

Spring

The NEW LOOK

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Inside

- Benchmark HOTEL BUSINESS® Survey On The Economics And Trends Affecting Hotel Design
- Designers Go All Out To Bring Hotels To Next
- Top 10 Tips For Hotel Photography

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The Topaz Glistens With Strong Colors, Luxurious Fabrics

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Andrea Dawson of Dawson Design Associates was losing sleep over the reaction the Topaz Hotel would get when it opened its doors. The reason, she said, was that she'd taken a big, but calculated chance in designing a property that truly went over the top in its look.

She felt better, however, when a 75-year-old woman who for years had lived at the hotel in its former life walked in to a sample room, stared around her for a moment, and murmured, "This is wonderful!"

Using a palette of iridescent colors as her palette, Dawson had indeed taken a risk with the look of the Topaz, but it's a risk that has gotten great acclaim since the property, which was converted from a Clarion, opened last October.

While the property is owned by LaSalle Hotel Properties, it is managed by Kimpton, which had every intention of lending its well-known, eclectic look to the 99-room boutique hotel.

Dawson, who has worked on a number of Kimpton hotels already, gladly accepted the challenge of bringing a warm, sensual look to what was at the time a 1960's-style hotel, even on a budget that was "moderate."

"When you work with Kimpton it means you have to break the rules," she said. "We like to break the rules."

In search of a design for the property, which had a total renovation budget of \$12 million, (which included upgrading basic infrastructure like its HVAC system), Dawson visited a number of other Washington hotels, and was surprised to find them so conservative in style. In want of inspiration, she wandered into the Smithsonian one day and came upon Whistler's Peacock Room in the Freer Gallery. Gazing at the peacock motifs, Dawson knew she had her palette, which included iridescent blues and greens as well as metallics.

Borne of that experience, the Topaz Hotel's lobby was designed as an "intimate space which provides an escape" from the outside, said Dawson. Adorning the lobby, which also acts as a bar/breakfast room, guests immediately gaze upon a daybed wrapped in a multi-colored silk sheer and framed by ruby red drapes with large Moroccan tassels. The Topaz Bar, meanwhile, is accented by plush fabrics in rich colors, including silks, mohair velvets and leather.

At night, when the bar is roaring with hotel guests and locals, lighting changes color every few seconds; in the morning, it all becomes a breakfast area with calmer lighting, said Dawson.

The entire property is meant to give a sensual feel, she said, with the lobby designed to make guests feel sexy and comfortable. Guestrooms, meanwhile, are meant to give a calmer feeling of warmth. Headboards have a cocoon style, while full tafetta-style drapes are red and black with a European feel. The carpet has a custom puzzle-style motif. Over the desk is

a custom piece of art in the form of a peacock, which is the only place the bird appears throughout the hotel.

"We love to play with people, to have double-entendres throughout our properties," said Dawson. "If they get it, that's great!"

One way or another, Dawson wants guests to leave the hotels she designs saying either "I love it," or even, "I hate it."

"I want a reaction," she said. "I don't ever want anyone leaving and just saying, 'that was a nice hotel.'"

— Ruthanne Terrero

