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urban operandi

By Katie Tandy

Three distinct hotels make their mark when it comes to conceptualizing urban hotel design.

LOOMING LARGE with 14 towering stories of limestone, the 341-room Ritz-Carlton, Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) was designed to be a timeless building in a new city, serving as a focal point in a fledging city on the cusp of economic explosion.

Name of Project: The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC **Architect:** José Sirera, principal and hospitality practice area leader, Gensler, EMEA region. **Interior Design:** Sandra Cortner of HBA **Owner:** Union Properties PJSC

Name of Project: Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel Guest rooms **Interior Design:** WAAW **Construction:** City Constructors Inc. **Artwork:** MobArt **Drapes:** Artcraft **Fabrics:** Maharam & Knoll **Casegoods:** Olollo **Lighting:** Flos **Rugs:** Pure Rugs **Upholstery:** Olollo

Name of Project: Waldorf Astoria Shanghai **Architect:** John Portman, CEO of John Portman & Associates **Interior Design:** Hirsch Bedner Associates **Owner:** Shanghai New Union Building Co., Ltd. **Operator:** Hilton Worldwide **Contractor:** Shanghai Construction Group **Architect:** John Portman & Associates **Graphics:** Victor Azarte Design International **Art Consultant:** Ruida **Fabric:** Coil Interior Material, Husetint **Carpet:** Haima Group **Furniture Supplier:** Freeman Contracting, Haixiang Contracting, Hopo Bright **Lighting Suppliers:** Kalmar Lighting, Kailai Lighting **Wallcovering:** Goodrich

Right:
The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC Center Cut restaurant.



Below left:
The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC lobby lounge.
Below right from top to bottom:
The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC exterior and pool;
The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC bar.

Envisioned by José Sirera, principal and hospitality practice area leader for Gensler in the EMEA region, The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC marks the second Ritz-Carlton in Dubai and the sixth property in the region.

Gensler was awarded the luxury project through an architectural design competition held in 2004, prevailing over the competition with a design based upon classic Beaux Arts architecture, which sharply contrasted the glass towers that flank the Ritz. Sirera says that the Ritz-Carlton, DIFC was Gensler's first completed project in the Middle East, and has served as a catalyst for myriad other projects currently underway in the region.

"Our client envisioned a building that looked solid, like it had been there 50 years and would be there for many decades to come," says Sirera. "The resulting design is classically modern and timeless, both distinctive and understated."

Gensler created an architecture that facilitates a pedestrian experience, a vital element to any urban hotel. Not only is there a "retail spine" which connects the hotel to the surrounding financial center, but the spaces around the hotel were meticulously created to provide both external and internal routes for maximum connectivity. Sirera says that special attention was paid to the outdoor areas, which respond to the local environment, mitigating the sultry summer sun with ample shade.

"The building stands out in the surrounding neighborhood, yet is mindful of the building's position in the fast developing city," says Sirera. "The profile respects the district's master plan, which seeks to achieve density similar to newer financial centers like Canary Wharf in London. Along the same lines, the limestone façade also references the classical

elegance of Paris and other global cities renowned for their design."

Further echoing the retro-sophistication of Paris was the interior design work of Sandra Cortner of Hirsch Bedner Associates, who channeled the 1940s French Art Deco period as a style reference. Cortner offers a cool color palette to counter the fierce heat of Dubai, crafting an entire lobby that serves as a tribute to renowned French interior designer Jean-Michel Frank with limestone walls and floors accented with inlaid wood as well as elevator doors emblazoned with Frank's hallmark starburst pattern. Glinting from the ceiling in the shape of languid branches are azure Swarovski crystals, uniting the lobby, mezzanine and podium levels.

"The goal was to make a grandly residential interior taking things such as crystal chandeliers and Oriental carpets and using them in a different fashion from some of the older Ritz-Carlton properties," says Cortner. "Those are materials that Ritz-Carlton guests will be familiar with, but they are used in a more modern fashion."

There are three different guest room plans, 50 suites, including two Ritz-Carlton Suites, and a Club Lounge cast in pale ocean blue and gold with cream walls and Anegre wood detailing.





The two Ritz-Carlton Suites evoke 1940s Parisian Salons; the walls in the parlor and dining rooms are upholstered in creamy silks, offering a pattern that matches the color of the drapery. The study is panelled in tigerwood and the bedroom has handmade area carpets and silk upholstered walls; the floors all shine with polished marble, a classic Beaux Arts residential material.

"A medium-toned Anigre wood is throughout the public areas—it is more contemporary than the traditional dark woods," says Cortner. "Glass and crystal are used throughout—they add detail and sparkle. The ceiling fixture in the main lobby space is quite dramatic; it acts as art as well as lighting."

California Scheming

The Hollywood Roosevelt hotel has served as the palm-treed playground for Hollywood's brightest and most beautiful stars since 1927 and with the red-hot new redesign of its 60 cabana rooms as well as the debut of three decadent new venues, (Public Kitchen & Bar, The Spare Room and Beacher's Madhouse), the 300-room hotel is ready for a new generation of revelers.

The 60 Cabana Rooms, which surround the infamous Tropicana Pool (hand painted by acclaimed pop artist David Hockney) have been redesigned to evoke the 1950s à la Palm Springs.

From top to bottom:
A Hollywood Roosevelt cabana room;
The Hollywood Roosevelt's Public Kitchen & Bar.

Designed by WAAW, Joyce Wang and Hun Aw (in collaboration with David Chang and Goodwin Gaw), the design duo was originally asked to manage the creative direction of Gaw Capital's and Downtown Properties' hospitality portfolio. Meanwhile, Goodwin was combing through pitches from several renowned design firms for the renovation. Wang and Aw, rather than accepting Goodwin's management offer, decided that they wanted to re-conceptualize the Roosevelt Hotel themselves, a bold move that resonated with Goodwin.

"We didn't think that we were going to get the project for a number of reasons," says Aw. "WAAW hadn't been formed, we had never collaborated before, and we were two young designers competing in a field of industry giants, but our passionate pitch registered. Not only was Goodwin excited by our concept, he was able to relate to our entrepreneurial spirit. Goodwin was 27 when he bought the hotel, right around the same age we were when we pitched for the project. He sensed our hunger and he very much wanted pass the torch of opportunity. We were awarded the project and WAAW was borne."

As The Roosevelt is legendary for its lavish nightlife and celebrity clientele, WAAW wanted to create a design that would echo the vivacious, fast-paced energy of its guests, infusing the spaces with equal parts glamour and playfulness.

"Let's be honest: The Roosevelt hotel is known for being a 'backdrop for scandal,'" says Wang. "We wanted to take this stereotype even further by injecting our perspective of Hollywood glamour and mystique into the design. When guests find themselves in a retro environment, we feel that it encourages them to step out of their own skin and into a sense of anonymity, where they feel at ease to act out their inner most fantasies."

WAAW created a different "look" for every suite, using vintage designer pieces from Eames, Baughman, Jere and Nelson to elicit a sense of nostalgia and authenticity. In the hallways leading to the rooms, WAAW collected photographs from various artists including Slim Aarons, Michael Tighe and Murray Garrett, hailing from the '50s and '60s.

"In the standard rooms, we designed a 'tete-a-tete' with some Danish modern influences, which can be used as a dining, work or lounging area," says Wang. "We wanted something playful and sexy, but also efficient and functional."

Aw explains that they also wanted to maintain the mid-century ambiance, thus a rather simple palette of natural white oak and charcoal wool were highlighted, coupled with polished chrome and Carrera marble juxtaposed against bronze mirrors and ebonized floors. For the suites, walnut was used exclusively as architectural slats on the custom furniture, while large slabs of exotic granite were used for added drama in the exposed bathrooms.

For the suites, we used walnut extensively as architectural slats and on our custom furniture, book-matched large slabs of exotic granite for added drama in the exposed bathrooms.

"It creates a sexy-yet-cozy feel," says Wang. "Don Draper would be proud."

As for the new Public Kitchen & Bar, the original Spanish Colonial architecture was celebrated by designer Christian Schulz of Studio Collective in collaboration with Jason Pomeranc, co-owner of Thompson Hotels, and Tim Goodell, executive chef and president of Domaine Restaurant Group, which owns the new spot.

Boasting a purposely boisterous atmosphere, the restaurant is decidedly "approachable," with rustic oak cabinetry and black walnut tables as well as brass chandeliers, cabernet leather booths and recently restored ceiling frescos circa 1927. ▶



"Believe it or not, acoustically we were trying to boost the noise level as much as possible, to create a heightened sense of activity," says Schulz. "The owners specifically requested the space feel like a bustling, dynamic and noisy space. We envisioned the busy cafes that fill European, stone-lined train stations or aging buildings. Hard surfaces abound from the plastered walls and ceilings, to the inlaid mosaic stone trims, solid walnut floors, to the oversized marble terrazzo patio floors."

Schulz also explained that there was careful attention paid to a diverse balance of the old and new, which was achieved through the use of custom-made period recreations in the decorative furnishings, lighting and millwork that emulate the beauty of bygone eras. Diners will discover a white carrera marble bar as well as an assortment of antique brass throughout the space that features a hand-rubbed finish for an aged patina look.

"Our creative director, Leslie Kale, is a master at finding long-lost, but stunning one-of-a-kind pieces that we take to our local craftsman and work collaboratively with them to re-create the found object in a contemporary way," says Schulz. "We love using nature's materials, whether that be glass, real metals, various hardwoods or stone; there's an authenticity to each material."

The Spare Room is another utterly unique venue from Studio Collective in conjunction with Marc Rose and Med Abrous of Thompson Hotels. Boasting two reclaimed bowling lanes, custom-made backgammon tables and intricate uses of different types of wood, the new parlor-cum-gaming hall glows and glowers like a 1930s library.

"They knew they wanted a turn-of-the-century, residential feel to the space which would promote the idea of camaraderie and conversation though social gaming," says designer Adam Goldstein. "They also wanted something that, unlike most nightlife venues in L.A. and other major cities, would be around for 100 years and should have a sense of permanence."

The owners wanted to cater to a crowd that had left the trendy bustle of bottle-service clubs behind and were looking for something more soothing and sophisticated. Goldstein created a space that is undeniably masculine, channeling a gentlemen's club's vibe, but he also carefully counters these elements with feminine curved furniture and soft, plush fabrics.

"When possible, we also tried to re-appropriate vintage finds with modern spins," says Schulz. "One such example of this was taking a 1930s antique bathroom vanity and refinishing it by adding a tufted upholstery detail, hence turning it into the DJ Booth. It had the perfect proportions for two turntables and a mixer; it just needed a little bit of love and care."



Seriously Shanghai

John Portman, vice chairman and CEO of John Portman & Associates, says he had his eye on this project for long time, actively pursuing varying development scenarios with the Jing Jiang Group and the Shanghai Jiushi Corporation for nearly a decade. The architect explains that it was a two-fold mission that had to be deftly accomplished: On the one hand, it was imperative to maintain the integrity of the waterfront of the historic Bund district and restore the original architectural character, but on the other, Portman had to infuse the property with appropriate contemporary functions. The interiors, crafted by Hirsch Bedner Associates, echo the grandiose nature of Portman's structure striking a balance between opulence and sophistication.

"Out of respect for the historic building, the tower complements the preservation of the historic Shanghai Club, but does not attempt to mimic its style," says Portman. "The design of the spacious courtyard that links the two buildings was motivated by the desire to create an open public space for everyone to enjoy. In addition to being welcoming, the courtyard is multi-functional to accommodate both hotel use and public cultural events. It's a unique and engaging 'people space' in the midst of the city."

Portman says that the program called for a tower in order to accommodate the 269 guest rooms and suites, but this design came with a serious challenge: The architecture of the tower had to be positioned so that its height did not dominate the historic Shanghai club.

"Standing at street level, the focus remains on the historic façade while the tower, by design, blends into the backdrop of the city," he says. "The tower features three levels of public spaces including a lobby lounge, meeting rooms, health club and spa, in addition to 20 floors of luxury guestrooms."

In order to functionally link the new wing to the historic building, Portman created interior spaces (one on ground level and one level below grade) that are centrally focused around the grand brasserie restaurant, bakery and show kitchen at basement level one—terraced stairs lead guests from the ground level to the open public space of the roof garden above.

"Our firm's hotel design experience and our familiarity of the local ways, coupled with our love for this vibrant city, drew us to the fabulous 'Dong Feng Hotel' building (formally The Shanghai Club, constructed in 1909)," says Portman. "It allowed us to appropriately highlight the structure's magnificence, the grand interior atrium and the surrounding spaces." ❄

Opposite clockwise from top left:
 The Spare Room at The Hollywood Roosevelt;
 The Hollywood Roosevelt pool and Tropicana Bar;
 Waldorf Astoria Shanghai bathroom (photo by Derryck Menere);
 Waldorf Astoria Shanghai lobby atrium (photo by Ken Hayden).
Above:
 Waldorf Astoria Shanghai Waldorf River Suite bedroom (photo by Derryck Menere).

Photography: The Ritz-Carlton, DIFC; Hollywood Roosevelt; Waldorf Astoria Shanghai