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Mandarin Oriental Boston, a new luxury hotel and residence, takes steps to reduce its ecological impact

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As industries become more discerning about the effect their behavior has on the ecology of the earth, the travel industry has needed to become especially responsive.

"It's now critical to for us to be environmentally conscious," said Susanne Hatje, general manager of Mandarin Oriental, Boston's newest luxury property, slated to open in this year. "High-end travel managers, responsible for booking hundreds of guest nights a year, now make their choices of hotels based on whether or not the hotel has taken steps to reduce its ecological impact."

Luckily, Mandarin Oriental, Boston, which broke ground in 2005, is one of those properties.

Comprising a 148-key luxury hotel, 50 custom condominiums, 25 luxury apartments, the 16,000 s/f Spa at Mandarin Oriental, and luxury retail, Mandarin Oriental was developed by CWB Boylston, a partnership between Julian Cohen, Steven Weiner, and Robin Brown. The building, Brown said, "was built for service," but was also built with great consideration for making it as low-impact, energy-efficient, and sustainable as possible.

"This is not a building where we simply installed energy efficient light bulbs and called ourselves green," said Brown. "It's a building created from ecologically sound design principles - we started thinking about efficiency and conservation at the bones of the building, and didn't stop until we designed the outdoor lighting."

Built for sustainability, stability and flexibility, the infrastructure of the building was designed to ensure easy modification in the future, and contractors made substantial use of rapidly renewable materials such as bamboo flooring and Forest Stewardship Council certified wood for subflooring as well as for protection during the construction process.

"Like the rest of Back Bay, Mandarin Oriental, Boston was designed and built for the ages," said Alfred Wojciechowski, principal at CBT Architects. "Our goal was to create sustainable, ecologically conscious architecture that will still be in use 100 years from now."

Created to be as energy-efficient as physically possible, Mandarin Oriental's "envelope," guards against the energy-draining intrusion of temperature and moisture and is built to museum-quality standards - the materials used to create Mandarin Oriental, Boston's roof are the same materials used at the U.S. National Gallery. To further conserve energy, when unoccupied, hotel guest rooms, condominiums, and apartments automatically reset to a location-specific optimum holding temperature - far more efficient than setting an arbitrary temperature for the entire building. And of course, energy-efficient light bulbs and motion-controlled lighting will be in use in all appropriate areas.

Taking full advantage of the abundant light and space atop the building, a landscaped garden off of the Newbury Arcade in the rear of the building serves as an active green roof to the parking garage

that Mandarin Oriental, Boston shares with the Prudential Center. And when the sun sets, low-level, energy-efficient lights on terraces reduce light pollution by directing light down instead of up, creating a dramatic effect on the building; not on the atmosphere.

Concern for the environment extends from the design of the building through to its operations. Contracts are in negotiation for recycling of paper, glass and plastic, and a "trash minder," which utilizes a dial-up modem to contact the hauler when the compactor indicates that the container is 75% full, will control the process. Trash will be picked up only as needed, not on a recurring basis, reducing the fuel wasted by unnecessary trips.

"To work on a high profile project like this with a team committed to efficiency and ecology has been a pleasure," said Ralph DeVito, principal at RDK Engineers, the firm responsible for designing the Mandarin Oriental's energy-conscious building systems. "It's a building that the entire region can be proud of."

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