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FF&E Trends



The headboard and bedding together are one focal point of Hotel Madera's Asian-inspired guestrooms.

Madera's guestrooms, which measure in excess of 400 square feet each, feature a seating area, thereby giving them an almost suite-like feel.



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BY BARBARA CAPELLA LOEHR

WASHINGTON, D.C.— How do you transform a former Clarion hotel into a unique boutique property managed by Kimpton Hotel & Restaurant Group?

According to Andrea Dawson of Dawson Design Associates, you work within the existing footprint of the hotel, make existing moldings work and create a cost-efficient look that changes the interiors into what she termed "an urban landscape."

Urban Oasis

Dawson said the design motivation for this Washington, D.C. property, called the Hotel Madera, stemmed from the fact that its three sister D.C. properties— (Topaz, which opened last October, Rouge, which opened last December, and Helix, which will open this November)— have very strong, club-like atmospheres.

The owner— Bethesda, MD-based LaSalle Hotel Properties, which owns all four properties— and Kimpton were looking for a more sedate setting for Madera that would provide a calm oasis for business travelers and couples looking to get away for the weekend, said Dawson.

"We wanted to do a hotel that was more sophisticated, more discreet. [Madera] is very refined and calm," said Dawson.

Madera's metamorphosis also had to be accomplished on a \$7 million budget, indicated David Sussman,

Kimpton's vp/development and design. And although LaSalle was very committed to the project, Sussman said cost was a concern.

In fact, Sussman said LaSalle postponed this renovation and the Helix project— which were in their early stages last fall— for 90 days following 9/11. "LaSalle wanted to wait and get its confidence back, which it did. This project, and the Helix project, were released after the first of this year," said Sussman.

But once the green light was given, the first challenge, explained Dawson, was the lobby. "It was a Clarion renovation, so we had a very narrow, rectangular lobby, only about 14-feet wide. So we tilted the walls at an angle, installed hidden light sources reminiscent of light through a canyon and used custom carpet in deep henna and bamboo colors to create drama in a very natural, abstract way."

Dawson explained that by using a mix of natural colors and materials, she was able to create a very organic space that provided much-needed impact, while offering a soothing arrival experience to guests.

According to her, the lobby serves as a starting point for the hotel's "subtle, underlying" natural theme. "We wanted to put guests at ease with this hotel," said Dawson.

A cove pairing a "sandstone-type" finish with soft backlighting that spills over into this niche, a small reception desk wrapped in stitched leather, custom seating for six and a wall featuring

cut fusion glass that mimics the look of a mountain cliff complete the lobby.

Asian Influences

The natural theme is carried into all 82 guestrooms, where it becomes more Asian-inspired because of the contrast between dark and light tones and the carpet that features a kimono pattern, said Dawson.

There was also plenty of traditional architectural detailing that was inherent to the old Clarion's design. Instead of tearing it out, Dawson kept it. "It adds an interesting twist to the space," she said.

By incorporating the existing architectural detailing, Dawson was able to spend money in other areas of the guestrooms, such as the bedding— an area that she feels is paramount to the guest experience.

Another guestroom focal point is the armoire, which has a "very contemporary, Asian feel." The drapery is also contemporary, with its horizontal stripes paired with tone-on-tone, polka-dot sheers hung from steel beams and grommets.

The guest baths got a simpler redesign. Dawson explained that by applying a new wallcovering in the enclosed toilet/tub area that ties into the guestroom design and remaking the separate vanity area so that it feels like an extension of the guestroom space, she was able to update the small, traditional baths without having to tear out existing fixtures.

The single-sink vanity now sports espresso-colored wood topped with granite, and features a skirt that hides the plumbing and a steel bar that serves as a towel rack.

A Former Life

Dawson further noted the hotel once served as apartment building, so all of the guestrooms are oversized, providing extra space to include a desk area and extra seating.

Each apartment-turned-guestroom also has a kitchenette. However, the new design does not incorporate the kitchenettes; instead most of them were closed off to save money. Some larger kitchenettes are being used as storage areas for guestroom furniture to enable the hotel to convert guestrooms to meeting space, noted Sussman.

When Madera opens this month, it will also feature a few "specialty rooms." For instance, "there will be two screening rooms with flat-screen, plasma TVs... there will also be two 'nosh' rooms where a microwave, a countertop and some seating will be provided if guests want to prepare something," said Sussman.

Madera also features a restaurant called Firefly, which will offer more of a dining experience, said Sussman, as opposed to the more bar-like F&B outlets at Madera's sister properties.

Sussman noted Kimpton is confident Dawson's design will help Madera achieve its projected occupancy, ADR and RevPAR levels, though at presstime, he did not have those figures available.