

The Beverly Hills Hotel installs Tihany-designed carpet in lobby

By NICOLE CARLINO

BEVERLY HILLS—In celebration of its 100th anniversary, the Beverly Hills Hotel, which is owned by The Dorchester Collection, has been in the process of a phased restoration project, which will include its guestrooms, pool area and Polo Lounge by the time it's finished in 2015. The first phase of the redo, the hotel's lobby, has already been completed; it entailed new lighting, carpets and a banana leaf center medallion crafted of limestone. With regard to the overall project, the flooring of the lobby is particularly important. "The first thing that guests see when they walk into the lobby is the carpet and the stone medallion," said Howard Clarke, project manager for The Beverly Hills Hotel. "This is their first impression of the hotel, so it has to look right. It's very important."

Clarke added that the last time the lobby was redone was in the 1990s, so it had begun to feel "a little outdated. The main thing was to update the lobby, but without losing that Hollywood feel that people have come to expect. It's contemporary, more modern, but still retains that glamour the hotel's been famous for."

Originally, the hotel planned to put stone floor down in the lobby. "There were some structural and construction issues with that," Clarke explained, so the plans changed to carpeting, the stone medallion its centerpiece. However, Clarke added that there were a few bonuses to opting for carpet. "It has a more residential feel, and people tend to like that from our hotel." In addition, the point of the restoration project wasn't to completely change everything, but to retain the history of the hotel while modernizing it a bit. "The lobby has had carpeting for a long time; that's what people expect to see."

The carpet chosen was a custom-made, custom-designed, hand-tufted, 100% New Zealand wool carpet with a three-dimensional, geometric design. "It's very high end," Clarke said, adding that price wasn't necessarily a factor in the decision-making process. "Price is important because we have a certain budget, but the carpet we put in was expensive, as was the stone flooring, so I don't think price was an overriding factor. Really, it's the look we were going for. You get what you pay for. That's an old adage that's absolutely correct. Very often, the more expensive things last longer and, obviously, are of better quality."

The design of the flooring came from Tihany Designs. "We did a design competition between a number of firms. Tihany Designs was the company that got the feel of the hotel better than the other competitors," Clarke explained. New Jersey-based Innovative Carpets provided the carpet to the hotel. "They are a well-known carpet company. We've dealt with them before, and they deliver high-end, quality carpets that fit."

In fact, getting the more-than 10,000-sq.-ft. carpet to

fit was a huge consideration. "The lobby is basically a big circle with lots of round walls, which is obviously difficult to do for carpets. Plus, with the big, central stone medallion, the carpet had to go around that as well. There was a lot of design input and a lot of work done to make sure that we got the carpet correct in all of the locations." This included carpeting on staircases and outside of the lobby. Noted Clarke, "It was

more than just a normal carpet job."

Clarke attributes the project's success to the collaborative effort between the hotel, Tihany Designs, Innovative Carpets and the contractor, Turner Construction Company. "We had to go back and forth with Innovative to look at the drawings and make sure we got the right things, like the right selection of colors and materials, before they actually started the production. That took some time. Communication is vital in this because Innovative is not a local company." In addition, Turner Construction spent a good deal of time preplanning to make sure everything went smoothly. "A lot of time was spent organizing beforehand."

The Beverly Hills Hotel did not shut down the lobby to complete the restoration project. "We spent a lot of time doing phasing plans so the lobby was split into a number of different areas," Clarke explained. "We had custom-made walls that we moved around the lobby so the contractor could work in a certain area behind the walls. The rest of the lobby was open to people. We would move the walls to the next section and open as we went. It was totally phased and the lobby was open at all times." Clarke noted that there were a few disturbances—"you can't build a whole new lobby without disturbing a few people"—but that

there were few customer complaints.

In fact, guests loved being a part of the process. "We actually had a lot of people very appreciative of the fact that we spent a lot of time communicating what was happening on a daily basis. We had boards with information on them so people would see what the lobby would look like," said Clarke. "Communication was vital. Many of our customers are repeat guests; a lot of our guests literally come every day for lunch. They were very much involved in the process because they were seeing it on a daily basis."

Though the entire restoration is a long-term project, the majority of the carpeting in the main lobby was done in one night. "We started at 10 p.m. and were still going at 8 a.m. We were all there surviving on coffee and donuts," Clarke said with a chuckle. "The stairs were another phase, so we did all of the carpet in three-to-four nights, but the main carpet of the lobby was done over one night."

The process wasn't without some complications. "It was quite strange. People were literally walking over the carpet as it was being laid because we couldn't close the lobby," Clarke said. "Everyone was in the spirit of it and understood why we were doing it. It turned out well in the end."

"Overwhelmingly, people like what was done," Clarke continued. "People who had been coming to the hotel for 40, 50, 60 years didn't particularly want to see it change, [but] 90% of people think that it's an improvement, that it's a more modern feel and it's more in keeping with the hotel. There are a lot of positive comments." **HB**



The communication between the hotel and the contractor was "seamless," according to the project manager, adding that the correct placement of the center medallion was necessary in installing the new carpet.



The circular design of the lobby was a bit challenging when laying the carpet; it was a highly collaborative effort.