

## TMT International Observatory LLC

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"This telescope has a big aperture, so you can see very faint objects, but also very bright objects that are very far away," says Gary Sanders, Project Manager for TMT. "This means that you can study the oldest objects because the universe is expanding and the oldest objects are furthest away. You can look back in time and see the farthest reaches of the universe. All of that is helped by the big diameter of the telescope."

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A newly opened brandy distillery is shaking things up in Louisville, Kentucky, and beyond

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Ontario town updates infrastructure in hopes of attracting new residents and businesses

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Year-round resort adds energy-efficient updates



Hotel Zephyr (Fisherman's Wharf)



Hotel Vintage Plaza Portland



Hotel Vintage Seattle



W Hotel Los Angeles - Westwood

# Stretching the Limits

Studio with a focus in hospitality design brings passion for art and themes to two Pacific Northwest hotels

Dawson Design  
Associates

**PRESIDENT**  
Andrea Sheehan

**LOCATION**  
Seattle, Washington

For some travelers, a hotel is merely a place to park their bags and get some sleep, but for Dawson Design Associates, it's a chance to create a great impression and lasting memories for guests. Two of the artistic studio's recent projects in the Pacific Northwest stretch the boundaries of what hotel design can do for a better travel experience.

Dawson took on the redesigns of the Hotel Vintage Park in Seattle and the Hotel Vintage Plaza in Portland, both Kimpton hotel properties. With each project, the firm takes an innovative approach to hotel design that goes beyond simply picking out furniture and wallpaper.

"Clients come to us based on the market, architecture and culture," says Andrea Sheehan, President. "We are hired to capture a certain rate and a certain guest. Rather than pulling in 'cool' things, we're pulling in things that will bring particular guests to the hotel. It's more like product design for a certain market. We create a narrative to position the product in the market and take it to the press. We create a branded product."

## MAKING THE INSIDE FIT THE OUTSIDE

When Sheehan first visited the Hotel Vintage Park in Seattle, she was struck by the disconnect between its interior design and its surroundings. The hotel, a renovated apartment building, was known for its strong connection to the local wine industry, but the lobby décor was more Italian Renaissance than anything else.

"It just didn't fit. We aren't in Italy, we're in Seattle," Sheehan says. "We needed to energize and activate the space by linking the lobby to the bar. The hotel was always a wine hotel. It has a long-term relationship with all of the top vineyards in the Northwest and it has a huge following. We didn't want to touch that theme."

Instead, Sheehan and her team of designers played up the wine connection in their design work, but kept their approach more

contemporary. Ownership agreed, and the decision was to re-brand and re-name the hotel: The Vintage Seattle.

"We wanted it to have both an educational and integrated experience that ties into the local vineyards and wineries," Sheehan says. "We made an interactive lobby with a small plate and wine tasting environment that was a contemporary spin on a wine cellar. We designed and integrated the architectural sculpture in the lobby that was implemented by a local artist and is a contemporary laser cut steel interpretation of a grape arbor. It dramatically ties the space together and makes it feel very intimate and social."

Dawson Design Associates also took this approach to The Vintage Seattle's 125 rooms, which were already each named after a different local winery, but had no aesthetic connection to wine. Using wine cork surfaces, wine barrel furniture, maps of local vineyards, famous quotes about wine and wine-themed art, the firm delivered a level of cohesion the hotel and its guests hadn't experienced before.

The redesigned Hotel Vintage Plaza in Portland has a similar connection to Oregon wineries, but also reflects its urban chic location downtown, just a couple blocks from the culturally rich Pearl District. Dawson described the multimillion-dollar redesign as having an "edgy, casual and gritty feel," which comes from distressed floor planking and bike racks in the lobby.

With each of these hotels, Dawson Design brought a high standard of what it wanted to accomplish.


"The hotel needs to be compelling in both its look and attitude in order to draw guests," Sheehan says. "It needs to tie in emotionally to their psychological profile and evoke a response. The goal is to create an experience so that when they walk in, they say 'Wow, this captures me.' It's both an interactive and a virtual experience, as if they are stepping into a fantasy or a sense of déjà vu. We provoke in a way that's fun and challenging, building contrast and tension."

#### EXPANDING HORIZONS

Sheehan acknowledges that walking the line between gimmick and theme is something Dawson Design Associates must be cognizant of during most hotel design projects. However, for some projects, gimmicks aren't necessarily a bad thing.

"There are times when we want to be gimmicky or kitschy," Sheehan says. "Right now, we're doing something in San Francisco on Fisherman's Wharf that might fall into that category. For the young [information technology] set, it's like an IT Disney World. But to do it in a sophisticated, fashion-forward way, we go to art. Artists usually have their finger on the pulse of the city, so we incorporate what local artists are doing. However, it's a little more edited so it doesn't seem contrived."

Dawson Design Associates is bringing this spirit across the Atlantic Ocean with its new London office, as well. As the firm moves forward, Sheehan says it will continue to focus on having multiple design perspectives for unique projects.

"There's value in having concept designers from China, Warsaw, Scotland and Venezuela, and having their perspective is interesting," Sheehan says. "It gives us an international look and feel. We're like chameleons and we value the diversity and versatility of having a group of international chameleons." 

#### JULIE COYLE ART ASSOCIATES

A vibrant art studio in Sausalito's Industrial district, home to Julie Coyle Art Associates, is creating a lot of buzz. Coyle and her team specialize in custom artwork for hospitality projects, including original oil paintings, drawings, fabrication in metal, wood and glass, hand painted murals, wall paper and silk screen. "We never say no to a design challenge - it's always more like... how are we going to make this happen?" says Coyle, a lifelong artist. See their work and project list at <http://www.juliecoyleartassociates.com>



Julie Coyle  
Art Associates

Creative fabrication  
& art consulting

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[www.juliecoyleartassociates.com](http://www.juliecoyleartassociates.com)

Studio : 200 Gate 5 Road, Suite 102

Sausalito, CA 94965

415.332.2660