Episode 4 - Robert and Felipe

Rob: [00:00:00] Imagine how a restaurant can say, now we have eight Philemon yawns this week who wants one, make your reservation, you'll get your steak. And so it starts to drive demand. So imagine in workspace, when you make your reservation to come in for the week, if you could partner with third-party delivery or in-house hospitality groups and say, you know, We have taco Tuesdays every Tuesday at this work location, you better sign up to work from here.

If you really love these tacos from this vendor. And next week, it's maybe this vendor, I think there's a great way of upselling space, right? And it goes back to the real estate game. And how do you upsell space to create a really great user experience? Whether you're working dining, sleeping, eating, drinking, whatever that may be.

Felipe: [00:00:50] The dynamic relationship between

Eric: [00:00:52] workplace and hospitality has a long history from business trips and working lunches to in-office amenities and even workplace design. We've seen the line between work and leisure become more blurred. If work can happen in cafes and hotel lobbies, how can offices become an exciting destination that fully immerses employees in a unique.

And memorable experience that makes them want to keep coming back. And this episode I'm joined by Robert Polytech and Philippe Gomez. As we explore how the hospitality industry might hold the answers to creating the future of work. Well, welcome to the podcast. Thank you both for being here. I'd love to start with

Felipe: [00:01:34] each

Eric: [00:01:34] of you could take a moment to introduce yourself.

Rob: [00:01:37] Hey everyone. I'm Rob Paula cheque. I'm a founding partner and creative director of Rose Bernard studio. Uh, we are a hospitality, uh, experiences studio, uh, with studios in Chicago, in San Francisco. Uh, we work on, um, anything from small independent restaurants to, uh, F and B outlets for large hotel companies internationally, as well as locally.

Uh, we also jumped into the room side of hotels as well. Uh, continuing the guests experience for the overall brand experience that the guest is expecting when they check into the hotel.

Felipe: [00:02:11] My name is Philippe Gomez. Uh, I'm the president of a raised commercial real estate, formerly known as hello office. Um, we are the, you know, first technology powered brokerage, um, also full service, uh, workplace strategy, project and construction management firm with offices in San Francisco, Los Angeles, uh, Silicon Valley.

Um, we work with, you know, very broad cross section of occupiers, predominantly high growth. Technology companies, um, helping to, you know, source and build, you know, the, the workplaces of tomorrow for, uh, for, uh, companies, not only in the locations where we have, um, you know, offices, but across the country, uh, formerly, uh, of the hotel business, um, I was with four seasons hotels and Rosewood hotels in a, in a previous life.

And, uh, very much looking forward to today's discussion. Um, well,

Eric: [00:03:00] I'm

Felipe: [00:03:00] super excited to have you both,

Eric: [00:03:01] uh, on the podcast today. Um, it's really exciting to, I'm glad you brought up your, your, your previous

Felipe: [00:03:08] life and kind

Eric: [00:03:09] of the hotel industry. And I think that's, that's potentially the bridge and kind of the contact point kind of connective tissue.

I think between the three of us and something that, um, you know, has been kind of coming up over the past couple of episodes. And this came up in the last episode too, with Ryan Anderson, he made this great analogy, uh, where he was talking about. You know, we can cook at home. We can get groceries, we can make food at home, but

Felipe: [00:03:33] there's something about going to a restaurant.

There's something about

Eric: [00:03:35] going out to dinner that that's still is this attractive thing. And, and to, to say that restaurants are dead, people would just laugh at you. And so he's like,

Felipe: [00:03:44] well, workplaces

Eric: [00:03:45] should be the same thing. Yeah. Yeah. We can work from home, but still there should be a purpose to workplace.

It shouldn't just be a place where we'd go and sit at a desk, but what is that experience? And I think there's. A lot of ways in which we've kind of seen, uh,

Felipe: [00:03:58] especially

Eric: [00:03:58] over the past 10 years

Felipe: [00:04:00] kind of

Eric: [00:04:00] hospitality kind of making its way into workplace with a lot of the amenities and, you know, creating more kind of lounge spaces and kind of these breakout spaces, spaces that feel like a cafe or a restaurant or a hotel lobby.

And so, um,

Felipe: [00:04:14] I would

Eric: [00:04:14] love to kind of hear from you both just kind of. What's happening in your, kind of your ecosystem right now, what's happening in your industry? What are kind of some of the things that you've

Felipe: [00:04:22] kind of discovered,

Eric: [00:04:23] uh, or run into this year? I mean, you know, now that we're coming to the end of it, I would, I'd love to kind of each of you, just to kind of clue us into

Felipe: [00:04:29] what have you covered our overall industry this year has been in an absolute pause and try and understand not only the current environment, but you know, a wait and see.

Um, I think that that employers have. Taking, um, you know, the, the trends that were already occurring that you just mentioned in integrating the human experience and really sort of, uh, having there be less of a division between what that, that human experience was outside of work and bringing it into the workplace that was already happening.

I mean, I think that COVID, as people have said, advanced that and brought it forward by, you know, uh, quite, quite a long time, the validation that you can work from home. But I think the, the, um, also the validation that we are social animals and that the workplace can compliment people's choice to work. A portion of their time from home, but understanding that what we provide in the workplace of what the office environment becomes, it doesn't have to look like the sea of desks that used to be the division between how you operated in your regular life.

Right? You went about having social engagements and interacting with people and doing things that provided a rich experience. And then you might go to a sea of desks. And that's the of desks might have, you know, really great snacks or other, you know, amenities to really oversimplify it. But now, um, we've, we've seen just a huge number of our clients without necessarily taking a lot of action because there's not a lot of transactions that are happening, right.

There are not a lot of, of, of new stakes in the ground saying this is going to be the new way, but what there has been is a call to strategy and thought process and scenario planning. And what we've seen is that, you know, throughout that process, We are looking at the built environment. What would have been over simplified as a sea of desks now, really asking to be a series of moments and those moments, um, Embrace the fact that a laptop and an individual can be productive, right.

In many places, but that to support the things that are done or what happened when the person becomes away from the laptop and wants that human interaction that you can do. So in a, in a way that is safe, right? COVID safe and, you know, really maintaining social distance and the like, um, that deals with acoustics around privacy while not necessarily having to be behind closed doors.

Um, and also just changes, um, sort of the inputs. Right? I think one of the things that employers have discovered over time and you talk to, you know, uh, organizational psychologists about sort of the impacts of isolation over time. Um, it's that, that, that thirst for interaction. It's the creativity that happens when two people are or bored more are face to face.

Um, but how do you take the built environment and design for it? So that's really what's happening in, in our side of the business right now. We're helping tactically. Both, you know, occupiers and landlords figure out how to, to, um, sort of reinvent their spaces when they come back. But there isn't a lot of we've come back and we are we're back in the office right now.

And so for us, um, it's been a real joy and very powerful to, to help, um, our clients reimagine these spaces. And, um, there's been a, uh, an overarching embrace of what will be the hybrid, right? I mean, you hear the word ad nauseum. But the hybrid workplace and supporting people's choice and, and their comfort level.

Um, but it has flipped on its head, everything that we thought the office needed to be. And that's been, been actually a joy to see sort of that unbounded thinking, right? Yeah. The one thing I want to

Eric: [00:08:06] highlight in there, and I think Robbie, this kind of links back to the conversation that we had the other day.

Uh, kind of looking at the employee journey. Like if we're, if we're looking at like service design and you can get these kinds of different touch points and those, those moments of experience and how the workplace needs to really kind of acknowledge what are those work points? What are those touch points?

I don't know, throughout the day, um, Robbie, we had talked the other day about it specifically around hotels, and you mentioned it, you know, the, the guest journey into the room, kind of this multisensory experience. Can you speak a little bit to that and just kind of more broadly as to what's going on specifically in your industry.

Rob: [00:08:39] Sure. I think what happens is how, how the work place greatly affects the restaurant industry. If you think about this cadence of getting up in the morning and going to the office, you, you buy a cup of coffee, you maybe grab a bagel, you have a business meeting for breakfast, you, and then you get to your space.

You go and have lunch with your employees. You have a team meeting out, you go for drinks afterwards. The restaurant industry relies on this cadence of going to work outside of your home to really survive, to make up that difference. That's outside of just the typical dinner. And I think we're hotels in hospitality was going.

Was it before COVID was, you know, this idea of this. This communal lobby space where you can with the global nomad, we, there were global nomads before COVID and I think COVID just made them even more so right. We took maybe what was going to be a three-year difference in terms of changing how we work into a one year difference.

Um, and so. Adapting to that when, you know, when we're all back up and running and able to get a vaccine and go back to the office or not go back to the office, but we'll find another space to work that third space that we always talked about in hospitality, which is that, that lobby space that you can order glass, so wine or a coffee, or, or have a small meeting, you know, there may be many brands out there right now that are working at.

Um, creating individual studio spaces within hotel lobby experiences to have a quiet space to work. That's really gonna start. I think what's happening now is really going to push this a bit further. Uh, and it comes down to real estate. I mean, we always in hospitality, it's a real estate game and a lot of times, you know, uh, rest of the restaurant industry, you know, we, we work on fine line margins to begin with.

Uh, cause cause the overhead is so high. Um, whether it's the overhead of rent or just health insurance for employees, you know, whatever that may be, you have to work at a certain level of commitment to making sure you can generate some revenue what's happening now is the fact that you're missing out on maybe two plus let's call it two and a half meal periods a day from someone not going to work.

It's it's a huge impact and it's a huge blow to the industry. And then those people that do stay home say, Hmm, maybe it's okay if I start cooking again, I don't have to go out to dinner all the time and that always starts to then play into it. So it's going to be a ripple effect. You know, the restaurant industry is that it's a, you know, a billion dollar industry.

It brings, you know, millions of, of, uh, employees and salaries into, into urban environments. And, and, and as we see this kind of. Paradigm shift in how people go to work and not go to work. It's really going to be an impact on it and the hotel and hospitality and restaurant industry. And so we're, we're following really closely what, where that future of workspace is going.

So we can adapt really quickly to it as well. There's a lot of, you know, talk about how brick and mortar spaces are going to get a lot smaller because we don't want to have to sit as many people indoors, uh, or inside. It's gonna be more fast, casual and more takeout, but really what does that mean to the real estate industry on the other side?

Like what do you do with that extra space? Is it workspace that is, um, more privatized where you can rent it out for a team meeting that has some kind of FNB component that's delivered to it, right. From a third party app. I think there is a silver lining here where it could really change the dynamic of how we get together to come together, to be creative, to work out solutions and problems outside of our home, without necessarily having to go back to traditional idea of going to the office.

And I think there's a great opportunity there where food and beverage could play a huge impact in, in that, in that experience to get us back out of the house. You know, to go meet up with some, some colleagues to, to, to celebrate what we do that keeps us creative. As you know, as human beings like this, it's a social experiment all over again.

Felipe: [00:12:33] I couldn't agree more. I mean, I I've used the term over over the years, not only in, in managing people, but also in sort of the thought process around those public spaces of, you know, breaking bread breaks boundaries. Right. And so if there's a conflict and again, I mean, I, I grew up that was a director of F and B it's near and dear to my heart.

I absolutely love it. But, but th th the truth is when you think about the, you, you close your eyes and you think about a team working late in a conference room, invariably, there may be pizzas or, you know, take out boxes. And, and, and that, that, that, there's something there there's a there that really does bring people together.

So I think in what you were just mentioning, I think about, you know, the conflict that Starbucks had in trying to get people, not to camp out at the tables

Eric: [00:13:27] that was telling us

Felipe: [00:13:27] years ago that people wanted a different place. They had access to their homes, they had access to their offices. They wanted to be in a coffee shop.

Right. So embracing that and leaning into it in a much more intentional way. Also understanding that in the current environment, Well, restaurants and hotels are missing out on those, those, those meal periods. And they are, I mean, they'd have crippling effects on, on that side of the industry. How can you rework those spaces to sort of capture what used to just live in the shoulders after, you know, before and after lunch service, before dinner service, you know, I was lucky enough to, to, um, Work at the Rosewood sand Hill, which has a very storied, um, bar and lobby lounge area where, where much of the business that happened on Sandhill road occurred there.

Right. It was because it was a very inviting place and it was not the offices of many of the venture capital firms that work up and down Sandhill road. And it was a perfect example of, um, and actually, you know, we opened that hotel in, in, uh, April of 2009. So it was really at the bottom of the last downturn.

The restaurant was absolutely packed. From day one, the restaurant and the bar. And it was, it was that sort of a, and again, this is 12 years ago, but it was, it was, um, further validation that people wanted to meet, wanted to have a glass of wine, hunted to have variable inputs. Um, And have sort of a much more rich experience while they were still conducting business.

Um, you know, I think what we're going to see from the, the office of workplace side is that the spaces associated with a work type are going to shift, right. I mean that largely, um, You know, employers, I think are looking at the heads down work that would happen at the desk. That that is going to be the most impacted by being able to be done essentially anywhere from the home, et cetera.

And so reducing that footprint while being able to, to maybe assign more square footage to those, those casual meeting spaces, um, I think is going to be a big shift and that's just in the traditional workplace, but there are already. Phenomenal examples in, in most of the urban markets where larger occupiers, where we're implementing great cafes and ground floor retail, and some of them had, you know, Uh, you know, outward facing full retail presence.

Might've been run by third-party operators, but they served as both an amenity for, um, the employees that were working in that building, but also brought in the energy from the street. And, and you, you walk into these buildings. I mean, you know, Pinterest is a great example of that in San Francisco, that cafe, uh, you know, on Brandon, you walk into that building and it's alive and it's a cafe that serves the public.

Yeah. But you're just as likely to find 50% of the employees from that building, having meetings, you know, in that environment when they could just easily be in a conference.

Rob: [00:16:24] Right. It's that whole idea of, I want to be alone, but not a loner. Uh, when it comes down to that creative, that creative process, right?

You want us to be activated somehow, visually being inspired and, and you, and it and allow it. And it also is, I think it's a sense of, of pride of where you work, right? Those, those perks were part of the hiring process. You know, you may, you know, your salary may be a little bit lower, but look at all the perks you got because you were working at the school place.

And so that, I think that's what's happening right now, too, with hotels, like in, in the beginning of COVID back in March, April. Everything was closed. Hotels are scratching their heads saying, what do we do? Like we're not going to go and change the entire design of a hotel. This is not, it's not the most lucrative investment to, to make.

Um, but what do we do with, how do we get heads in beds, if you will. And now, and they were thinking about, well, how do we get heads in desks? How do we convert these hotel rooms into private workspaces? So, you know, you can get out of your house away from your kids, whether it's for an hour or two, and be able to have that opportunity.

And I think they're going to start looking at ways of how. You're going to see a blend of a hotel state B for, for a pleasure, leisure night stays and, or like daytime use work use, and how that blends together. And then food that food and beverage component is really going to tie the tie, everything together to allow a catered work lunch and your sweets, or, you know, as, as we, as we all.

Get going back to somewhat normal working together in groups. You know, you may see that idea of that hotel lobby expand even further. You know, you may even see restaurants go away in those hotels and it's just mostly a food service component. That's comes from the back of house to the front of house, wherever you need it, versus sitting at a table and enjoying that there also, I think will be this.

Uh, expanse of those private workspaces that we were seeing really pop up in San Francisco. You know, a lot of like for wrapping the assembly always comes to mind for me. Um, because it was such a cool space in that church, but, you know, that's gonna, it has to come back be, it was such a, it was like the candy that everyone wanted before this happened and we're still gonna want it.

Right. But, but it's surviving getting through this is going to be the hard part. And it, and again, it goes back to that, you know, it's the landlord saying, Hey, where's the rent, you know, and when, how do we start to re reevaluate what that space is on the street? I think there's a, uh, another thing we're looking at in hotels is, you know, how that restaurant can be that cornerstone of a community, uh, particularly for hotels.

It's, it's the local place that everyone wants to hang out at. And when the locals hang out at those restaurants, the guests want to say, Oh, I was there too. I can hang out in this and see what it's like to be in San Francisco in union square or in Noey Valley, whatever that may be. But now with increasing amount of closures to those ground floor spaces, what, you know, what's going to happen next to that real estate, you know, what's out there that what's that new, next thing that we're all trying to, to jump onto from.

And we think it from a hospitality point of view, what can we provide people that give them some space out of their home? If they don't have to go back to an office, if they're not forced to, but allows them to have some kind of third space that allows a third party app to deliver food to them, maybe they can get a massage or some acupuncture or it's therapy.

I think there's going to be a really great opportunity for that space to kind of evolve into. Something that is very like health focused, whether it's health conscious or mentally focused of creating a better self as you get up from the nine to five. So that's, what's up, that's the stuff that we're like playing around with in terms of what, where is that going?

Felipe: [00:20:11] Yeah,

Eric: [00:20:11] it's really exciting to hear it. Do you feel like that's happening? Um, primarily in kind of major kind of urban areas, or do you think that this is something that potentially could occur?

Felipe: [00:20:21] Because

Eric: [00:20:21] I know there's kind of talk about hub and spoke model and, you know, even the idea of, you know, people not wanting to travel from the suburbs into the city because they live closer and they want to find something that is more

Felipe: [00:20:33] know proximal to where they

Eric: [00:20:34] live.

Do you feel like that's going to kind of start to extend beyond kind of big cities into

Felipe: [00:20:38] more suburban

Eric: [00:20:39] area?

Rob: [00:20:40] I think it definitely is gonna probably start in urban areas just because there's going to be a need to. Generate revenue with empty space. Right. And then, but, but I think there's a different user between the urban environment and the suburban environment.

There, there probably definitely is a lot of urban users moving into a suburban way of life these days within this past year. And they're going to dictate things that they want to bring with them. Right. And so there, there will be some kind of change there, but there's probably going to be a lot of like, this is the suburbs and this is how we do things out here.

So I think there'll be a really interesting conversation between the two users of what, what it's typically used for, and then what people are bringing to the table as they start to repopulate suburban areas, to raise families, to work from home, to have a little bit of a better life than, you know, a dense urban environment.

Eric: [00:21:30] Another thing I want to call out too. I think just kind of in

Felipe: [00:21:32] the realm of proximity and proximity,

Eric: [00:21:35] I think, I feel like, and I've, I've been saying this all year,

Felipe: [00:21:39] um, you know, as we've moved

Eric: [00:21:40] to kind of social distancing, what is the return to social closeness going to look like? But I'm, I'm curious, you know, you mentioned, you know, how hotels are not

Felipe: [00:21:49] going to kind of redesign their entire

Eric: [00:21:50] spaces.

Um, but looking at kind of these different kind of space, types opportunities for privacy. You know, if, if we're looking into, you know,

Felipe: [00:22:00] six months from now, hi, you

Eric: [00:22:01] know, hopefully the vaccines have

Felipe: [00:22:03] kind of reached more of

Eric: [00:22:05] the masses and we start to kind of slowly get back to kind of whatever this new reality is going to be.

What are your thoughts about proximity and space and, you know, are we going to continue to kind of shrink four plates or does it need to be bigger kind of the need for privacy versus public? Like how do you imagine that influencing design. Operation, all of those things,

Rob: [00:22:29] if I'm going to invert or urban, if you think of a typical New York hotel, I mean, New York hotel or restaurant in say the lower East side, you know, if you can get 20 seats in that thing, you're lucky.

Right. And so, but that what's, that's, what's the charm about those places. And if that goes away, it changes that dynamic of, of what it's like to go be served in a restaurant what's it's like. You're going for theater, right? It's the experience. It's if that's what it's all about, you want to be sitting next to someone and listened to their conversation.

And those, those places are, you know, the food may not be the greatest, but it's good enough to go there to experience that space. Right. I think that's going to be a challenge for a lot of cities with really dense footprints in old buildings, whatever that may be, uh, in suburbs, you know, the drive-through I think I was just looking at an article the other day, how.

McDonald's burger King KFC. They're all like redoing their drive-through experiences and adding like three lanes and this whole new concept of, of grabbing though and pickup. But that only goes so far. I mean, you can, you know, I don't, I can't see myself. Wanting a steak dinner, being afraid to go to a restaurant and sit in an intimate space, but then ordering my steak dinner delivery at home.

And it's like, you know, you order it rare by the time it gets to you, it's like steamed in a box. It's just not, it's not the same. Right? You, you want that intimacy and, and, and there'll be the people who, who are craving it. I'm sure. I'm sure there is. There, there was the will be that gender, that not generation, but that, that level of want, that's going to say.

We're back to normal. Let's go, let's go for it. And probably enjoy the fruits of that versus the ones who were saying, I don't want to go. I still want to stay back a little bit. Um, so I think the travel industry is going to take a little bit a while to get back on track, but the ones that you adventures are like the bags are packed.

Like we're ready to go. You know, we ready for those deals. We're ready for all of it to come back and to be experienced. So, because I think in the design industry, like when this first started, there's a lot of product, there was a lot of product put on the market that personally I thought was. Crap just wasted, wasted materials, wasted resources, like, Oh, let's make like decorative plexiglass screens and let's put bubbles are over everything.

And it's like designer, like hand sanitizer dispensers, all that stuff is just. It's just more and more garbage that we produce as human beings thinking it's design and you cringe a little bit because it it's just such wasteful ideas that are, that are too reactionary versus forward future thinking.

Eric: [00:25:08] I mean, I'm all about experience.

I'm all about theater, but the sanitation theater, like I want to be done with that

Felipe: [00:25:14] because it's not helping anybody.

Eric: [00:25:16] If leader, what are your thoughts?

Felipe: [00:25:17] Well, you know, I mean, I think that there, there are a couple of things that you touched on. Um, Robert that I think are, are crucial here. The first one is there were a lot of knee jerk reactions, right?

I'm going to begin at sort of the end of the statement around what it looks like in six months. I think once the fear factor has been removed, you know, the, the push factors are getting us out of the house. My wifi is terrible. I gotta get away from the kids. Right. That's just time to go get some fresh air.

The pull factors are. I missed the theater of a restaurant. I miss the interaction with my, my company, my friends, my team, et cetera. And the fear factor right now is just sitting right in the middle of it. Once that fear factor has been alleviated, the trickle back will turn into a torrent. That's all. And it is, you know, there were so many knee jerk reactions to this and people making proclamations about how things were going to be forevermore.

Now, look, this was a massive, massive. Problem pandemic issue, never before seen, et cetera. But if you look at, you know, In Hong Kong, the way that this was dealt with the last time that there was a major pandemic, right? It's not as near and dear to us because we weren't, you know, right there in the hotbed of it.

But the collective memory is this thing happened. We've learned from it. Here are the new ways that we can go about our lives. And, and, and that return is, or the product of it. So I couldn't agree with you more that, that overtime, they're not only the, the desires to get back to normalcy. There's a generation of people who are going to come up and they are the consumers of the future that will have this awareness that this thing has happened.

And that there's a vaccine for it. And that, you know, you have the burden of knowledge that it could happen again, but that doesn't atrophy the desire to go live. Right. And I think that's a really important one, you know, in, in response to the first question you asked Eric about sort of the, the distribution from the urban hubs into the suburbs.

Um, I think. At least on the, on the office side of it in the workplace side of it, uh, the war for talent is going to dictate a lot of this for the next. I mean, it, it, it always dictates how workplace needs to behave, but, um, for an employer to be, uh, to, to reach the broadest cross-section of talent. They're going to need to be open to all different modes of working.

And so I think that activating, um, sort of public spaces in hotels and in restaurants and doing so in as distributed away as possible, there's an opportunity to lean on brands, you know, for example, a Marriott or a Hyatt or any of those brands that have. Really distributed footprints. There's an opportunity for them to potentially partner with or create a branded, you know, knowable, um, experience within their spaces for, uh, distributed work.

And that can be both in the urban environment and in, in, in the suburbs. And what that provides is an opportunity for an employer to say, We respect your, um, desire to choose where you work, wherever your best work will take you. And we have an opportunity for you to work in a workplace in the urban environment, work from your home, or potentially work at

one of these, you know, insert X, right relationships were, can choose to do that by Metro by location, but there is a, a, a branded.

And I, and I say Brandon, and just because you want to reduce doubt, right? If there is something that you have a service provider that is committed to, um, stating how they are making the environment safe. Letting you know, what your expectations can be. If you go choose to use that, you know, providers space within a hotel.

You know, I think about things like, um, like operators, like convene, right convene was, was taking somewhat dead spaces and commercial office buildings and really turning them into that hospitality environment. And I think that that, that can continue on at scale because if they are distributed the way that they, that they should be, they don't have to be that large.

And if they are all backed with technology and your ability to reserve spaces over food, communicate with and set expectations upon arrival and exit and billing. Um, the employer has expanded their workplace offering. In a very meaningful way, right? So these occupiers don't have to be under one roof anymore.

They can really, in, in, um, the hiring process, because all of this begins with the why, why do you have a workplace, right? It is to hire, retain and motivate the best talent for whatever your company is. And if you, as the, as the, the, the. Procuring managers able to say, look, we're gonna, we're gonna meet you wherever you, you want to be.

Right. Um, I think that's a tremendous opportunity. So I think that the, and we're, we're, we're seeing it, there, there, there are operators out there trying to address it, both with sort of, you know, single passport for all co-working types of spaces. Um, the convenience of the world, and those were already happening.

Right. I just think it's accelerated the need for it. And it has also, I think, opened, um, the hotel operators and restaurant operators a bit more to, um, the need to be flexible with how those spaces are being activated when they're under utilized. So I think that that'll be an interesting, okay. Going forward.

Rob: [00:30:41] And to your point, uh, the it's the operators that are going to look at the bottom line. And see if it makes sense. And that's when I think that's where technology is going to play a huge role in back of house food, service technologies, front of house, food service technologies, how it's going to need to eliminate some of the workforce.

Um, and, uh, when people say that sometimes, you know, I cringe a little bit when I even say that myself, but, but. In, in, I think in hospitality, there was this big kind of like dark cloud of how do we make any money? There's so many things against us, union labor, uh, you know, overhead the cost of supply chain.

Like there's so much that was just like pushing against the big idea. But now I think there's an opportunity to push back and say, how do we, how do we fix this? How do we become more profitable? How do we become a better experience or. For our guests. And I think that idea of technology, that idea of moving people around in bigger spaces and from an, from an operational point of view is going to be really helpful too, to find that bottom line number that says, yes, this is worth investing into, um, to make a change for the better.

Felipe: [00:31:56] I think that that's right. I, you know, I, I it's, it is a terrible example, but when Starbucks embraced the fact that people are going to sit there and use the wifi. So how do you capture a little bit of extra spend from that person while they're there? Once you can dial the volume up on that a little bit.

Um, the fact is today, um, both individuals and companies are much more used to the subscription model. Right. It's a lightweight subscription that happens in the background. They're relatively low impact dollars, but at, at sort of at scale and at volume can really change, um, the way an operator views, the quote unquote headache of, of activating a space, right?

I mean, you, you, you know, that, you know, having. A server, a busser and you know, somebody doing just cold sandwiches for a space that was otherwise unutilized can be an operational headache. Right. But if you're able to understand sort of just in time, what. The food expectations could be when you can expect people.

Right. Um, due to sort of that, that, that sort of technology infrastructure, um, it becomes much easier. So I agree with you. I it's, I hate the, the, when we say out loud that this is going to remove some jobs, but at the same time, the activating of more space and the, the sort of distribution. Of the consumer, both urban, suburban markets.

I think that that, um, resort hotels also stand to really embrace this. If you look at the way that people have moved to resort locations from the urban environments right now and are working remotely, they're still working remotely from eight. A house, an apartment and Airbnb in those locations, if we can activate those resort hotels, which oftentimes are sprawling and have a meaningful amount of underutilized space, you can capture this, right.

And it just turns it so that you, as the human, who are upwardly mobile and able to move about the planet, you get to work and have a rich environment and a new set of inputs in these different places

Rob: [00:33:59] it's creating. It's almost like it's creating new communities overnight. With, with different types of people coming to one location.

Right? And I think there's a, there's a lot of ops opportunities. There. There's a lot of optimism and bringing different types of people that are used to working in certain environments or living in certain environments. Now we're kind of collaborating on top of each other and how food and beverage and work space plays a role in their, in their daily lives could be really a game changer.

Felipe: [00:34:27] I have a question for you. Um, so you've, you've, I mean, obviously designed some of the most incredible, you know, spaces and places and moments I've had, you know, spent a lot of time looking at some of the incredible projects you've done in the last 10 years. In lobbies and lobby bars, has there been a change in the ratio of outlets and their distribution for electricity?

Rob: [00:34:52] That's like the first thing you do is look for power, right? And how you design spaces to work into that. It has always been an up and uptake in terms of where we, how we think. Um, the other challenge we face to keep bringing up a good point is, is the idea of when you are working outside of an office environment, Finding quiet time to have a phone call is a huge problem in hotel spaces, just because you're trying to be a hotel lobby and there's great music playing and there's people talking and there's restaurant noise happening and you're like, you know, you can't find a quiet space, but everybody's shut up.

Yeah. It's like, where are those old phone boots when you need them? You know? So, so like technology, the use of technology is changing how people use. Hospitality spaces for sure. We're always looking for a place to set up a lot of the times when we're designing spaces, we like to design, um, we call them, we call them the loner spaces where you, you want to be able to sit your back up against a wall at a high top bench with a small little table to put your laptop on.

So. You are in charge of your own environment. You can see everything that's going on. You could sit there all day and work and you feel protected and you have some power. And those are the things that really are going to define how we move out of the office and into a third space, uh, on the less traditional path.

I I think, uh, and we're seeing that we've seen that before this happened, this is going to accelerate it and,

Felipe: [00:36:21] and those very same elements, that same moment that you just described is more and more being integrated into workspaces as well into the office. I mean, the, the ways in which our clients are asking us to think a little bit, um, sort of more openly about what a desk looks and feels like it's gone beyond just, you know, the basics, which are now the basics of.

Having sit-stand desks, right? Having enough power, having a place to store your items, whether it's a hotel desk and a locker, or, you know, those, those things have, have become sort of the standard and the baseline. But what you just described of being in a, you know, sort of a sheltered acoustically sound with power table that has big enough for a laptop and, you know, maybe a snack that really those, those are popping up in different places.

And that's for the individual work where phone calls are going to happen. You might as well find an elegant solution. To, to embrace that they're going to happen as opposed to having somebody pacing, you know, their phone's stuck to their ear. Um, the, the other side of it though is also, I think there's a, there's a balance in those public spaces of, at what, at what point does it become

Rob: [00:37:29] an office

Felipe: [00:37:34] people who really should be guided into. One of the, the banquet spaces or one of the conference rooms. Right. And, and there's that breaking point where it's, you know, two, three, four people who are doing work and collaborating together to now, all of a sudden you've got plans spread out on the, on the, you know, the, the, the coffee table in the middle of the lobby lounge.

And if, um, The hotel or restaurant environment embraces that those things can happen, but he's ready to guide that group into a frictionless sort of, um, shift the environment. That's what you want. I think what happened previously is that, um, hotels, because of that need to exact revenue from every square footage.

From the operating plan that would say, well, we can, we can take you to this conference room, but it's going to cost you, you know, uh, $3,500 food and beverage minimum, et cetera, et cetera. If you've got the infrastructure for an, an app that might help provide sort of third-party food service to that room, you can still capture that group of people.

They now will know forever that that's available to them. I mean, there's a, there's a great, a great company called peer space that has been activating, uh, you know, um, Off the wall spaces that are under utilized, um, for, for years. And I think that's the opportunity. It's people are gonna make calls. We want them to make calls.

If they're doing their business, then they can afford the business travel that brings them to this location. Right. Um, how do you do that? Elegantly? What's the sexiest new phone booth that should exist in a hotel lobby and from a design standpoint should also exist in a workplace. Those things don't have to be that.

Diametrically different anymore. The best employers out there know that they need to have engaging workspaces that are designed to spark creativity. You know, um, you, you can feel the energy, you know, we walk into all the workplaces in the world and you can feel the energy. The difference between one that was designed with intention.

And one that was designed in the old guys of, you know, uh, an eight foot high tope cubicle, right?

Rob: [00:39:40] It is it's furniture, it's furniture design. That's really playing a part in being charged, having some quiet space. It's very easy to execute. You can put it in multiple locations. You're not building things in it's, it's an easier pill to swallow in terms of creating some workspace.

Um, and it also, I think, We always say that it inspires creativity. Imagine you're sitting at a communal table and you're working and someone across from you, you maybe hear them have a conversation or you catch their eye and you maybe start a conversation. And what they do may inspire what you do. And then all of a sudden you spark that creativity.

Right. And then. And you don't really get that in an environment where you're all doing the same thing and you get it in environments where you get a chance when you get a chance to continually to communicate outside of what you're doing on a day-to-day basis as a human being, but then also spark creativity and what we're passionate about and why we're.

You know, why we're working right at the end of the day is what drives us to do that. And so I think those environments will hopefully, always continue to evolve how we communicate with each other and cross kind of communicate through different types of work environments.

Eric: [00:40:52] Yeah, a lot of good stuff in there.

I think that what, what that brings to mind for me, I mean, I'm a, I'm a big proponent for activity-based working and really looking at creating opportunities so that no matter what you're needing in the moment, you can find it. And I think historically with

Felipe: [00:41:09] workplace, we want to kind

Eric: [00:41:10] of create these, you know, uh, you know, team kind of stereotypes or archetypes, like, you know, all engineers want to be in a dark room and all salespeople are gonna be on their phone.

And, but even within that, You're there, there may be a desire or a need for a space that is not stimulating or a space that is very stimulating. And I think what that makes me really wonder, um, you know, as we're talking about minimizing friction and really kind of supporting

Felipe: [00:41:34] this journey and

Eric: [00:41:35] supporting people, navigating these spaces, Uh, I think for those of us who, who are

Felipe: [00:41:41] doing this work,

Eric: [00:41:42] you know, we walk into spaces and we can see like what's wrong and what should be better.

But I'm thinking about just kind of the, the lay person. It just, that person, who's just, just trying to find a phone rubber, try to find that quiet space.

Felipe: [00:41:54] What

Eric: [00:41:54] are some thoughts in regards to creating environments that clearly communicate the narrative or the journey in, in the way that. You know, when you go to Disneyland, you're kind of navigating through this space and it's kind of this seamless experience where music transitions and you can feel the, kind of the mood and like, Oh, I'm going from this land to this land.

Like I'm wondering, can we get better to really be clear and intentional about what that pathway or that journey

Felipe: [00:42:19] is?

Rob: [00:42:20] I mean, if you look at Disney's a great example, We've had an opportunity to work with Disney for the last 17 years of my design career of working with them. And, and they've already bringing to the table that next, that next level of thinking, right?

And so like, if you look at this, if you look at it's a small world, and as you go on the little boat and you go from room to room to room, and it's a different set design and it, and there's a little different stories, there's music playing that. It takes you to that other place. As we move forward with technology, AI technology, VR technology.

I think that is really where it's going to move us to be able to take any room, take a white eight by eight box and make it your Island for the day. Right? Like how does that work? You know, and how do you do that with, um, with technology? So it's not. It's not overtly, always in your, in your eyes. I feel like, you know, a lot of us these days are probably more so staring at, you know, video on computers than we were used to about a year ago.

Um, so that has to be taken into consideration to what con honestly, what visual technology does to us as human beings. I don't know if anyone has studied that yet, but I'm sure there's probably not some good news out there. Um, but, but I think that it will allow us to really create our own space. Right.

Like, how could you take, you know, we're working on this project right now. By making green streets like health streets and urban environments. And instead of putting an HR blocks and banks, some of these empty wheels, retail spaces that you see all throughout San Francisco, for example, in my neighborhood, how do you create these wellness spaces where people could rent them out?

And you can, you know, you can see a doctor where you can have that opportunity to create your own little environment. And that's through aromatics it's through VR technology. It could be through sound. There's so many. Opportunities for us to connect back to having some kind of meditative moment in our day-to-day lives.

That can be part of our work environment, which I think is good. It's, it's pushing us to that level. You know, it's no more thinking about it and talking about it. It's doing things to make it happen.

Felipe: [00:44:27] Absolutely. And I think I, first of all, that the green street project sounds amazing. Like that's those, those little ecosystems where you have complimentary services and it's important to be able to also package that experience and call the thing, what it is, leaving people guessing, uh, about how they should behave in a certain environment is I think where that late person that you were, you were mentioning, Eric becomes a little bit, um, Self-conscious am I doing the right thing in the right space?

Should I be here? Do I need to order food? If I'm sitting here, can I take a phone call, right. Being able to call the thing, what it is, is very important. I think that the technology impact that, that we would have on both in the workplace and in hospitality spaces is that through, um, things as simple as density monitoring and reservation systems be able to move people.

Um, based upon their desired activity into the right places. Um, so if there's a, a loud environment that is at high density, um, and that person is looking for like, you know, when you get into an Uber, you have your preferences. Well, potentially you could put your preferences into what am I looking for in an experience right now?

And it, and it, and it could guide you now. I, I'm not a technologist obviously, but I know that, you know, just within workplaces, there are enough ways where we, uh, have had sort of human intervention in the ability to, um, have people make reservations for their spaces, understand the flow of traffic through those spaces, how many people are in them at any given time.

That could be a really interesting impact to take people from. High medium, low, you know, heads down quiet at work all the way to nap room. And, um, and so calling, calling the thing, what it is, and being able to package it as such, I think is, is really, really important. Yeah.

Rob: [00:46:08] And the travel industry does that right now.

You know, taking a flight on a Monday morning versus a Monday evening, you're gonna pay a different price, right? You, you may have more space in your plane or not the hotel rates throughout the course of the week. Like we were talking about this with the restaurants where imagine how a restaurant can say.

Now we have eight filet mignons this week who wants one, make your reservation, you'll get your steak. And so it starts to drive demand. So imagine in workspace, when you make your reservation to come in for the week, if you could partner with third-party delivery or in house hospitality groups and say, you know, we have taco Tuesdays every Tuesday at this work location, you better like sign up to work from here.

If you really love. These tacos from this vendor and next week it's maybe this vendor, I think there's a great way of upselling space, right? And it goes again, back to the real estate game. And how do you upsell space to create a really great user experience? Whether you're working dining, sleeping, eating, drinking, whatever that may be.

Hmm.

Eric: [00:47:08] I think that's a brilliant idea. And I think it's a million dollar idea. Then I think one of us needs to do something with, but it just, this idea of, you know, is there an app where I could just plug in like, You know, I really just need some quiet kind of focus time with like a view. Like I want to just kind of see some nature.

And then through the algorithm, it goes, Oh, this room on the fifth floor is available. You can book it right now. Boom. So it's not even like looking at. You know, Oh, I need a conference room for five people. Yeah. But really looking at well, what is the mood? What is the environment?

Felipe: [00:47:37] What am I

Eric: [00:47:37] trying to achieve

Felipe: [00:47:39] right now?

And

Eric: [00:47:40] can you help me navigate this building to find that perfect space that I may have not even known that it existed. And I think to add that to the food and beverage piece as well, I love this idea of bringing people in and driving that demand and making it feel

Felipe: [00:47:54] like, um,

Eric: [00:47:55] an experience. So being mindful of time here.

Um,

Felipe: [00:47:59] I

Eric: [00:48:00] would love to just hear from the, both of you, I asked this in every episode, what are some things that are being talked about, um, that are just kind of really kind of irking you or pissing you off that you kind of

Felipe: [00:48:10] wish that we

Eric: [00:48:11] weren't talking about it and we need to be kind of focusing on other things, like, I know we mentioned kind of the sanitation theater.

Is there anything else that you're just kinda like, Oh, you know, 20, 21, let's stop talking about this thing.

Rob: [00:48:23] Sanitation theater is always going to be my under my. Like a hundred percent arc of like, I remember in the very beginning, you know, there was, there's always some kind of something to listen to what it was a podcast or an Instagram video, whatever that may be.

And I'll, you know, there's designers out there were saying like, what's put, you know, sinks in the middle of the blobbies. Like, I don't want to watch anyone wash their hands. You know what I mean? Like, I don't need to see that. It's it's like, it's the knee-jerk stuff that has to go away. We have to continue.

I think as a society to always be forward, future thinkers, not just this real jerk reactionary people that you know, are kind of putting band-aids on things and it doesn't work that way in, in, in hospitality. You know, we, you know, build hotels overnight,

you know, a hotel out of a ground is at least sometimes it could be a 10 year experience from buying the land to developing it to the, getting the bank loans, whatever that may be.

So you just can't have a knee-jerk reaction to this, uh, to be successful. Uh, that's my biggest Cirque. And I have a question as we are less motivated because we don't have to be so motivated to go into downtown urban core to go to the office, which most of them are located, particularly in cities. I'll use San Francisco as an example, in the real estate game.

Do you see areas. In smaller parts of the city that real estate can actually start to grow in terms of what you're getting per square foot, because you may have now have more concentration and people looking for that cafe environment during the day, because they are not going to the work they're not going to downtown.

And so does it shift where people kind of work and play and how does that change the real estate game?

Felipe: [00:50:07] I, I, it's a, it's a, it's a great question. I think that, um, you know, San Francisco is, is a, is a city that, um, you know, It was at an absolute boiling point Q1 of this year, right? There was an imbalance that was so acute between available housing units, the amount of, uh, uh, the number of jobs that were open, where pricing had gone from everything from, uh, you know, apartment rent to office rent to, um, the salaries for people to be competitive and be able to sort of live here that.

That imbalance was never going to be sustainable, honestly. And so, so what has happened now I think is that, um, yes, there will absolutely be a redistribution and that leveling out is very healthy. That imbalance. In a space constraints, city seven miles by seven miles with development caps, it was never going to be something that could be sustained.

So that redistribution is, I think it's exactly what we're talking about in a smaller scale. It doesn't have to be from the urban center to the suburbs. It can be a redistribution within a city. Um, one of the headwinds to that is going to be issues around zoning and the way that those spaces are utilized.

And so, you know, Our fair city is going to have to be able to sort of, you know, grapple with those, um, Zoning issues in order to make it sort of a fair and equitable redistribution of spaces and places for people to go find exactly what we're talking about. Um, so I think, I think that, that there are going to be continued opportunities both on the, the office leasing side.

I mean, whether it's financial district so much cetera, but also the fact that, you know, there is a, a large contingent of people who are committed to, to this city. To San Francisco and who are going to look for that same creative element that built these, these, these great companies that were here, um, to, to help us sort of figure out what the future looks like.

And inactivating these neighborhoods. I mean, that, that the green street is a perfect example of the kind of idea that's actionable. Um, so in facing the headwinds around zoning, that is, that's been a challenge, but, um, I think that yes, there will be a redistribution of where and how people work. I think that w that will bring opportunities for more fair pricing and availability, right?

Because that, that sort of fever pitch of, of, uh, demand has subsided. And we'll take some time to, because it's going to be redistributed. We're seeing companies that were very HQ centric may still have an HQ. It might be a reduced footprint and they're redistributing either nationally or regionally. Um, so I think that's a, that's a, a really, um, And that, and I think that'll happen in, in many major metros, but, um, what you're hearing and this actually goes to what my kind of bugaboo is in this whole thing, which is salacious headlines.

I just, I. If you're standing on shifting sands and you make a proclamation that, you know, what the future is, you're destined to have some error pointed out at some point. And that I think for me is the biggest thing is these, these, these, these proclamations with 100% sure any that turn into. Salacious headlines, which in turn spur these conversations that are not balanced, I think that's going to be the biggest, the biggest thing we deal with.

Um, it's the lack of patience in sort of the collective think we're still have a lot to learn about what normal is going to look and feel like we have a lot to learn about the behaviors that, you know, the employee base, the occupiers. Landlords, we've got, we've got a long road ahead. And I think that that it's, that knee-jerk desire to be the first one on a panel saying, this is how it's going to be.

Or the first one to put a sink in a lobby. You know, those things, they come from a place where you might want to demonstrate being proactive and staying ahead of the needs of, you know, your, your client or whatever it is. But it's the big proclamations that I think are most detrimental because they shift the conversation from patients.

To immediate action, even if you're running in the wrong direction.

Rob: [00:54:20] Right.

Felipe: [00:54:20] Um, and so, so that's that I think the answer is, I hope both of, both of the questions there. Philippe Robert, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it. This was a really great conversation. Great. Super fun

Rob: [00:54:35] Think we're gonna keep talking without you, Eric.

Eric: [00:54:38] Oh? You're gonna keep talking. Okay.

[00:54:39] I'll stop recording now.

Eric: [00:54:56] Thank you for tuning in to this episode of a holistic workplace experience podcast. If you enjoyed the conversation, be sure to subscribe wherever you are. You find your podcast. I'm Eric Kerr. See you next time.