

# perspectives places **boston**

By JoAnn Greco



Photo by MICHAEL DISKIN/BOSTON PARK PLAZA

## HOME RUN

A rush of development for the sports and college town



Boston's proposed convention center expansion may be on hold, but the massive development in a warehouse neighborhood (newly dubbed the Innovation District) not far from the center is helping to reinvigorate a stagnant hotel scene.

According to a February report from hotel consultancy Pinnacle Advisory Group, the Boston/Cambridge lodging market has experienced six consecutive years of RevPAR growth, with few additions to supply since the most recent recession, facts that make the area one of the most sought-after in terms of investment in new projects and acquisitions.

Jason Brown, chief development officer for London-based lifestyle brand Yotel, says the company was aware of Boston's numbers when it chose to open its second U.S. location after New York (another is planned for San

Francisco), set to debut next year in the Innovation District. The city, he says, "continues to outperform the overall hotel market pretty significantly and does well in both upturns and downturns."

Meanwhile, a slew of freshenings and expansions in Boston are ensuring everybody stays on their toes.

## On the Cutting Edge

According to Brown, Boston's large education base is a perfect match for Yotel's affordable luxury and tech-centric focus (think self check-in kiosks and souped-up in-room connectivity). While the hotel and its rooms (called cabins) will have the same overall look and kit of parts developed with London-based Softroom and Rockwell Group for the New York location, Brown says its in-house design team in Boston will add touches that salute the location. "Even the building itself nods to that," he says, "with exposed brick and beam on the back façade that echoes that of the old buildings in the area now being adaptively reused, and a more typical Yotel-y sleek, white front exposure."



Photo by DOM MIGUEL

1. The Boston Park Plaza's update includes modern lobby elements such as sculptural seating and lighting.

2. The Liberty Hotel's guestrooms feature references to the former Charles Street Jail and the city, as seen in artwork above the desk.





3. The Godfrey Hotel Boston's historic elevator bank is clad in Carrara marble.

4. A seating nook in the Hotel Commonwealth's lobby features a preppy palette and eclectic artwork.



Photo by WARREN JAGGER PHOTOGRAPHY INC.

## Old is New Again

The Godfrey Hotel Boston, a 242-room adaptive reuse of two adjacent historic buildings in Downtown Crossing, works toward an “obvious separation of old and new parts,” says Ben Nicholas, senior design director at the Gettys Group, which also handled design for the brand's only other property (thus far) in Chicago. “A modern lobby of stone and steel leads to the existing historic elevator lobby clad in Carrara marble.” Guestrooms are inspired by menswear, with a custom plaid headboard and muted gray lampshades, while red accents act “as the pocket square” of the property, he adds.

New owner Sunstone Hotel Investors has just completed a top-to-bottom \$100 million transformation of Back Bay's historic Park Plaza. Parker-Torres Design of Sudbury, Massachusetts was charged with overhauling the hotel's 1,060 guestrooms and corridors, lobby, and meeting spaces, and adding a library lounge, steakhouse STRIP by Strega, and a gym by David Barton. “The property hadn't been touched in awhile and was very dated,” says principal Miriam Torres, who has worked on many projects in the area, including the Hyatt Regency Boston, the Royal Sonesta Boston, and the Fairmont Copley Plaza. “The owners asked for a streamlined, contemporary feel, which we delivered while retaining the beautiful details like millwork, ceilings, and columns.” Modern elements include conversation pieces, such as sculptural chairs and unique lighting, she says, while guestrooms are warm and neutral, with a palette of charcoal, caramel, and camel.

Many of the hottest dining spots that have opened in the city come courtesy of its new and renovated hotels. One exception is the sexy Yvonne's, a reincarnation of an 1860s supper club. The Downtown Crossing space has emerged in such meticulous detail that managing partner Chris Jamison, who helmed a team of designers and craftspeople, says the “fun part for us is when guests ‘could swear’ that some feature element used to exist” in the previous club, which was in operation for 150 years. In actuality, about the only original thing left is the handcarved mahogany bar, he

This year's crop of Innovation District newcomers (including an Aloft-Element dual-branded project) was preceded by last year's opening of the new-build Envoy, directly across the street from the rising Yotel. Designed by local firm Group One Partners—with a 153-seat restaurant, Outlook Kitchen and Table, from Scottsdale-based CMDA Design Bureau and Testani Design Troupe—the hotel's 136 rooms emphasize their harbor views while public spaces highlight original artworks crafted from the materials of older innovations, such as

telephone cords and VHS tapes.

The highly anticipated arrival of the city's second Four Seasons, not due until mid-2018, is part of a \$750 million tower by Henry Cobb of New York architecture firm Pei Cobb Freed. New York-based Bill Rooney Studio will design the hotel's common spaces and 211 rooms. “The building's design informs a lot of the rooms, in that many corner rooms are oval in shape,” Rooney says, adding that the classic interiors will feature mahogany with metal accents and patterned floors of gray and white.





5. Yvonne's wall of illuminated books adds to the moody and glamorous aesthetic that nods to the original circa-1860s supper club.

6. A rendering of the Ames Hotel's soon-to-be refreshed wood-wrapped lobby library.

says. New York-based Focus Lighting mixed refurbished and refashioned old-style fixtures with modern architectural lighting elements to reinforce the opulence and sophistication that the owners envisioned.

### Iconic Structures

This spring, the Liberty Hotel, part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts' Luxury Collection, unveiled an \$11 million update by Bill Rooney Studio to its 298 distinctive guestrooms, which incorporates elements of the building's former identity as the Charles Street Jail. "There were subtle references to the prison before in the drapery and bedding," Rooney says, "but our mandate was to really infuse the rooms with those cues, since any stigma associated with the building's former use has been erased by its tremendous success." Playing with ideas of "doing time," the rooms feature key and clock motifs, while tweed and herringbone patterns speak to bespoke Boston proper. (Rooney also oversaw the \$20 million guestroom upgrade at the Charles Hotel, which he outfitted with Shaker-style furniture and board and batten paneled walls.)

Built in 1893 as headquarters for an agricultural tool company, the landmark Ames



Hotel (originally part of Morgans Hotel Group and designed by Rockwell Group) is considered Boston's first skyscraper. New owners Gencom, in partnership with management company Gemstone Hotels & Resorts, turned to Glen & Co Architecture of New York to update its 114 rooms and public spaces. "We wanted to deliver more of that sense of history," says president and owner Glen Coben. "We've approached that through the sensibility of 'made in America' and once in awhile a direct reference to, say, shovels." Most of the heavy lifting of this multimillion-dollar redo was reserved for the lobby and library, with guestrooms receiving a freshening that "brings them up to standard" for Hilton's Curio Collection.

### Local Nods

Although located outside of downtown, Hotel Commonwealth is perfectly positioned adjacent to iconic Fenway Park and Boston University. Its recent \$55 million renovation and expansion adds 96 rooms and 6,000 square feet of meeting and event space, and offers design touches for both the collegiate set and baseball fans. "I went to school in Boston and I felt that the hotel didn't really reflect the city's dominant cultural themes," says David Ashen, principal of Long Island City, New York's dash design, who worked with local architects Group One on uniting the new space with the existing hotel. "There was no real sense of place, so we tried to echo the college town aspect without resorting to kitsch. A playfully preppy palette of houndstooth and plaid and Chanel-like patterns are a bit more grown up and they're made fresh by altering scale and layering texture." As far as the iconic ballpark goes, one very special suite facing the stadium is filled with valuable Red Sox memorabilia.

Photo by RYAN FISCHER

Courtesy of GLEN & CO ARCHITECTURE

Across the water from the Innovation District, downtown's Boston Harbor Hotel has completed renovations of its 230 guestrooms, with design firm Wimberly Interiors drawing inspiration from its spectacular vistas. "This has always been a very traditional hotel," says senior designer Erin Nichols, "so we wanted to maintain the elegance that guests have come to expect." Taking cues from yacht design, the team replaced outdated casegoods with pieces made of rich wood and polished nickel accents, upgraded about half of the bathrooms with Calacatta marble, and brightened the palette with saturated blue tones. This follows last year's update to the hotel's fine dining spot, Meritage, with interiors by Atlanta-based the Johnson Studio at Cooper Carry. **hd**