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Matt Johnson - How does a construction team remain invisible while renovating an occupied hotel?

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Hotel renovation projects are known to be challenging, with construction managers working on tight schedules in occupied buildings. Add a tight downtown Boston job site to the mix, and the project takes on a whole new level of difficulty - one that Columbia Construction Co. is adept at overcoming.

Columbia Construction has been renovating major hotels in the Boston area for over 20 years. We understand it takes more than good construction knowledge and sound management skills to complete a successful project. Hotel renovation projects require a never-ending amount of flexibility, patience and foresight to pull all the pieces together. Your team needs to be immersed in a fully operational and occupied facility. Our management team and subcontractor workforce have to be willing and able to become an extension of the hotel staff at all times. It's not enough to come into the building and do our work with a 'plans & specs' mentality. The responsibility of our hotel renovation team runs far beyond pleasing the owners, architects and designers. It extends to the hotel managers, staff, and perhaps - most importantly - to the hotel's customers.

Columbia Construction has completed three major renovation projects in downtown Boston recently totaling over 1,000 guestrooms. In April, we completed an 803-room renovation at the Westin Copley Place Hotel, a brand of Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide. This was Columbia's second major renovation project at the Westin Copley. We served as construction manager for their last 800 room renovation back in 2000/01.

The project team completed this latest multi-phased, 29-floor project in just 23 weeks. The owner is LaSalle Hotel Properties; owner's rep. was Ajax Consulting Services, LLC, and the interior architectural design firm was Vivian-Nichol's Associates.

"Renovating 29 floors in 23 weeks, in one of the busiest convention hotels in Boston, is no small feat. Columbia Construction did a phenomenal job for the Westin," said Michael Jorgensen, general manager. "They are to be commended for working so closely with the Hotel in completing this complex, multi-phased project on time. Their ability to remain flexible throughout this project allowed us to maintain the highest level of customer service the Westin Copley is known for."

Also a brand of Starwood, Columbia recently completed the award-winning 120 room renovation for the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel and Conference Center. Our scope also included renovations to the lobby, elevator bays, public washrooms, and life safety upgrades. The owner for this project is Hobbs Brook Management, LLC, and the architect was Allegro Interior Architecture.

Starwood recently bestowed the owner of the Four Points by Sheraton with a Renovation of the Year Award. They were recognized for their commitment to excellence and leadership; and for delivering a renovation within the stringent standards and detail to quality for which they are known. Particularly impressive were the high guest satisfaction scores that the hotel maintained during the

renovation.

Columbia also completed a multi-phased 35,000 s/f project for the Hyatt Regency Boston, located in the Theatre District. It included renovations to the hotel's 3rd floor lobby level; the hotel's restaurant Avenue One; four large meeting rooms; several prefunction/circulation; several ballrooms; and the hotel's Conference Center. The owner is Hyatt Corp. and the architect was Stonehill Taylor Architects and Planners.

An interesting aspect of hotel construction is the coordination and installation of intricate and custom pieces. During the Hyatt Regency project, Columbia worked closely with an artist on the installation of custom wall panels in the hotel's Grand Ballroom.

During a conversation with the artist, Carla Weisberg, she shared that "usually when a contractor hears the word 'custom' they immediately think installing these panels will result in a lot of mistakes. Matt, fortunately, is very visual and it's been great working with him. There was good communication between Columbia Construction and my studio - it was a smooth process as a result."

Completed in April 2009, Columbia renovated the Millennium Bostonian Hotel's 200 guestrooms and the hotel's North 26 Restaurant & Bar. Construction also included a new lobby, a basement kitchen and a new courtyard. The owner is Millennium Hotels and Resorts, and the architectural team included Jinnie Kim Design (lobby and guestrooms); William Mitropoulos Architects (lobby), and CCS Architecture (restaurant/kitchen).

A main challenge for this project was the redesign and construction of the exterior façade, including the entrance to the lobby, restaurant storefront, and the circular courtyard entrance. Since the hotel is located across from historic Faneuil Hall, the exterior redesign had to meet the rigorous review and approval process of Boston's Historic Districts Commission.

What was unique was that, in addition to rooms, we were also taking the entry to the building, at the street-elevation, and the entire lobby and completely rehabbing it. It was a complete gut renovation down to the studs while maintaining temporary entrances, so from a coordination standpoint, it was very challenging.

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