

# Green Ogres & Onions

*Peeling back the many layers of the green movement reveals opportunity after opportunity for the hospitality industry*

**By Ray Burger, President of Pineapple Hospitality**

In the first *Shrek* mega-hit movie, Shrek was trying to explain to his motor-mouthed friend Donkey that Ogres are like onions. Donkey didn't quite get it at first — like much of the world regarding the early going green movement — but then it really hit him (and us)!

Donkey: "They stink?"

Shrek: "Yes. No."

Donkey: "Oh, they make you cry."

Shrek: "No!"

Donkey: "Oh, you leave 'em out in the sun, they get all brown, start sproutin' little white hairs."

Shrek: "NO! Layers! Onions have layers. Ogres have layers. Onions have layers. You get it? We both have layers." [sighs]

Donkey: "Oh, you both have layers. You know, not everybody likes onions."

Lodging's ever-expanding green movement is like an onion in how it draws on our senses and like the lovable green ogre in how it shatters stereotypes (that green products cost rather than save).

To some people, the idea of going green is scary, or the concept is misunderstood. But if you take the time and do your research, you will see there are layers to being green. Once you start peeling back those layers, you'll find that going green isn't so scary after all. In fact, if done correctly, going green will be better for both your bottom line and the environment. Results like that can win over even those people who don't like onions!

## **HARVESTING THE FRUITS OF GOING GREEN**

Green is the hallmark of the Gaia Napa Valley Hotel & Spa in American Canyon, Calif. — the world's first and only Gold LEED Certified hotel.

The 133-room resort was built using wood from sustainable forests and recycled materials for carpets and bath tiles; solar panels provide 12 percent of the hotel's electricity; bulk, paperless soap, shampoo, and lotion dispensers are mounted in its bathrooms; recycling bins are located throughout the grounds; and a copy of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* is left on the nightstand in each room. A kiosk in the main atrium lets guests discover how much water and electricity the hotel is using, and how much CO2 it's emitting, at any given time.

To put it mildly, not every hotel is going to be able to do that. To get to that level, it took a major environmental commitment from the hotel's ownership and a complete plan in place before a shovel ever hit the dirt at the site of the resort. But even if your hotel is not new, that doesn't mean there aren't steps you can take to improve your facilities' environmental impact.

Like the onion, we should think of green in layers: green, *greener* and **greenest**.



The Gaia Hotel

## **GREEN**

At the green layer are some of the simplest ways that a hotel can improve its operations and environmental bottom line. These are steps like installing compact fluorescent light bulbs, starting a linen and towel reuse program for guestrooms, and using refillable amenity dispensers for soap, shampoo, lotions and other amenities, rather than throwing away hundreds of tiny shampoo bottles (unnecessary packaging and product waste) every day.

There's no reason why every hotel shouldn't be implementing these kinds of policies. They are easy to do, benefit the environment, and will cut down on the hotel's costs in the long-term. The challenge here is to make guests aware of the programs.

If all you do is put up a small sign in guestroom bathrooms about your towel and linen reuse program, guests may not care — or worse, they may feel that your hotel is just doing it to be cheap. That's not a problem at the Gaia. Because the hotel has made the environmental programs an interactive part of the guest experience, so guests are eager to get involved.

A recent study from Luxique found that 70 percent of hotel guests don't think hotels are doing enough to reduce their carbon imprint, but at the same time 90 percent of guests themselves aren't watching their own carbon footprints while traveling. That is why it is up to the hotels to make the environment a priority. Be smart, be funny, be serious. It doesn't matter. But know that you cannot do green half-hearted.

## GREENER

The greener layer of environmentalism includes some significant changes to your hotel's operations.

To cut out utility waste, the hotel should be using high-efficiency plumbing fixtures. According to the Eco-Criteria from EcoRooms and EcoSuites ([www.ecorooms.com](http://www.ecorooms.com)), an online database of environmentally friendly hotels, the fixtures should be within these standards: "2 GPM Faucets with 1.5 GPM or less aerators, the showerheads shall be 2.5 GPM or less, and the toilet shall be 1.6 GPF or less."

Hotels also can switch to organic cleaning products, begin a guest recycling program and use recycled paper. Guests might not even notice these behind-the-scenes measures, which is good because you don't want to inconvenience them in any way. But you still could take steps in letting guests know that you are walking the walk — that you are truly serious about your environmental responsibility and hope they are too.

## GREENEST

The greenest steps a hotel can take include many of the measures found in the Gaia Hotel. Solar lighting. Guestroom energy controls, like motion sensors or keycard energy management systems. Using sustainable materials for guest furniture, carpets and upholstery. LEED certification. These may cost significant dollars at the outset, but will pay you back in energy efficiency.

For more ideas, check out EcoRooms' and EcoSuites' Eco-Criteria. There, we are working with some of the greenest minds in the hospitality industry to outline what it truly means to be green. And just as the interest in green continues to grow and evolve, so will the Eco-Criteria.

The interest in green is at an all-time high. By providing and exemplifying a green program at your hotel, guests' (and employees') actions will follow. It requires education and cooperation, amongst management, staff and guests. But when you look at the big picture, the whole green onion — made up of those individual layers — you'll have created something significant for your guests, the environment and your bottom line. That's something even an Ogre, or a donkey, can understand.

*You can reach Ray Burger, President of Pineapple Hospitality, at [ray@pineapplehospitality.net](mailto:ray@pineapplehospitality.net), (636) 922-2285. Headquartered in Saint Charles, Missouri, Pineapple Hospitality™ is an EPA ENERGY STAR™ partner bringing fresh ideas to hospitality guests' doors and owner/operators' bottom lines — including FreshStay® ([www.freshstay.com](http://www.freshstay.com)), Environmentally Sensitive Amenities™, the greenSPA™ luxury amenity and dispenser system, Numi™ Organic Teas, Project Planet™ Linen Re-Use Programs, Guestat™ programmable thermostats, Oxygenics™ water-efficient showerheads, the Nature's Mist™ deodorization system, and dozens of other products and programs. To get a taste of Pineapple's sweet planet-friendly solutions helping thousands of hotels bolster business and cut costs, please visit [www.pineapplehospitality.net](http://www.pineapplehospitality.net).*



**The Kiosk at the Gaia Hotel displays the hotel's environmental policies**  
(High-Resolution images available)