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TKA+D

Small Changes,
Big Impact

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SHERATON CENTRE TORONTO

by ROBIN BRUNET

Hotel makeovers are common in the hospitality industry to keep up with evolving trends and tastes; but the renovation of Toronto's iconic Sheraton Centre Hotel is the largest and most spectacular renovation to date in the facility's 50-year history.

As part of a bigger project, Marriott International committed to extensively renovating three of its Canadian flagship hotels, one of which was the renovation of Sheraton Centre Hotel (the other two being Sheraton Gateway Hotel in Toronto International Airport and LeCentre Sheraton Montreal Hotel). Changes were made to the entrances and the lobby of the Sheraton Centre Hotel to include a new cafe and restaurant as well as soundproof booths for calls. In addition, the outdoor pool area has been upgraded, and the Sheraton Club has an elegant new look on the 43rd floor.

This project was an impressive task for all parties involved. "We dealt with innumerable site conditions and were obliged to accelerate the work to keep on schedule, despite two COVID lockdowns and a labour strike. We also had to account for as many as 3,000 people circulating daily through this busy facility," says Allan Scoler, VP, hotels & hospitality at JLL Project and Development Services.

Plans to refresh the Sheraton Centre began more than four years ago. The intent was to bring its original brutalist design back to life. "The Sheraton was built in conjunction with, and looks onto, our City Hall complex, but subsequent renovations didn't align with the modernistic architecture of the facility," says Blair Robinson, senior associate at architects-Alliance.

DesignAgency was retained to revamp the interior spaces and the project was implemented in phases, the first being the reimagining of the 43rd-floor club in October 2021 to reflect Toronto by using bespoke artwork, locally sourced trendy furniture, and accents.

Scoler points out the challenges his firm and Eastern Construction Company had to overcome in achieving DesignAgency's vision. "The only way we could bring up materials and remove the debris of the old lounge from the 43rd floor down to ground level was by use of the service elevators, which required meticulous co-ordination as they were in constant use," he says.

Cohen & Master Tree and Shrub Services was engaged for the technical tree removal aspect of the project, in particular the 87 trees and shrubs on the third floor terrace. What posed specific concern were the seven mature Linden trees overhanging Richmond Street. These were removed with the utmost care and most up-to-date rigging methods to ensure the safety of the public below and all crews on-site.

The second phase of the renovation included a newly designed lobby, a refined beverage and food experience program, and major upgrades to Toronto's largest heated indoor/outdoor pool. "The hotel's porte-cochere was the most obvious example of where earlier cladding and glazing renovations deviated from the original modernist architecture," Robinson says. "So, the addition of an entrance canopy and tall span curtain wall and many other features rectified this shortcoming while creating a more welcoming

environment. The original large entrance canopy at the Queen Street entrance was replaced with a canopy and glazing similar to that added at the porte-cochere, in conjunction with the installation of a large steel screen, to make the hotel entrance more recognizable and inviting."

Feature Walters, a Walters Group company, fabricated the steel mullions of the entrances' prominent new curtain walls executed by Antamex; engineering ingenuity (the maximum dimension of the raw material available was only 3.6 metres) resulted in the mullions framing large, uninterrupted sheets of glass that disappear into the soffit. Architects-Alliance's design introduced a lightness between the solid wall at the porte-cochere, maximizing transparency and connecting the interiors to the public realm.

"The lobby also needed to be lightened up, which was achieved by DesignAgency with a white coffered ceiling with cove lighting. We extended this into the porte-cochere. Other lobby features included the installation of ribbed wood wall panels on either side of the lobby, and creating a coffee bar in the centre of the lobby as the social heart of the hotel. We also added additional washrooms adjacent to the lobby with increased accessibility," says Robinson.

Earlier renovation elements that obscured an interior courtyard and garden were removed, thus making this unique space an integral part of the lobby. "All of this was augmented by a comprehensive upgrade to life safety systems, and that meant removing walls and core drilling through the concrete

floor while keeping guest disturbance to a minimum," Scoler says.

Robinson credits Eastern and JLL for "being nimble and compensating throughout two COVID lockdowns," to which Scoler replies, "Overall the two biggest challenges were staffing and material resourcing. Planning for the project in general was done years in advance, which prohibited changes, so micromanaging everything was crucial to us staying on schedule."

As of January, finishing touches had commenced in the porte-cochere, and Sheraton Centre Toronto was already receiving glowing reviews for the revitalization of its spaces. "The owner group was extremely committed to this project, and we were all motivated to make this a success," Scoler says. "By breaking the work down into five separate projects with separate teams, building permits, and inspection processes, we were able to achieve all of our goals." **A**

LOCATION

123 Queen Street West, Toronto, Ontario

PROJECT MANAGER

JLL Canada Inc.

ARCHITECT

architects-Alliance

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER

Eastern Construction Company

STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT

Entuitive

ENERGY RETROFIT CONSULTANT

H.H. Angus & Associates Limited
Consulting Engineers

BUILDING ENVELOPE CONSULTANT

John. G. Cooke

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT

MBTW Group

TOTAL COST

Undisclosed