

## An evaluation of interior styles in the serviced apartment sector in Nairobi

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### Abstract.

**Background/Introduction:** *Serviced apartments became increasingly popular in the market recently, especially in Nairobi due to a number of factors like their relative affordability as compared to hotels, the home away from home feel, security and spacious units. However, there is an oversupply of hospitality space with an annual bed capacity of 20 million of which only 5.8 million was occupied in 2015 (Cytonn Hospitality report, 2017). This creates a supply and demand gap which has a negative outlook in regard to serviced apartments in both the real estate and hospitality sector.*

**Objectives:** *Objectives guiding the study included exploring the choice of interior style(s) incorporated in the serviced apartments, assessing how the apartments can deliver their brand experience to customers through tangible and intangible interior style elements and to determineways of enhancing creativity and innovativeness in the sector through interior style(s), to improve the serviced apartments' brand experience.*

**Design:** *A qualitative exploratory research design which involved administration of questionnaires and conducting interviews was incorporated.*

**Setting/scope:** *unestablished serviced apartment brands in Nairobi*

**Subjects/respondents:** *Serviced apartments owners/developers and guests in the apartments.*

**Results:** *The findings indicated that there is lack of diversity on interior style choices since most of the apartments had a modern finish/style with twists on the general structure and furnishings.*

**Conclusions:** *Criteria for distinctive serviced apartment should includes; Focus on the appropriateness of the materials being used in interior spaces basing on their compatibility with environmental and aesthetic conditions, and their applicability to occupancy and size of the space; Assess the physical properties of design materials which are determined by their physical and visual density, mass and thickness, strength, texture, colour, temperature and pattern before being used in the interior spaces; Explore techniques used in fabrication processes, detailing of how design materials and systems are joined and installed, and the craft used to produce different interior works; Symbolism should also be considered in the interior spaces through artefacts which carry specific meanings within different cultures and regions, as a means to promote diversity in the sector; There also lies opportunity in reviewing current building design codes with other stakeholders in the serviced apartments sector, especially the government, since this will ensure that the changing needs in the country are met; Consistent review of interior style effectiveness in relation to lowering guest turnover, so as to improve the customer experience through better ambience and services.*

### INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Serviced apartments are part of the relatively recent accommodation products in the hospitality industry that have

attracted huge popularity in the recent past. They create a huge competition to the conventional hotels and are also an appealing alternative to the hotels; to business-oriented guests and those

relocating for various durations (LaSalle, 2013). The ability to generate a higher profit and income than the average hotel through lower guest turnover makes them successful, since the staying duration is longer than that of regular hotels (E&Y, 2015). Being a fusion of the residential and hospitality market sector, they bridge the gap between a shorter and longer hotel stay and rental accommodation respectively.

The apartments originated in the USA purposefully for business-oriented and fun travelers and then spread into Europe and Asia (Poon, 2005; Vanichvatana 2006a, b; Phadungyat, 2008). Initially, they were constructed in holiday destinations as spaces for families that sought to duel in apartments, which would generally be serviced but provide a holiday home. They developed into extended stay hotels with provision of home-like features which are unavailable at standard hotels. Drawing back to Kenya, the current economy is categorized by focus on 3 factors which include delivery of services, knowledge-based industrial trading and innovation (Gathungu & Karoki, 2010). This presents a competitive age for the serviced apartments sector because of the amplified propagation of hospitality brands. Despite the swift move into the aforementioned factors, the brand establishment of some apartments has staggered due to various issues.

Lack of adequate design information in the sector is one of the issues, which can be addressed through providing design standards/guidelines on what makes up a serviced apartment. Kenya is highly inflated with serviced apartments as compared to other African regions, especially in the sub-Saharan Africa. East African capitals have over 6,600 operational serviced apartments and Kenya tops the region with 3,350 keys in operation in close to 100 apartments in Nairobi (Chabari, 2018). Customers are

mostly aware of almost 20-30 apartments due to their higher ratings and their well-established brands in terms of services and interior styles, among other factors as per guest reviews on various booking sites. This leaves out quite a number of the unestablished apartments in the target zones. The abundance of these apartments has both positive and negative effects since it favors the well-known or main service brands while promoting product cannibalism.

### ***Problem***

Serviced apartments became increasingly popular in the market recently, especially in Nairobi due to a number of factors like their relative affordability as compared to hotels, the home away from home feel, security and spacious units. However, there is an oversupply of hospitality space with an annual bed capacity of 20 million of which only 5.8 million was occupied in 2015 (Cytonn Hospitality report, 2017). This creates a supply and demand gap which has a negative outlook in regard to serviced apartments in both the real estate and hospitality sector.

Due to an oversupply of hospitality space in regard to unestablished serviced apartments in the Kenyan hospitality industry, some apartments are copying each other's designs hence lacking originality. This allows the few local well-established properties like the Triumf hospitality limited or internationally branded properties like the Hilton and Fairmont hotels among others to flourish, due to their worldwide market reach, distinct designs and multiregional campaigns as the unestablished apartments stagger. The owners'/developers' lack of information on what clearly entails a serviced apartment from a design perspective is what contributes to this unoriginality, which hinders their growth in the longrun.

### ***Research questions.***

1. What interior style(s) have been incorporated in the serviced apartments in Nairobi?
2. How can the serviced apartments deliver their brand experience to customers through tangible and intangible interior style elements?
3. How can creativity and innovativeness in the serviced apartments sector be enhanced through interior style(s), to improve the serviced apartments' brand experience?

### ***Objectives***

1. To explore the choice of interior style(s) incorporated in the serviced apartments in Nairobi.
2. To assess how the serviced apartments can deliver their brand experience to customers through tangible and intangible interior style elements.
3. To determine ways of enhancing creativity and innovativeness in the serviced apartments sector through interior style(s), to improve the serviced apartments' brand experience.

### ***Justification of the problem***

Through examination of existing literature, there is a huge deficiency of design-oriented information on serviced apartments since most of the studies have focused on the economical aspect of the apartments and traditional forms of accommodation. The serviced apartments which are part of the alternative accommodation concept have been relatively unexplored (McIntosh, Lynch & Sweeney, 2007), especially as they are a contemporary accommodation concept still evolving in

Kenya. Thus, there is a need for more research on them from a design perspective, taking into consideration the sector's growth, popularity and appeal. The study aims at providing adequate information to the property owners/developers and potential investors in the serviced apartments sector in a design-oriented method, through evaluating the interior styles of the unestablished apartments with considerations on how they can relay their distinctiveness through tangible and intangible design elements such as colors, materials, décor, furniture, fixture & equipment, lighting, ambiance and design practices, and how they can deliver their brand's experience to customers through their interior styles.

### ***Key Literature***

Worldwide, as at January 2018, there were 1,022,984 serviced apartments operating in 1,364 locations, an increase on 2016/17 of 19% in units (The Apartment Service report, 2018-19). This denotes a significant expansion in this sector even though it varies from regions, cities and years. Africa is still at the lowest level in serviced apartment supply by both units and location as compared to other world regions and surprisingly, there already is an oversupply of hospitality space within the continent, especially in Kenya (Cytom Hospitality report, 2017). This is because of various factors which include the slow economic growth in terms of urbanization which causes discrepancies in infrastructure between countries, branding of the serviced apartments and the relatively untapped technological grounds in the region.

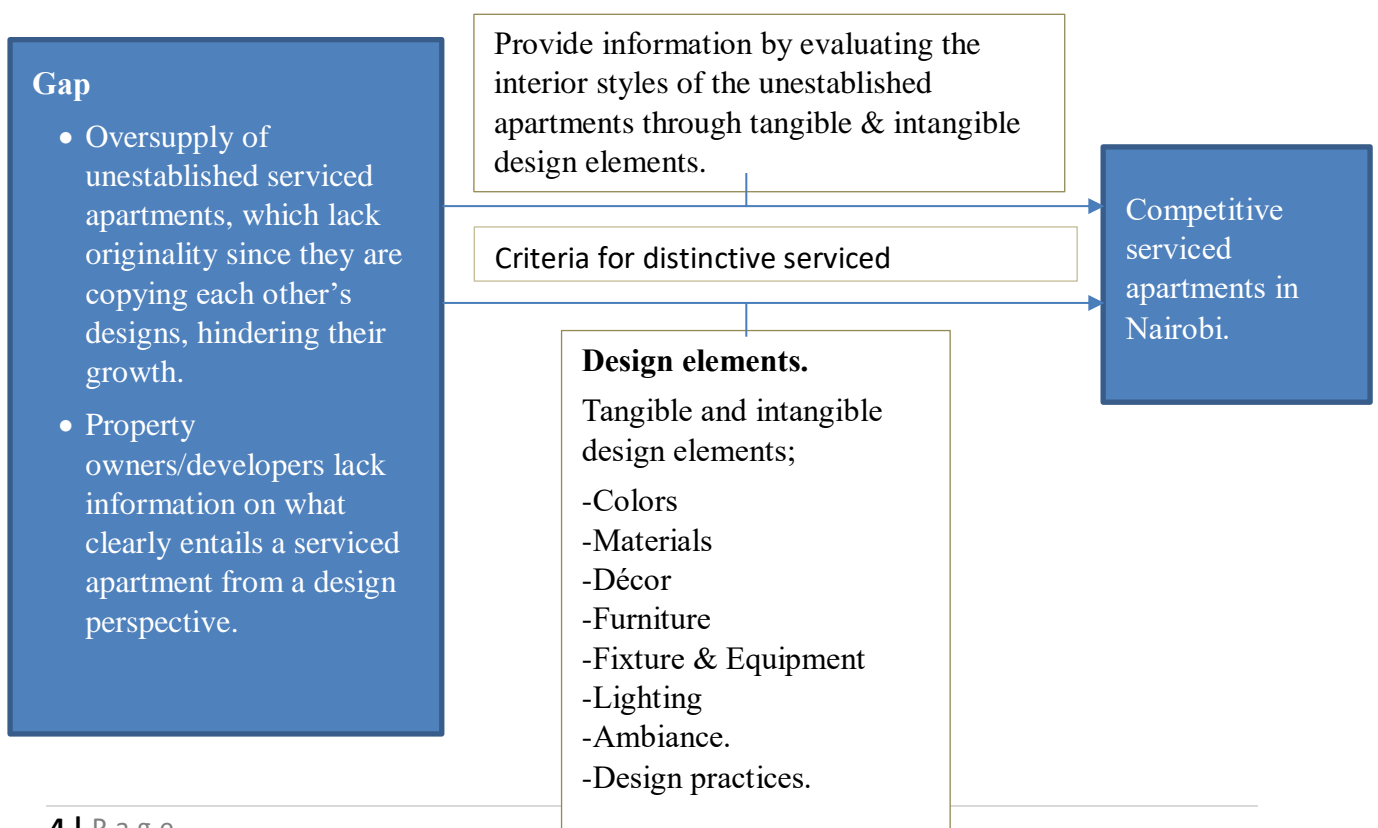
Focusing on interior branding, which is mostly done through interior styles, the hospitality industry is handicapped without these styles because they increase brand awareness, communicate brand identity, improve company image, differentiate it

from the competition, appeal to target markets, create unique and memorable experiences and develop customer loyalty (Villalon, 2017). Thus, the need to foster proper interior branding creatively and innovatively is essential for growth in the serviced apartment sector. Interior branding is interior design that combines brand strategies to relay a company's identity through tangible and intangible design elements and to deliver that brand's experience to customers. It is more than a logo, color and sign and its effectiveness depends on the co-relation of design elements to create an exclusive and engaging physical and sensory experience with customers. Aligning every design decision with its brand identity strengthens and increases the value of its brand.

In Kenya, the regional culture and treatment of serviced apartment offerings in Nairobi is yet to fully mature with the primary point of focus being on select

service (Chabari 2018). Furthermore, the serviced apartment sector is a very young segment which really started to form in 2010 and due to high fragmentation, the target market highlights mainly on local investors, families, investor groups and wealthy individuals and expatriates on assignments among other players. However, most of the apartments lack originality in terms of interior style choices since they are copying each other's designs which makes them "soulless" (Lancaster, 2016). With the current oversupply of hospitality space in the country, the apartments ought to be unique to remain relevant, rather than have a general design that could be found in most interior spaces. The main challenge is the lack of information on what makes up a serviced apartment thus providing information involves advising investors on what the industry really means (Muna, 2017), which the research aims to address from a design point of view.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.**



## METHODS

### *Research design*

The study adopted an exploratory research design to establish priorities and develop operational definitions to solve the problem at hand. This was by reviewing available literature on the serviced apartments and using both structured and unstructured qualitative approaches such as questionnaires, discussions and in-depth interviews with customers and the serviced apartments' owners/employees among other stakeholders in the sector (Kombo & Tromp 2006). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the research in summarizing and categorizing the data into emerging themes. Results were presented through figures and tables and quantitatively through percentages and charts for easy interpretation of information.

### *Study area and population*

The study analyzed unestablished serviced apartments which are spread out across various market zones in Nairobi which include Westlands, Kilimani, Upperhill-Milimani, Valley Arcade – Lavington, Kileleshwa and Gigiri-Runda-Muthaiga-Kasarani. The Serviced Apartment report (2018) indicates that Kenya leads the development pack in serviced apartments in East Africa with 3,350 keys in operation in close to 100 apartments in Nairobi. However, customers are aware of almost 20-30 apartments. The study population therefore consisted of the approximately 70 unestablished brands across the zones.

### *Sampling techniques, sample size and distribution*

The target population was computed based on the serviced apartment population estimated by HVS market report (2015) with consideration on the lesser known

apartments only, through separating established apartments in each market zone and reviewing data from various booking sites, which now puts Westlands at 23, Kilimani at 13, Upperhill – Milimani at 10, Valley Arcade – Lavington at 10, Kileleshwa at 6 and Gigiri-Runda-Muthaiga-Kasarani at 2, totaling up to 64 known serviced apartments. Simple random sampling was adopted in distributing questionnaires. Each of the identified serviced apartment complexes was allocated a number and placed in a box and mixed so as to give each apartment a chance of being selected. Respondents with information for the selected apartments constituted the developers or property managers and in their absence the caretakers or any other developer's representatives. In order to gather the customer perceptions towards the serviced apartments, each of the selected serviced apartment was issued with extra questionnaires for the available guests to fill. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a sample size of between 10 and 30 % offers a good representation of the target population and hence a 30% sample size was considered adequate. The sample sizes are calculated as follows:  $30\% * 23 = 7$  apartments in Westlands,  $30\% * 13 = 4$  apartments in Kilimani,  $30\% * 10 = 3$  apartments in Upperhill – Milimani,  $30\% * 10 = 3$  apartments in Valley Arcade – Lavington,  $30\% * 6 = 2$  apartments in Kileleshwa and  $30\% * 2 = 1$  apartment in Gigiri-Runda-Muthaiga-Kasarani.

### *Data Categories*

Both primary and secondary data was collected during the study. Field surveys of the various zones assisted in the collection of primary data. The primary data sought included investigating interior styles used

in the unestablished serviced apartments with considerations on how they relay their distinctiveness through tangible and intangible design elements such as colors, materials, décor, furniture, fixture & equipment, lighting and ambiance, and how they deliver their brand's experience to customers through their interior styles. Secondary data comprised of a thorough literature review of documented information from publications, journals and reports. The aspects reviewed included the interior styles and the serviced apartments sector, classification of the serviced apartments, merits and demerits of the serviced apartments, the serviced apartments global outlook, serviced apartments in smart cities, branding in the serviced apartment sector and serviced apartment branding through interior style.

#### ***Data collection methods and instruments***

Both primary and secondary instruments were used in collecting the necessary information. Questionnaires administered to the selected respondents were used during collection of primary data and clarification was given to questions where respondents had difficulties. Both close – ended and open – ended questions were used. The close – ended questions provided more structured responses while open – ended questions helped in testing the rating of various practices and perceptions. (Kothari, 2004). In order to gather detailed information that cannot be obtained through administration of questionnaires, both oral and written interviews were incorporated. This was

undertaken by identifying the various key informants/ designers and seeking their indulgence.

Observation and photography were also used. Observation involved getting information through the investigator's own direct observation and taking down notes while photographs captured information as it is on the ground. This aided in capturing existing serviced apartments conditions in the areas of study in relation to their interior styles. Secondary data was compiled through review of both published and unpublished literature relevant to the study. These included books, articles, internet, magazines, newspapers, reports, journals, legislations and government policies. Maps and physical development plans of the area from the relevant authority also constituted secondary data as well

#### ***Data analysis***

The collected data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data was analyzed manually initially by summarizing the information gathered, categorization and coding into emerging themes and presenting in a narrative form. Results were presented through figures and tables and quantitatively through percentages and charts, to facilitate easy interpretation and understanding of the information by the users and a brief explanation of each offered.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Distribution of questionnaires and response rate.***

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Questionnaires issued</b>	<b>Questionnaires received</b>	<b>Percentage response</b>

<b>Kilimani</b>			
Developers, property managers and caretakers.	4	4	100%
Guests	18	15	83%
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>Westlands.</b>			
Developers, property managers and caretakers.	7	4	57%
Guests	30	22	73%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>77%</b>
<b>Upperhill-Milimani.</b>			
Developers, property managers and caretakers.	3	1	33%
Guests	12	7	58%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Valley Arcade-Lavington.</b>			
Developers, property managers and caretakers.	3	3	100%
Guests	20	11	55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Kileleshwa.</b>			
Developers, property managers and caretakers.	2	2	100%
Guests	10	6	60%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Gigiri-Runda-Muthaiga-Kasarani</b>			
Developers, property	5	5	100%

managers and caretakers.			
Guests	15	10	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>75%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>70%</b>



*Logical framework*

<b>Objective 1: To explore the choice of interior style(s) incorporated in the serviced apartments in Nairobi.</b>				
<b>Data needs.</b>	<b>Data source.</b>	<b>Data collection method.</b>	<b>Analysis method.</b>	<b>Findings.</b>
Images.	14 Apartments. 2 Apartments. 2 Apartments. 1 Apartment.	Observation & photography.	Visual analysis.	-Modern style. -Contemporary style. -Rustic style. -Mid-century modern style.
<b>Objective 2: To assess how the serviced apartments can deliver their brand experience to customers through tangible and intangible interior style elements.</b>				
<b>Data needs.</b>	<b>Data source.</b>	<b>Data collection method.</b>	<b>Analysis method.</b>	<b>Findings.</b>
Practices & perceptions.	4 Interior designers. 19 developers/ owners. 5 informants-established serviced apartments.	Questionnaires & interviews.	Discourse analysis.	-Appropriateness of materials. -Physical properties of materials. -Technique. -Symbolism.  -Reviewing current building design codes. -Reviewing interior style effectiveness for lower guest turnover.
<b>Objective 3: To determine ways of enhancing creativity and innovativeness in the serviced apartments sector through interior style(s), to improve the serviced apartments' brand experience.</b>				
<b>Data needs.</b>	<b>Data source.</b>	<b>Data collection method.</b>	<b>Analysis method.</b>	<b>Findings.</b>

Knowledge/ information.	4 Interior designers.  1 hospitality report analyst.  Property owners and guests in the serviced apartments.	Questionnaires & interviews.	Framework analysis.	-Create awareness in the sector through design.  -Response to changing guests' requirements.  -Avoiding overuse/replication of styles.  -Embracing ICT.  -Encouraging proper interior branding.
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***Summary of participants' responses***

The majority of people that took the questionnaire were the serviced apartment's owners, representatives on site and guests who were occupying some of the apartments. Most of the owners were conversant with the exact style they incorporated in the apartments though a number affirmed that they basically let their contracted interior designers come up with the ultimate design. This contributed to most of the apartments ending up with almost similar modern styles in their interiors since the style is meant to build for function and is simpler to achieve with current industrial raw materials like chrome, glass and concrete, which new technologies make available. However, the owners acknowledged they lacked proper information on interior styles and how they could be incorporated in the apartments. Most of them focused on getting revenue as they compete with the already established apartments, more than thinking of exclusive ways of making their properties unique and then competitive in the sector.

On the other hand, various stakeholders in the sector also had varied opinions on how the serviced apartments could deliver their brand experience to customers through tangible and intangible interior style elements. Most of the interior designers suggested that the apartments could focus on the appropriateness of the materials being used in the interior spaces and also assess their physical properties, explore the techniques used in various fabrication process and they could also consider the use of symbolism in the interior spaces through artefacts. After interacting with both owners and representatives from unestablished and established apartments alongside some interior designers, it emerged that there is need for reviewing current building design codes with other stakeholders in the serviced apartments sector; especially the government. Furthermore, most of the established apartments reviewed their interior style effectiveness to reduce on their guest turnover, so as to improve the customer experience which is a trait that can be emulated by the less established apartments.

Creativity and innovativeness is key for survival in the sector and most of the feedback from the guests revolved around emphasis on originality in the interiors, embracing IT through efficient online listing and proper interior branding with regard to authentic/durable material selection, all for a better guest experience. Additionally, some interior designers and hospitality report analysts suggested creating awareness in the sector through influential design forums and not only digital marketing, and their also needs to be consistence response to the ever-changing guest requirements. The results enabled the criteria for distinctive serviced apartments to be developed.

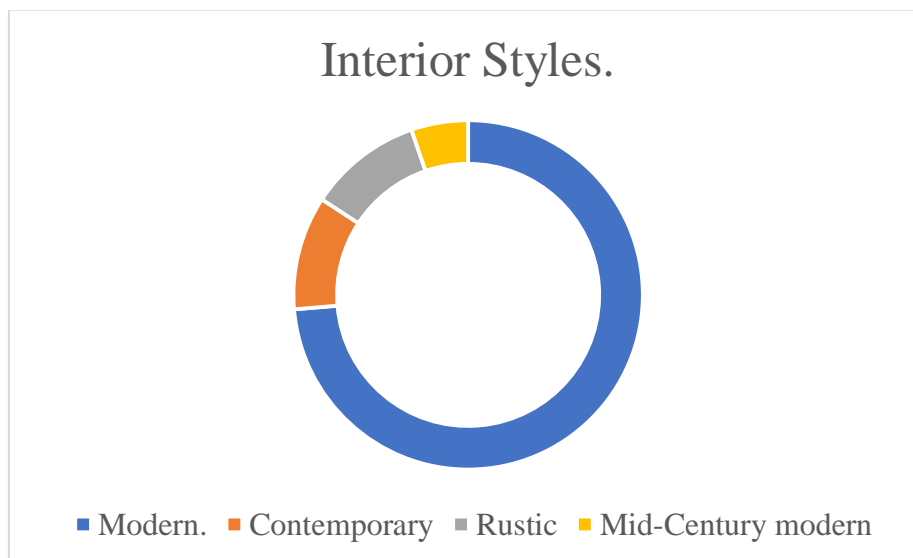
## DISCUSSION

### *Interior styles incorporated in the apartments.*

It is important to keep in mind that before choosing any interior style and using it in a space, form should follow function, which is precisely a modernist approach in design. However, it is also valid for function to follow form in various non-modernist approaches and creating spaces that are efficient and appealing is vital and can be achieved through;

- Planning with a purpose.
- Understanding that interior style and designs change over time.
- Knowing that functional spaces are more valuable.
- Considering cost by understanding what is aimed to be achieved and for whom.

From the study, the main interior styles incorporated in the serviced apartments' interiors were;



Prevalence of interior styles in the serviced apartments.

Source: Field survey, 2019.

- Modern. (14; Spread out across all the serviced apartments market zones.)
- Contemporary. (2; Westlands and Kileleshwa.)
- Rustic. (2; Westlands and Kilimani.)
- Mid-Century modern. (1; Westlands.)



**Modern:** (Marriot Executive Apartments, Addis Ababa – Ethiopia.)

- Modern style is based upon new and innovative technologies of construction, with the idea that form should follow function, an embrace of minimalism and a rejection of ornamentation (Royal Institute of British Architects, 2018).

**Contemporary:** (Sandton, Gauteng – South Africa.)

- Contemporary style involves creating designs that embody all the differences in various present-day interior styles, without too much focus on any of them (ArtWiki, 2018).



Exemplars of interior styles used in the serviced apartments.

**Rustic:** (Woodmere serviced apartments, Nairobi – Kenya.)

- The Rustic style is a design emphasis on rugged natural beauty with nature inspired textures, simple earthly colours and unpretentious organic warmth (Homedit, 2019).

**Mid-Century Modern:**(Airbnb, Cape Town – South Africa.)

- The style focuses on a clean, minimalist aesthetic, an emphasis on bringing the outdoors in and the presence of angular structures (Kelly Richman-Abdou, 2017).

Identifying these styles through various criteria was made possible by interacting with some of the designers who handled the projects, after being referred to them by the owners of the apartments.

come up with the styles was based on various aspects of interior design which are; colour palettes, furniture, fabric and lighting.



Conclusively, designing the interiors to  
Greenpath residence, Kilimani.  
Source: Field survey, 2019

### ***Modern style***

The modern style basically involved the use of natural materials, neutral or earthy colours and elimination of unnecessary detailing. Colour variations included monochromatic schemes, earth tones, bright schemes, modern meets vintage and an artful mix. Furniture used involved cutting off of excess material, modification and practicality of the materials which

greatly influenced their design and the general aesthetic appeal in the interiors. Most soft furnishings/ fabrics used natural materials and neutral or earthy colours. The lighting fixtures aimed at complementing the architectural design and look of the apartment by representing an intersection of function, form and style.



*Contemporary style*



Suite Life Serviced Apartments, Kileleshwa.  
Source; Field Survey, 2019

The contemporary style which is constantly evolving to reflect popular styles of present-day designs, by borrowing qualities from post-modernism and minimalism among other global styles without specifically focusing on any of them. Neutral elements and bold colours focused on the basics of line, shape and form. Tone on tone colour palettes relied heavily on black, brown, taupe, cream and pure white, with shots of colour sometimes found on a single wall, in a striking floor rug or in special art pieces. Furniture pieces were entailed with clean lines and smooth surfaces without any carving or

adornment, made of light-colored wood like maple and birch, frosted or clear glass and stainless steel. Most fabrics contained natural fibers like wool, leather, silk, linen and cotton because of their textural aspect and inherent natural hues. Lighting fixtures were used as artistic statements in the interiors and the floor/table lamps were characterized by straight lines and sleek metallic finishes, with specially colored shades. Furthermore, recessed lighting drew attention to well-placed art, accessories and surfaces.

*Rustic style*



Tropical Towers Apartment, Kilimani.  
Source; Field Survey, 2019

The style generally involved common details like leather chairs, dark stained wood, beams, stonework and plenty of natural fibres. Natural colour schemes like brown, taupe, deep red, dark green, yellow, grey, white, black, stone work/stone veneer were used in the interiors. Weathered wooden chunky furniture with unfinished, edged, original

or reclaimed wooden floors and leather/soft textured seats accessorized open surfaces in the rooms. Fabrics incorporated the use of wool, cotton, linen and animal hide rugs/ patterned area rugs and blankets or throw pillows with geometric or striped prints. The lighting was specifically designed for warmth and a rich ambience

### *Mid-century modern style*



Cerenata Gardens Hotel and Suites, Westlands.  
Source: Field Survey, 2019

The style involved uncluttered and sleek lines with both organic and geometric forms/curves minimal ornamentation and juxtaposition of contrasting traditional as well as non-traditional materials. The hues combined darker neutral tones with saturated accent colours and the furniture involved straight clean lines with smooth curved angles rarely featuring any fancy ornamentation or upholstery. The furniture

pieces relied on wooden construction but can also use fiberglass or metal and have one or two colours with little to no patterns. The fabrics incorporated asymmetrical abstract patterns and the lighting fixtures featured either very straight, geometric lines or round curved contours mostly accessorized with finished metal.

***Brand experience delivery through tangible and intangible interior style elements.***

The tangible and intangible interior style elements are the design factors that correlate with each other either directly or indirectly to achieve both utilitarian and aesthetic aspects in an interior space. The brand experience delivery through tangible interior style elements revolves around colours, materials, texture, lighting and finishes and they were categorized under

three aspects which included appropriateness of the materials used in the apartments, their physical properties and the technique/skills used in developing them. The intangible interior style elements which are subtle carriers of the interior style integrity basically involved the knowledge in the serviced apartments, socio-political aspects/perceptions linked to design practices and instruments, objects and artefacts with their cultural representations/expressions. They were categorized under symbolism, reviewing



current building design codes and reviewing interior style effectiveness for lower guest turnover, some of which were highlighted by other tangible interior style elements.

### *Tangible Interior style elements*

#### *Appropriateness*

Appropriateness of the design materials/elements should be based on their compatibility with environmental and aesthetic conditions and their applicability to occupancy and size of the space. Some of the apartments were not inclined to some of these factors, i.e. using wrong materials like MDFs in water prone areas, especially in the kitchen. This is attributed to lack of information/misadvice, cost or unavailability of the appropriate materials.

#### *Physical properties*

According to the interior designers, some of the qualities of the design materials/elements in the apartments are usually determined in the finishing process though most of the properties are inherent and cannot be changed. They include;

- Physical and visual density.

- Mass and thickness.
- Strength.
- Texture.
- Colour.
- Temperature.
- Pattern.

#### *Technique*

This includes the fabrication process, detailing of how the design materials/elements and systems are joined and installed and the craft employed to produce the work.

### *Intangible Interior style elements*

#### *Symbolism*

Terms such as natural and artificial are mainly used to describe design elements in the apartments and items such as artefacts, which are mostly sculptures among other art pieces carrying specific connotations within different cultures and regions. In a few of the apartments that incorporated symbolism, the materials/elements associated with desired symbolic expressions were not accessible thus they were replicated to achieve desired effects.



Symbolism using artefacts.  
Source: Field survey, 2019.

### ***Reviewing current building design codes***

Some of the developers and owners concluded that the current designs of their apartments were affected by the socio-political practices affecting design. This is in regard to the archaic building codes set by the government, which are yet to adapt to the changing needs of the country, like allowing the use of locally available building materials. Developers currently cannot be granted regulatory approval to build permanent structures in urban zones unless they are using specific materials such as brick and mortar.

Through Gazette Notice (No. 13048, 14<sup>th</sup> September 2012), the Kenyan government is aiming at discarding the 1969 Kenya building code (British Standards and Codes of Practice) in favor of new 10 European construction guidelines - Eurocodes by 2021 (Kenya Engineer, 2016). In regard to encouraging and facilitating the marketing and use of materials, structural components and kits as one of the codes, Principal Secretary in the State Department of Industry and Enterprise Development, Julius Korir affirms the government will ensure these standards are localized to bring on board finish, natural leather and landscape wallpapers all contribute to low costing as well as diversity in the interior spaces.

local building materials and local building practices to make them relevant and applicable in the country. This will enhance diversity after standardization and efficient safety tests are done on the materials, promoting the implementation of Afrocentric interior styles, which the unestablished apartments can adopt.

Through consultation with some of the interior designers in the field, Afrocentric themes basically involve the combination of vivid colours with earth tones and details like animal prints, which emphasize the opulence of the African continent. Wooden figures and virtual masks create a mystical note in any given space and when it comes to incorporating the design, the key elements; warmth of the sun and wealth of both flora and fauna, need to be balanced up in the interior space. Focusing on reducing the cost of construction in the serviced apartment sector which can be efficiently achieved through these themes/styles, the simplest version of the style can be done through wall papers with native African and animal themes. Additionally, rough and simply wicker furniture with minimal but aesthetic surface



Living room space enhanced with African masks and statues  
Source: Interior Design and More, (2012).

### ***Reviewing of interior style effectiveness for lower guest turnover***

As compared to established serviced apartments brands, always improving the customer experience through better ambience and services represents a huge opportunity for the unestablished serviced apartments. Understanding that the different customers have different expectations is key in improving these experiences such that, the leisure customer can be emotional and spontaneous and can impulsively click the “book” button by simply basing on how they perceive the ambience in the interior space. On the other hand, the business-oriented customer may take a rational and dispassionate approach to booking, guided by an

### ***Enhancing creativity and innovativeness through interior styles***

Majority of the guests were moderately satisfied and were highly concerned with the quality of customer service rendered and amenities, the aesthetic appeal in

objective criterion and a cool-headed analysis of options.

Having this knowledge is therefore essential to ensure efficient, insightful and personalized service delivery through interior styles used in the serviced apartments. This is because service acquisition decisions are made by the customers who spend time looking for what meets their needs. Thus, the experiences they go through shape their expectations. To achieve this, serviced apartments have to personalize and customize how they relay their identity through incorporating unique or customer-centred interior style ideas that serve both utilitarian and aesthetic purposes.

terms of nice views, flower gardens and spacious clean rooms with finishes that enhanced relaxation and comfort. Conclusively, all the respondent’s inputs on how to enhance creativity and innovativeness in the serviced apartment sector through interior styles were also sought. They include;

- Creating awareness in the sector through design.
- Avoiding overuse/replication of styles.
- Embracing ICT.
- Response to changing guests' requirements.
- Encouraging proper interior branding.

established serviced apartment brands. Developing these criteria for distinctive serviced apartments will hopefully enable the unestablished serviced apartments to carve out their own niche and be competitive in the sector.

### **Practice implications of the results.**

In regard to the findings through the following criteria, the apartments could; focus on the appropriateness of the materials being used in interior spaces basing on their compatibility with environmental and aesthetic conditions, and their applicability to occupancy and size of the space; they also need to assess the physical properties of design materials which are determined by their physical and visual density, mass and thickness, strength, texture, colour, temperature and pattern before being used in the interior spaces; the apartments could also explore techniques used in fabrication processes, detailing of how design materials and systems are joined and installed, and the craft used to produce different interior works; the use of symbolism should also be considered in the interior spaces through artefacts which carry specific meanings within different cultures and regions, as a means to promote diversity in the sector.

Generally, there also lies opportunity in reviewing current building design codes with other stakeholders in the serviced apartments sector, especially the government, since this will ensure that the changing needs in the country are met. Lastly, the unestablished apartments could consistently review their interior style effectiveness in relation to lowering guest turnover, so as to improve the customer experience through better ambience and services, as what is being done in the

## CONCLUSION

The study was able to collect data and provide sufficient information but it was limited to unestablished serviced apartments in Nairobi that were only listed on various online platforms. This left out quite a number of those that haven't fully embraced technology in terms of efficient online property listing and were using ambiguous means of advertisement, basing on their proximity to infrastructure or social amenities. More inclusive research thus has to be done to assess the performance of these unestablished apartments.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for awareness creation through interior design forums/outlets like home expos and magazines, that target potential investors and apartment owners in the sector.
2. Localization of styles into Afrocentric themes/styles by working with other stakeholders in the sector like the interior designers and the government, to enhance diversity in the sector and reduce construction costs.
3. Embracing ICT through efficient online apartment listing.
4. Response to changing guests' requirements by providing quality and ambient spaces which will definitely enhance their experience.
5. Encouraging proper interior branding in the apartments which will enable them to relay their identity through tangible and intangible interior style elements and to deliver that brand's experience to customers.

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