

1 One of the lead visual stories in the soon-to-open Press Hotel will be this dimensional art piece of large, painted-block letters behind the reception desk.



MARVELOUS MAKEOVERS

Designers surmount some surprising challenges to turn existing structures into hot new hotels.

BY MATTHEW HALL

WHETHER A straight-up renovation of an existing hotel or an adaptive reuse project, creating a new lodging destination within the confines of already-built walls presents designers with obstacles and opportunities. Here's a behind-the-scenes look at how designers grappled with the former and took advantage of the latter in two noteworthy renos—one just opened, the other just about to.

THE PRESS HOTEL

The phrase, "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" is emblazoned on the seat backs of the desk chairs in the guest rooms at the soon-to-open Press Hotel in Portland, Maine. Those words form a pangram, a phrase that contains all letters of the alphabet at least once.

So, why are those nine words being integrated into a hotel setting? "They are commonly used for touch-typing practice and to test the keyboards of typewriters and computers, which makes the phrase an apt reference in a building that once housed a newspaper," says Michael Suomi, principal and vice president of design at Stonehill & Taylor Architects, the New York-based firm charged with overseeing this adaptive reuse project. "In addition, the seating bearing that phrase is a re-creation of a mid-century writer's desk chair."

The presence of that pangram is just one of the many ways, large and small, that the Stonehill & Taylor team drew on the building's past life as a newspaper office—it housed the *Portland Press Herald* from 1923 through 2010—to create a one-of-a-kind experience for guests when it opens in May.

Some of the larger-scale visual elements reflecting the building's ink-stained past include the letterpress wall sculpture behind that reception desk that consists of a series of large, block letters; a towering installation of 50 to 60 antique typewriters that serves as the centerpiece of an in-house art gallery that will display works by local artists, and a massive scale (originally used to ensure that giant rolls of newsprint shipped to the paper were of the promised heft) that's been pressed into service in the hotel's lower-level fitness center.

Other references to the structure's previous incarnation include coffee tables in the lobby whose tops will be printed with images of the Portland paper's front pages, and guest bathrooms with reeded glass doors similar to those found in old-style newspaper offices.

Suomi notes that his team had something of a blank slate in creating the 110-key hotel, as the building (which actually consists of two connected structures: a seven-story portion built in 1923 and a five-story addition that came online in 1948) had been gutted to make way for a previous owner's plans to convert the site into a residential complex. When that proposal stalled, local developer Jim Brady stepped in to buy the building in 2012 and moved ahead with plans to convert it into a hotel, according to a news story in the *Portland Press Herald*. (Not surprisingly, the paper has given ample coverage to the fate of its former home.)

The designers did make one major change to the space being used to house the hotel's public areas: They created a large opening in the center of the main-level floor, to let more natural light into an art gallery below. A stairway was added at the side of that opening to connect the two floors, and the side-wall of that installation will house art installations by locals.

As happens with just about any project, not everything the designers envisioned came to pass. For example, Suomi says his team wanted to rename the floors within the seven-story structure after the sections of a paper. However, that



MICHAEL SUOMI

- 2 The Press Hotel's guest rooms feature chairs emblazoned with a pangram that would be familiar to news reporters who once toiled at keyboards in the newspaper offices that were formerly housed in the building.
- 3 All the artwork throughout the hotel is from its home state of Maine, including these ink-evoking pieces in one of the guest rooms. Further reflecting the property's newsprint heritage is the navy-colored wallcovering, which has black lines within it.

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

- OWNER**
Press Hotel LLC: Jim Brady, managing member
- OPERATOR**
Trust Hospitality: Patrick Goddard, president
- DESIGN FIRM**
Stonehill & Taylor Architects: Michael Suomi, principal and vice president of design; Sherry Dennis, interiors associate, Tory Knoph and Xyrus Diego, senior interior designers, Carmen Koller, Laura Plasberg, Ariana Holland, Cinthya Toledo and Tracy Ong, design team
- ARCHITECT**
Archetype Architects
- GENERAL CONTRACTOR**
Wright-Ryan Construction
- PURCHASING COMPANY**
Neil Locke & Associates
- SPECIALTY DESIGN CONSULTANTS**
Soho Myriad (art)
Kugler Ning Lighting Design
- ANTIQUE TYPEWRITERS**
Maine College of Art
- ART**
Jim Brady
Stonehill & Taylor Architects Studio 24b
- BATH FIXTURES**
Watermark
Kohler
- CASEGOODS**
Bryan Ashley
- COFFEE TABLES**
John Nelson Fabrication
- DRAPERY**
County Draperies Inc.
- FABRICS**
Demar Leather
Kravet
Moore and Giles
Opuzen
P/Kaufmann
Valley Forge Fabrics
- FLOORCOVERINGS**
AP Designs Ltd.
Caccese Collection
Innovative Carpets
Paul White Tile
- LIGHTING**
Mario Industries
Renaissance Contract Lighting
- METAL WORK**
John Nelson Fabrications
- MIRRORS**
Mirror Image
- SEATING**
Custom Contract Furnishings
- WALLCOVERINGS**
Innovations in Wallcovering
- WOVEN TAPESTRIES**
Angela Adams