

DESIGN

QUARTERLY

HYATT REGENCY VANCOUVER

EDITH WORMSBECKER, MCM INTERIORS

APPLIANCES

FURNITURE

AUDIO & VIDEO

FLOORING



PHOTO COURTESY ED WHITE

A \$40 MILLION FACELIFT

BY CLARE TATTERSALL

IT HAS BEEN almost six years since the coordinated terrorist attacks on the U.S., which toppled the World Trade Centre, left a gaping hole in the Pentagon and, for the first time in history, grounded all civilian flights in North America.

On Sept. 13, 2001, after laying low for two days, aircraft returned to the sky to resume regular travel. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, people were less inclined to board a Boeing 767.

As the calamity of the disaster settled in, it was evident the attacks not only brought down the Twin Towers but the tourism industry as well. Airline ticket sales plummeted, exacerbating financial problems in the airline industry, and hotel vacancy rates soared.

Unsure of the future, one of the world's largest premier hotel companies put its renovation and new construction projects on hold, that is, all but one — the Hyatt Regency Vancouver. In December 2001, the hotel embarked on an ambitious, multi-phased renovation and expansion project, which spanned six years.

“In 1997, Hyatt (Global Corp.) bought out an outside company that owned 75 per cent of the hotel...and (four years later) it put an offer on the table to buy the land, which was around the time of 9/11,” says Hyatt Regency Vancouver general manager Rolf Osterwalder. “Though the offer was put on hold for a few months, as soon as we were able to buy the land we basically had to start renovations.”

Built in 1973, Osterwalder says the Hyatt was in need of a complete overhaul to keep pace with other downtown hotels.

“We wanted to update the property and make it more contemporary and urban, maximize the meeting space and make it as compact yet flexible as possible,” he explains, adding this was the first major renovation project since the hotel opened, though soft goods renovations were completed in 1988.

Approximately a week before Christmas, the luxury hotel closed to the public.

According to Stuart Olson project manager Jim Gibson, guests



PHOTO COURTESY ED WHITE

were exiting the hotel at the same time construction crews were entering through the back door. Within an hour of final check-out, demolition was already underway.

Working on a tight, three month immovable deadline, crews literally worked around the clock to complete the \$15-million project on time.

“Today you could never do what we did then,” says Osterwalder, who has been at Vancouver’s second largest hotel for almost 10 years. “It would’ve taken us three times as long because of the construction boom in B.C. now. It is very difficult to get trades and keep them on schedule...so, from a time perspective, it was actually advantageous.”

Redesigned by MCM Interiors Ltd. and CHIL (Coordinated Hotel Interiors Ltd.), the first phase included a comprehensive facelift of all public areas (approximately 45,000 square feet) on the first three floors. The lobby was completely redone and contains a reconfigured guest registration area, custom-designed furniture, a quartzite floor and a feature “waterfall” wall constructed of glass, light and holographic film.

“Upon entrance of the hotel, you meet this great wall which is a replicate of a waterfall and it’s a ‘Wow,’” says CHIL principal Richard Negrin. “Guests only remember two things — coming and going — so whether you understand what that wall is, it’s

your first and last impression.”

To create additional pre-function space for the Regency ballroom, one of the largest hotel conference venues in the city, the designer team lowered the lobby ceiling from three to two-stories. Infilling the lobby opening on the third floor created an additional 2,000 square feet, which can be closed off to provide additional “breakout” space for events.

Also included in the hotel renovation was replacement of the concrete port cochere with a glass and metal canopy, revitalized food and beverage concepts, including cafes, bars and restaurants, and reorganization of the grand ballroom (formerly divisible into three large rooms) to create six function spaces when divided.

In terms of concept, the client wanted to incorporate scenic Vancouver into the design.

“We played upon the theme of the natural resources — the water, forests and mountains,” explains Negrin.

But in keeping with the client’s desire to create a sophisticated, contemporary environment, MCM Interiors principal Edith Wormsbecker says these West Coast elements were interpreted in an abstract not literal way. For instance, the custom designed carpet on the third floor is a lively evocation of raindrops and circles on water. In addition, finish materials — wood, metal and stone — were chosen to reflect the natural resources and the

project profile

application of technology to raw materials.

While the redesign was relatively straight forward in that there were no major hiccups design-wise for either CHIL or MCM Interiors, unexpected asbestos posed a challenge.

“There was an asbestos survey done prior to construction started but once things got opened up we discovered there was probably 50 per cent more asbestos than we originally thought,” says CHIL senior project manager Riaan de Beer who, at the time, worked on behalf of project architect Musson Cattell Mackey Partnership.

As a result, what originally started off as a cosmetic upgrade turned into a major gut and re-build.

“The first three weeks were taken up with asbestos abatement, which really put a crunch on the rest of the schedule,” he says.

But thanks to dedicated construction crews, the Hyatt reopened just in time for the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation annual convention, which was booked well in advance of the first wave of renovations.

A Fresh New Look

Upon completing Phase 1 of the expansive \$40-million project, MCM Interiors remodelled the 4th and 34th floor meeting rooms, which was a continuation of the main lobby design, and embarked on the final phases — renovation of 644 guest rooms to match the design of the new public spaces and the creation of two themed feature suites.



PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL BOLAND

Again, this included asbestos abatement as well as replacement of the entire 30-year-old water pipe system.

To minimize revenue loss, the Hyatt remained open and guest room renovations were executed in two phases — Phase 1, which took place last year, saw the 284 rooms on the top floors remodelled, and Phase 2, which focused on the 360 rooms on the lower half of the hotel, was completed June 2007.

The goal was to update and improve the largest guest rooms in Vancouver to meet today’s market and guest expectations while minimizing construction.

“Originally the guest rooms had a lot of mouldings and trim,” says MCM Interiors senior designer Christina Fong. “The hardware had a brass look, there were floral bed covers and the walls were a yellow colour that worked with the traditional theme.”

Today, rich blue fabrics reminiscent of the deep sea contrast the white vinyl wallcoverings. The generous use of textural materials, warm walnut wood and natural polished slate emphasize luxury and comfort. Spot lighting accentuates the modern interior shapes and adds drama to the rooms. Window treatments were designed to be drawn back along the side walls to take full advantage of the stunning views, maximize daylight and room width.

“Most draperies you draw to the side gather (and) create a lot of bulk, so we created an L-shaped track that pulls the drapes not only to the side but along the length of the wall,” explains Fong. “Now that it’s parallel to the walls, we have more opening to the view...so when you walk into (the room) that’s one of the biggest draws.”

Other highlights include the stylish ensuite washrooms containing polished slate tile, backlit vanity mirrors, relaxing rain showers, a combination of unique light fixtures and textured glass.

For the special suites, MCM Interiors presented two separate themes to the client, both of which were adopted.

“One has a warm wood feel and it followed along that transitional feel but in a much more contemporary way,” says Fong. “So, we used a lot of cherry wood trim and panelling through the space and bamboo flooring. Most of the fabrics are rich earthy colours and we used a textural, horizontal grass wallcovering.”

The design team took a modern approach in the second room, incorporating classic 1920s furniture and vibrant red-orange accessories into a predominantly white room.

“When it came to the two feature suites, we started with a blank slate and really got to make them different,” notes Fong. “The Hyatt gave us a real open door to design more or less anything, (which) gave us a real opportunity to come up with some real fantastic ideas.” ■



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