

IN FLIGHT

G R E A T L A K E S **BY**
DESIGN

Celebrate
the ride

A small-displacement motorcycle company in Indiana is inspired by traditions in classical architecture and timeless, tried-and-true design.

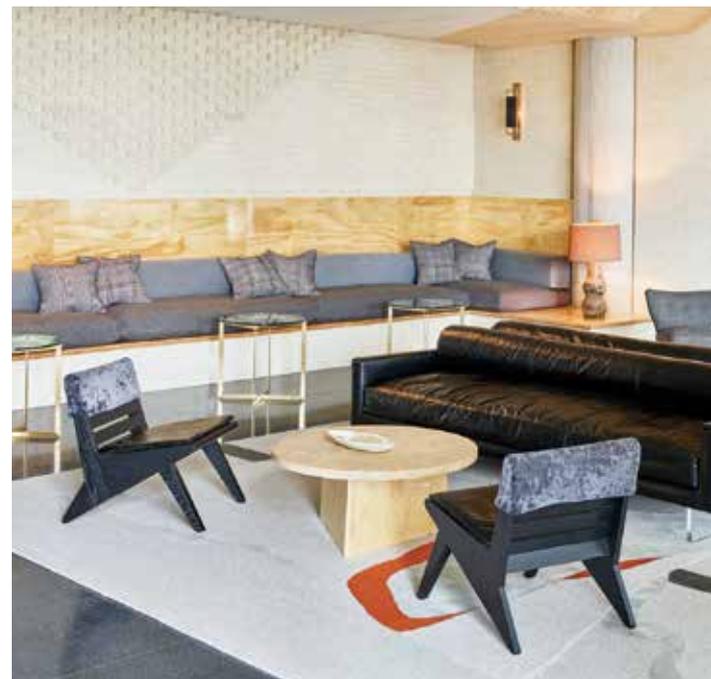
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JANUS

GREAT LAKES **BY**
DESIGN
VOLUME 2, ISSUE 2
FORM



TOP: MIKE SCHWARTZ; BOTOM, RIGHT: TOM HARRIS;
LEFT: SPENCER LOWELL



The Bauhaus spirit

BY R.J. WEICK

“Our role and obligation to our clients is to solve functional challenges in an efficient way,” said Don Copper, principal at GREC Architects. “We like to see design as taking that charge to another level; of using those solutions to functional requirements in ways that create meaningful experiences for the people who live there, work there, or are within the city who will experience it just by living in the city.”

When the Chicago-based architecture and design firm was brought on board for developer Sterling Bay Companies’ proposed new hotel in the Fulton Market Historic District in Chicago, the team was tasked with not only integrating the design with the surrounding neighborhood context, but also to develop a concept re-envisioning the traditional hotel model—while remaining authentic to its property site—for long-time client Ace Hotel Group.

Located at 311 N. Morgan St., the Ace Hotel Chicago is nestled within a designated landmark district regarded for its wholesale market, meatpacking, loft manufacturing, and warehousing industries that contributed to the city’s economic development. While many of the buildings historically reflected a function-driven design aesthetic prioritizing utilitarian use over decoration, typologically speaking; there are notes of architectural detailing

from movements such as Romanesque Revival, Chicago School, Tudor Revival, and Art Deco among the facades.

“It was our priority to find a way to harmonize with the scale and material palette of the neighborhood, yet at the same time we wanted to create a building that was notable and was unique. We didn’t want it to look like we were trying to recreate a 100-year-old warehouse, so that is when the early-modern-Bauhaus concept became part of the project,” Copper said.

“It was a way to acknowledge the modern architectural legacy of those early modern movements in Chicago and how that changed the face of the city—and do it in a way that would be commensurate with the scale and the materials of the neighborhood,” Copper added.

When Laszlo Moholy-Nagy began The New Bauhaus in Chicago in 1937, he effectively established the modernist philosophy and approach as an enduring architectural and design legacy in the city. It is a concept and approach that sought to bridge the gap between fine arts and creativity with manufacturing in a modern industrial age.

“We were very inspired by the Bauhaus philosophy of merging art and design and industry together. All of our projects are informed by our interest in the arts, including performing arts, music, and vi-





sual arts,” Copper said. “We try to find inspiration in things outside of architecture to inform the work we do and the Bauhaus is obviously a very rich source of inspiration in terms of multidisciplinary arts, their playful, humorous approach to design and their priority of the value of space and its impact on people.”

The project, which reunited GREC Architects, Ace Hotel Group, and Los Angeles-based Commune Design—a collaborative team that renovated the landmarked United Artists theater and tower into the 146,000-square-foot Ace Hotel Los Angeles—comprised transforming the property into the nearly 140,000-square-foot hotel complete with 159 guestrooms and five event venues inspired by the Bauhaus philosophy. While most of the site’s existing structures were demolished for the project, the vacant building on the south end of the property was determined to be a contributing façade to the landmarked district and was integrated into the final project, according to Copper.

“It turned out to be a real strong aspect of the project,” Copper said. “We preserved the façade at the south end of the site and then designed that portion of the building to mesh together with the façade, including two new stories behind it.”

While the material palette paid homage



to the Bauhaus philosophy, Copper noted the most important aspect of its influence was in how the exterior and interior spaces were articulated for guest-use. The front terrace colonnade at the entry court along Morgan Street allows for an activation of the street-level space into a lively environment for City Mouse Chicago; and the fifth-floor, landscaped terrace offering a view of the downtown skyline with sculptural play elements, an amphitheater stair structure, and a portion dedicated for food-producing through an alliance with an urban farm group known as The Roof Crop.

The spatial planning and intentional placement of public and event spaces throughout the building was in part informed by the modular guest room unit as well as an attempt to engage as much of the space as possible. From the exterior, The Ace Hotel Chicago blends the historic brick on the south end with the black masonry in the tall-one story portion and the cream-colored brick of the seven-story section with crisp lines, glass, and steel. Its interior, however, is a seamless integration of all three building volumes with its long-running ground level and connecting hallways on the upper guest

room floors and rooftop terrace.

“It is all about creating this sort of spatial experience with a little bit of an early modern influence to it,” Copper said. “The guest rooms are basically a double-loaded corridor running north-to-south. We also wanted to disperse the public spaces—the event, food, and beverage spaces—throughout the building so you start to activate all parts of the building rather than putting everything on one floor or on one end of the building.”

From the Stumptown Coffee Roasters café, the hotel lobby and gathering space, City Mouse Chicago restaurant and bar, and the entrance—the skylight-windowed ballroom set behind the dining area, the ground level flows from north-to-south through a series of distinctive spaces. Rotating wall panels, furnishings, fluctuating ceiling heights, and greenery bring the public space’s proportions down to an almost intimate scale.

On the upper floors, the guest units range from the 290-square-foot small room and approximately 300-square-foot medium skyline, to the 545-square-foot-to-700-square-foot spacious loft and nearly 864-square-foot Ace suite with a king-size

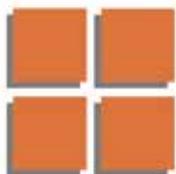
bed, private kitchenette, private terrace, turntable, and acoustic Martin Guitar.

Located on the fifth floor in the seven-story portion, additional event spaces known as Form and Function can be found with doors opening out onto the rooftop terrace in the middle portion; and the Waydown bar can be found on the seventh floor with windows running the width of the building and opening out onto decks on both the east and west side.

“It is a completely different experience than being on the first floor, so it allows for multiple experiences and different environments,” Copper said.

Copper also noted the team collaborated very closely with Commune Design—a studio focused on the holistic approach and collaborative mindset—to ensure the building didn’t appear as if it was architecturally designed as one style or philosophy, while the interior reflected a different atmosphere.

“I don’t think you see the boundary between the architecture and the interior design. I think this project was really successful at blurring the line,” Copper said. “I think [Commune] did a really beautiful job of taking the early modern concept and



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moving it forward to some unexpected places. It is very playful, very arts-oriented, and employed some unexpected materials like the stained plywood and the recycled paper, fiber board used throughout.”

When given the Bauhaus concept to work with, Copper noted the interior design team emphasized the performance art aspect, the costumes, and the social gatherings prevalent in the environment.

“Commune took a really fantastic approach. I thought it was a great way to start, because they weren’t starting with particular materials or light fixtures or colors; they were starting with the spirit of what that philosophy was and then they manifested it into their design,” Copper said. “It was rewarding to be a part of that collaborative process.”

From the custom metal lights in the guest rooms, the sunburst fixtures in the lobby, artwork found behind the reception desk, and the graphics on the partition walls in the first-floor ballroom, to the unique furnishings, recycled denim in the ceiling of the Waydown bar, and modern-inspired aesthetic, there is a dedication to the craft and fine arts woven throughout the hotel.

“I think it is a great building and a great environment. Ace is unlike other hotel groups we have worked with in the sense that they don’t have a brand standard—they want each property to be its own unique property. It is kind of a beautiful thing from a design point of view, because it gives you new challenges for each project and Ace pushes everybody to be their most creative and resourceful,” Copper said.

“They really prefer it when you come up with design solutions that surprise them, because I think they figure it is probably going to surprise their guests and their customers as well. That is a great creative environment to work within and I think our collaboration with Commune was the manifestation of that process,” Copper added.

The project team of GREC Architects, Ace Hotel Group, Commune Design, and Sterling Bay Companies were also joined by other engineers and consultants, such as: WMA Consulting Engineers, Charter Sills Architectural Lighting Design, Spaceco, Power Construction Company, Site Design Group, Forefront Engineering, and Integral Consulting.

As a firm, GREC Architects has devel-

oped a diverse portfolio of award-winning projects since its establishment in 1989. The architecture and design team has worked in markets such as hospitality, industrial, educational, commercial, and mid- to high-rise residential markets; and in the last 15-to-20 years has focused on designing and creating meaningful environments in developer-driven projects. Although its primary focus is in the greater Chicago area, GREC Architects has completed projects in Portland, Oregon; Los Angeles, California; Nashville, Tennessee; Detroit, Michigan; Boston, Massachusetts; District of Columbia; and internationally on master planning for large public spaces, parks, and buildings when it had an office in Abu Dhabi for five years.

“Building any building is a challenge, because it is such a complex process. The reward in the process of building a building is finding a way to collaborate with the people you are working with to meet those challenges and actually come out with something even better,” Copper said.

“We see design as driven by creating meaningful experiences for people,” Copper added.