

# Lock manufacturers offer security with style

By BRUCE SERLEN

**M**ention electronic door lock systems to hotel purchasing agents and the first thing that comes to mind understandably is security. The second most likely concern would be guest convenience, probably matched by ease of maintenance. But increasingly, a fourth concern— aesthetics—is gaining traction.

Interior designers creating a plan for a hotel's guestroom corridors will most likely start with the lighting, carpeting, wall coverings and artwork. They'll next focus on the guestroom doors themselves—the wood and the finish—and only then shift their attention to the door lock system.

"It's hard to argue that this isn't the correct order of things, which isn't to say that we're not paying more attention to the design aspect of our products," said Frank Dyer, director of product marketing for Onity, based in Duluth, GA. "We take design considerations into account much more today than we did five or 10 years ago. Design is an increasingly weighted part of the decision-making process, presuming all capabilities, needed features and functions are present. All else being equal, if one company has a product that's more visually appealing, that becomes a kind of competitive advantage."

David Ginn, vp of hospitality sales for Madison Heights, MI-based Saflok and Montreal, Canada-based Ilco, both members of the Kaba Group, agrees that the days of the lock system as "a brick on the door" are over. "Companies have tried what I would call softer modifications to make the lock look not quite as industrial. We began seeing more rounded edges and a more interesting approach to levers. It's generally a more stylized approach," Ginn recalled.

Rune Venas, president of Assa Abloy Hospitality, which manufactures the VingCard door lock systems, described the new design approach as minimalist. "Hoteliers and designers today prefer a lock system that doesn't stand out as much as earlier systems. The trend towards minimalism, meanwhile, goes hand-in-hand with advances in door lock technology, which have reduced the size of the mechanism," Venas said.

He cited emerging RFID (radio frequency identification) technology as an example. "The RFID reader is much more compact than prior systems, which allows designers more flexibility,"

Venas continued. Assa Abloy, a company based in Stockholm, Sweden, has its U.S. headquarters in Dallas.

Similarly, Onity is focused on enhancing what Dyer describes the modularity of its Advance RFID product. "By basically disaggregating or separating some of the capabilities of the lock,



Odyssey by Saflok.



Onity's locks feature Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology.



VingCard's Signature line has been designed by nine different architects.

and appealing to a contemporary sensibility."

When the right design choices are made, the results can be impressive. Saflok is in the process of a major installation in Las Vegas. Ginn was able to do a walk through soon after the door lock systems were installed, completing the guestroom corridor design. "The doors have a polished chrome lock set and trim. As you walk down the hall, you see how it really sets off the entry way into the room," he reported.

Before design considerations became more of a priority, purchasing agents might order a more expensive finish for the door hardware being installed on guestroom floors and less expensive hardware for ballroom, meeting room, and other doors around the property. "But now they understand the importance of having a consistent look," Dyer said.

With architects and designers focusing more intensely on door lock design, Onity, Saflok, Ilco, VingCard and other brands have responded by offering more options. "With both our brands, we try to listen to what people ask us for," Ginn said. The Saflok Quantum series, for example, offers customers five or six standard options.

While there hasn't been significant change in the number or type of metals that are used to make the various lock components, what has changed is the number of finishes available. "We make decisions on materials based on security and cost considerations. As long as we can

attain the desired look and feel with a specific finish, that typically meets the needs of our customer base," Dyer explained.

Traditionally, Onity's most popular finish has been satin chrome.

"But we've begun seeing a lot more interest in some of the more polished finishes as well such as polished chrome and polished brass. We typically offer eight finishes," he said.

Through a partnership with Italian handle maker Valli & Valli, VingCard has enlisted a number of the world's most renowned architects to design door lock handles for the Signature by VingCard line, Venas explained. "It was important to be able to

offer customers a number of choices, each very stylish in its own way. Designers appreciate it," he said. Among the nine architects are Norman Foster from the U.K., Richard Meier from the U.S., and Renzo Piano from Italy.

you're able to create a more aesthetically pleasing product," he said.

Overall, these executives describe the look and feel of their latest more compact, less obtrusive lock systems as "more stylish and residential,