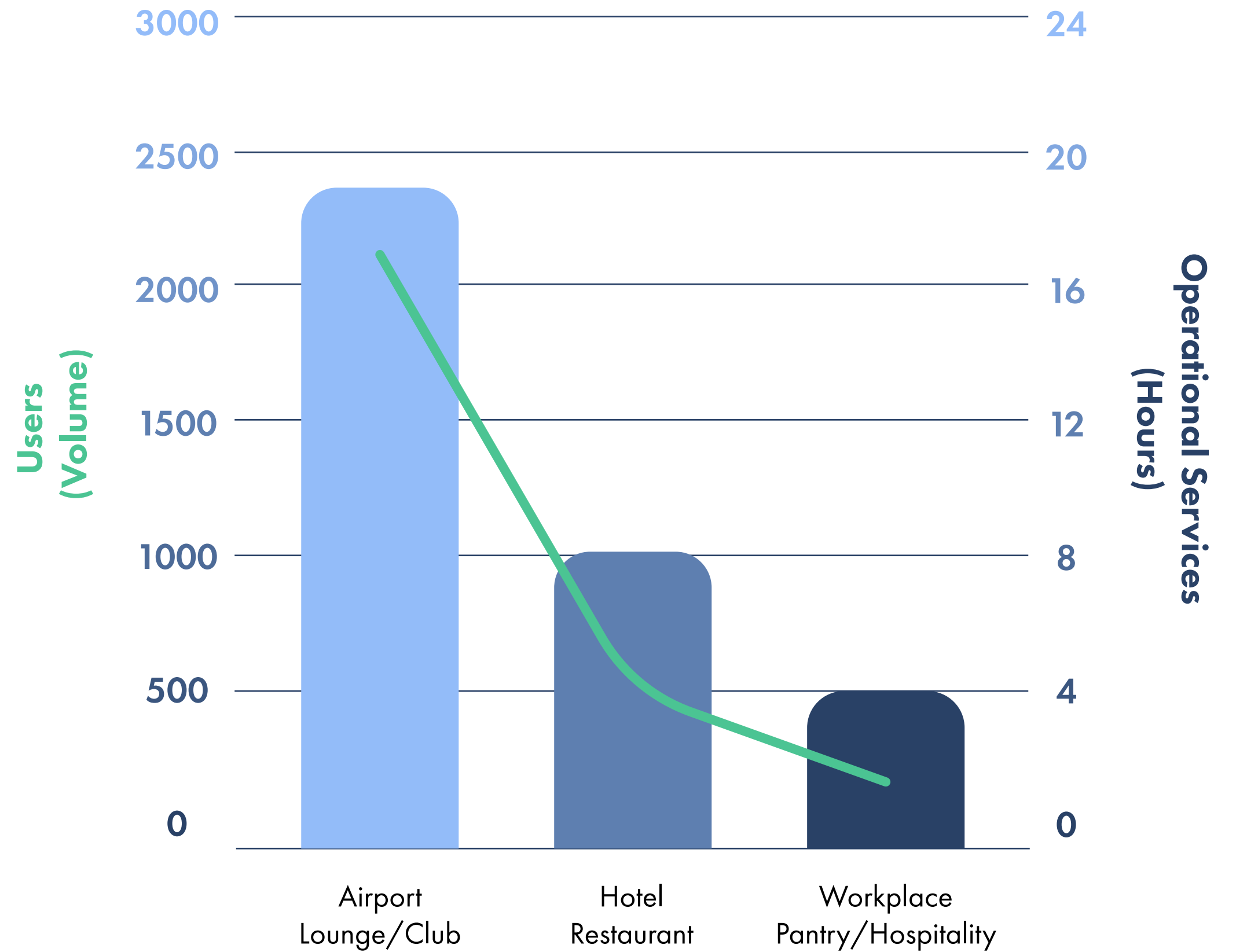
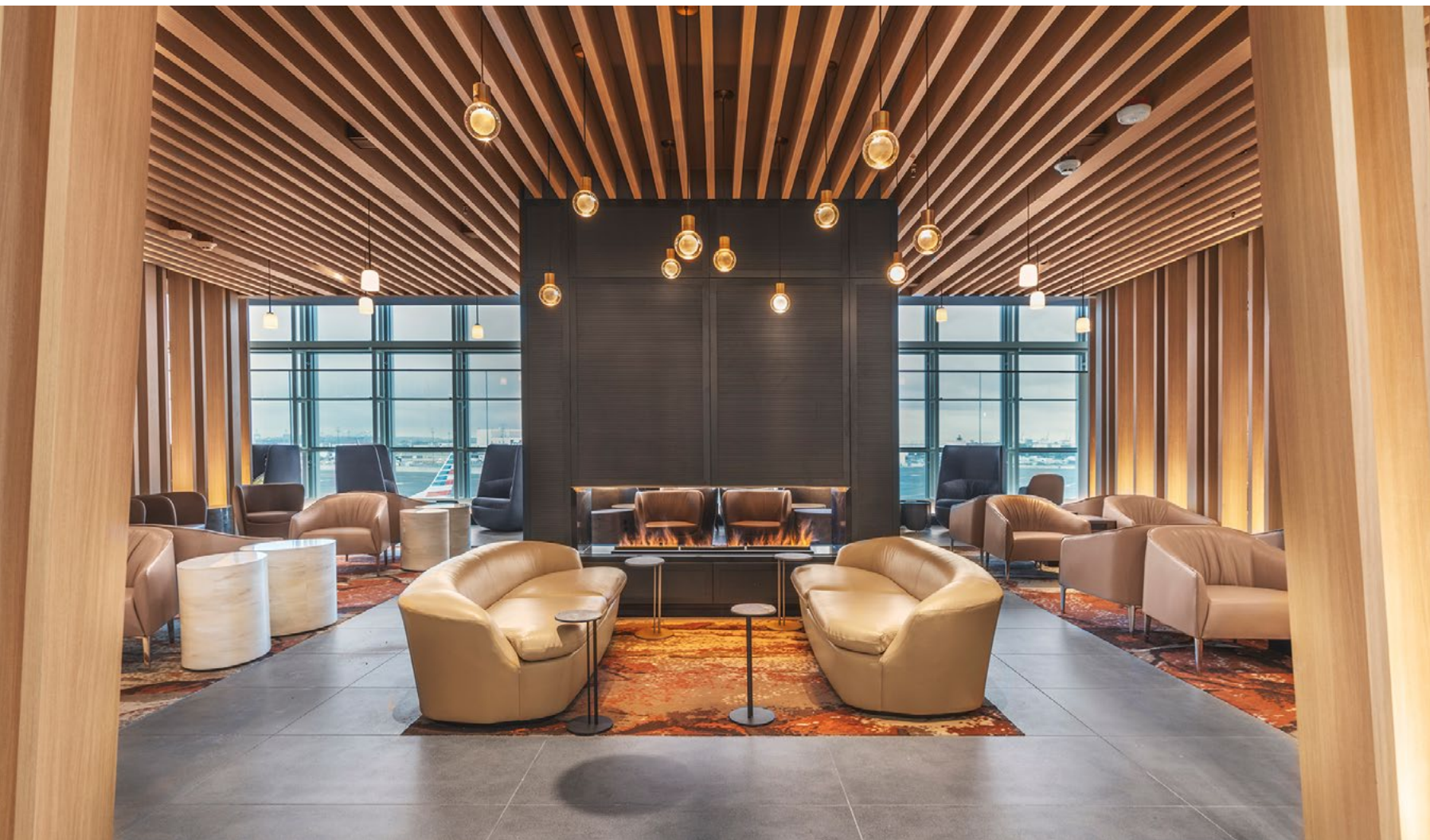
Six Principles of Next-Generation Lounge Design and Delivery

Principle #1

Luxury That Lasts

Lounges must provide the tactile richness and bespoke detail of a luxury hotel with the resilience of a mass transit environment.

Every surface, joint, and transition should reflect refinement with a robust durability beneath the elegance engineered to accommodate millions of passenger interactions and 24-hour operational service, as well as rolling luggage impacts, constant traveler turnover, and cleaning cycles.



The graph shows the typical volume of users and number of operational hours per day for various types of hospitality spaces. On average airport clubs and lounge spaces age between 3 and 6 times quicker than hotel restaurants or workplace amenity spaces.

Principle #2

Strategic Material Selection



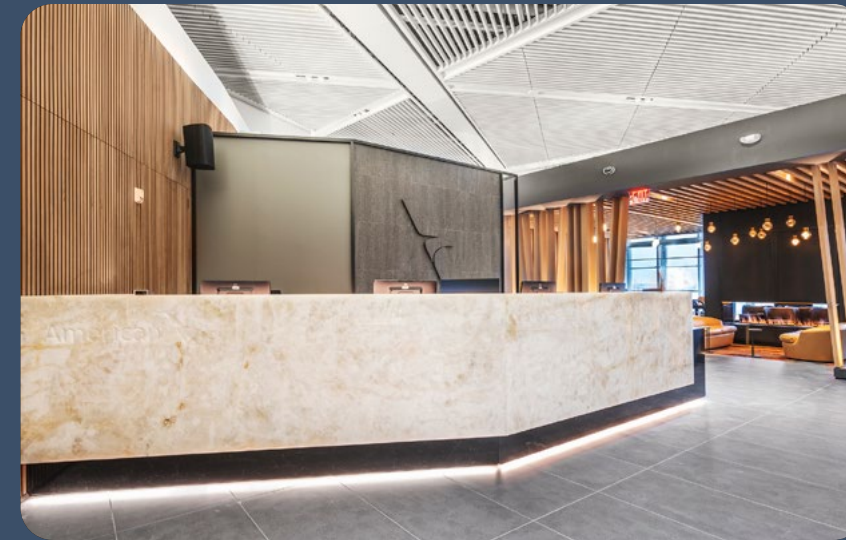
Performance Without Compromise

Engineered stone, marine-grade millwork, porcelain panels, and performance textiles resist abrasion, spills, and impact without compromising aesthetics.



Elegant Durability

Resilient stone floors, durable upholstery, and protective details such as crash rails, corner guards, and base elements maintain a refined, craft-driven character that keeps their function discreet, ensuring the overall experience remains elegant and bespoke.



Craftsmanship That Elevates Resilience

Precision-aligned material transitions and hand-finished details ensure lasting beauty from day one through year five. With skill, resilient stone floors, durable upholstery, and protective details such as crash rails, corner guards, and base elements can remain discreet in function yet refined in craft, preserving elegance and bespoke quality in high-traffic environments.



Planned Maintenance, Timeless Appeal

Balance considered material costs with luxury, durability, and long-term maintenance. Design for timeless elegance, incorporating a planned attic stock of key finishes in high-traffic areas to enable swift repair of wood or metal paneling and base molding in the event of unexpected damage.

Principle #3

Modularity & Adaptability

Lounges need to flex in response to evolving airline products, passenger behaviors, and post-occupancy insights.

Efficiently upgradeable finishes and adaptable furniture allow quick adjustments to program distribution and passenger needs.

Early engagement with finish subcontractors allows for off-site fabrication, accelerating build times and minimizing terminal disruption.



Modular planning frameworks, prefabricated elements, and reconfigurable partitions enable rapid rezoning and functional, experiential shifts creating future-proofing for a constantly developing travel culture.

Data-driven reconfiguration informed by feedback optimizes experience and revenue.

Principle #4

Immersive, Zoned Experiences

Travelers expect curated environments tailored for work, rest, dining, wellness, and socializing.

- Design choreographs the passenger journey with cultural, contextual, and brand resonance.
- Designers and builders must ensure acoustic, lighting, and finish quality with precision, allowing each zone to perform optimally.
- A collaborative, solution-oriented project culture will maximize lounge performance, passenger experience, and revenue potential.

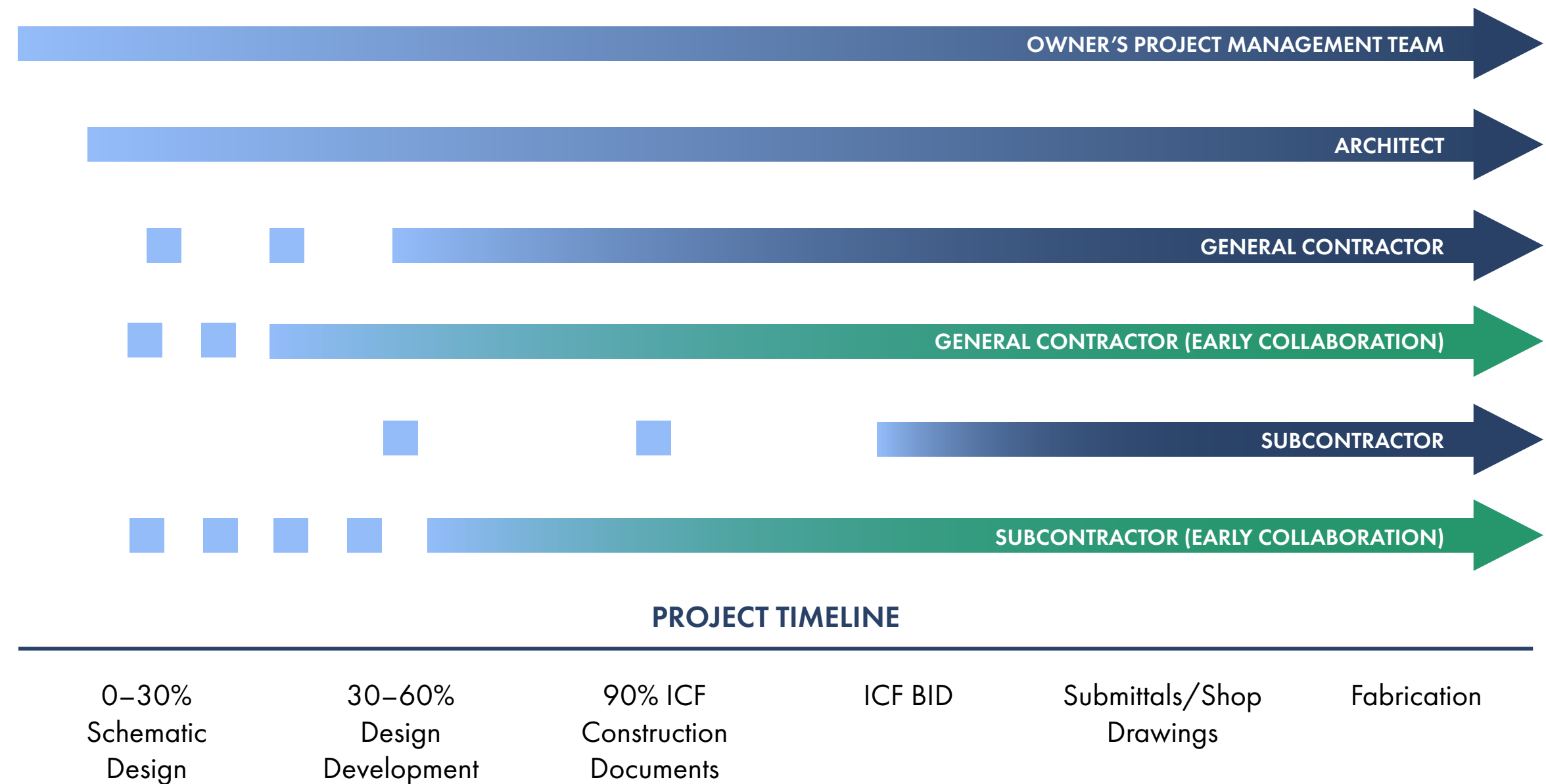


Principle #5

360-Degree Operational Excellence

Flawless function behind the scenes is essential for food services, housekeeping, maintenance, and other staff.

- Back-of-house spaces must be designed for efficiency, durability, and a seamless service flow.
- Easy-to-clean surfaces, robust components, operational flow, and layouts should reduce friction for food service, maintenance, and restocking.
- Operational requirements integrated into the design with the same rigor as the guest experience ensure luxury matched by functionality.



Stakeholder Engagement for Typical Design-Bid-Build vs. Design-Assist/Design-Build

KEY

- Pre-Contract Touchpoints
- ➡ Current Design-Bid-Build
- ➡ Ideal Design Assist/Design Build Early Collaboration

Principle #6

Sustainability Without Compromise



Smarter Systems, Healthier Spaces

Low-VOC materials, energy-efficient HVAC, smart lighting, and responsibly sourced finishes are key factors.



Prefabrication & Waste Reduction

Prefabrication and waste reduction techniques can lower carbon footprints without sacrificing luxury.



Designing for Longevity

Rigorous specification, detailing, and durability can reduce the need for frequent refreshes or renovation. To alleviate downtime when replacement may be required, plan for the seamless substitution of parts by providing attic stock as well as non-permanent fasteners to enable quick replacement.





Enabling Teams for Success

The roles of the project management and ownership teams are critical for project success.

- They must enable innovation and momentum by streamlining decision-making, providing timely feedback, and removing barriers, allowing the lounge to quickly align with new route announcements and peak travel seasons.
- Choosing design-assist or design-build over staggered procurement methods like design-bid-build empowers creative and technical teams to collaborate from project inception and adapt to evolving project needs.
- Clear communication, aligned goals, and collaborative problem-solving create an environment where design excellence and construction efficiency reinforce each other.



Navigating Challenges & Delivering Opportunity

- Rising Costs: Early engagement of subcontractors allows for cost certainty and creative budget management options in an era where inflation and tariffs are unpredictable. Smart specifications and prefabrication control budgets without quality loss.
- Operational Complexity: Secure, live-terminal work requires experienced teams and precise sequencing.
- Evolving Passenger Expectations: Personalization, cultural connection, and wellness features keep lounges relevant.
- Sustainability Pressures: Green strategies satisfy stakeholder and passenger priorities.

The Path Forward

Airport lounges stand apart as a unique architectural typology, with little precedent for designing spaces so intensely used yet expected to show no signs of fatigue. Delivering such spaces requires a collaborative, integrated team - clients, designers, contractors, subcontractors, and project management team - aligned from vision through completion.

Success depends on:

- Exclusivity paired with accessibility
- Elegance combined with resilience
- Sustainability driven by innovation
- Operational excellence front and back of house

Designers and subcontractors collaborating in real time

- Project management and ownership teams as enablers
- Clearing obstacles and supporting collaboration over bureaucracy



When these forces are aligned, the lounge becomes a **defining chapter in the passenger journey**, delivering an impactful, immersive encounter with immediacy, precision, and lasting value. Expertise in design and construction translates into a timeless experience for both passengers and employees.

AUTHORS



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