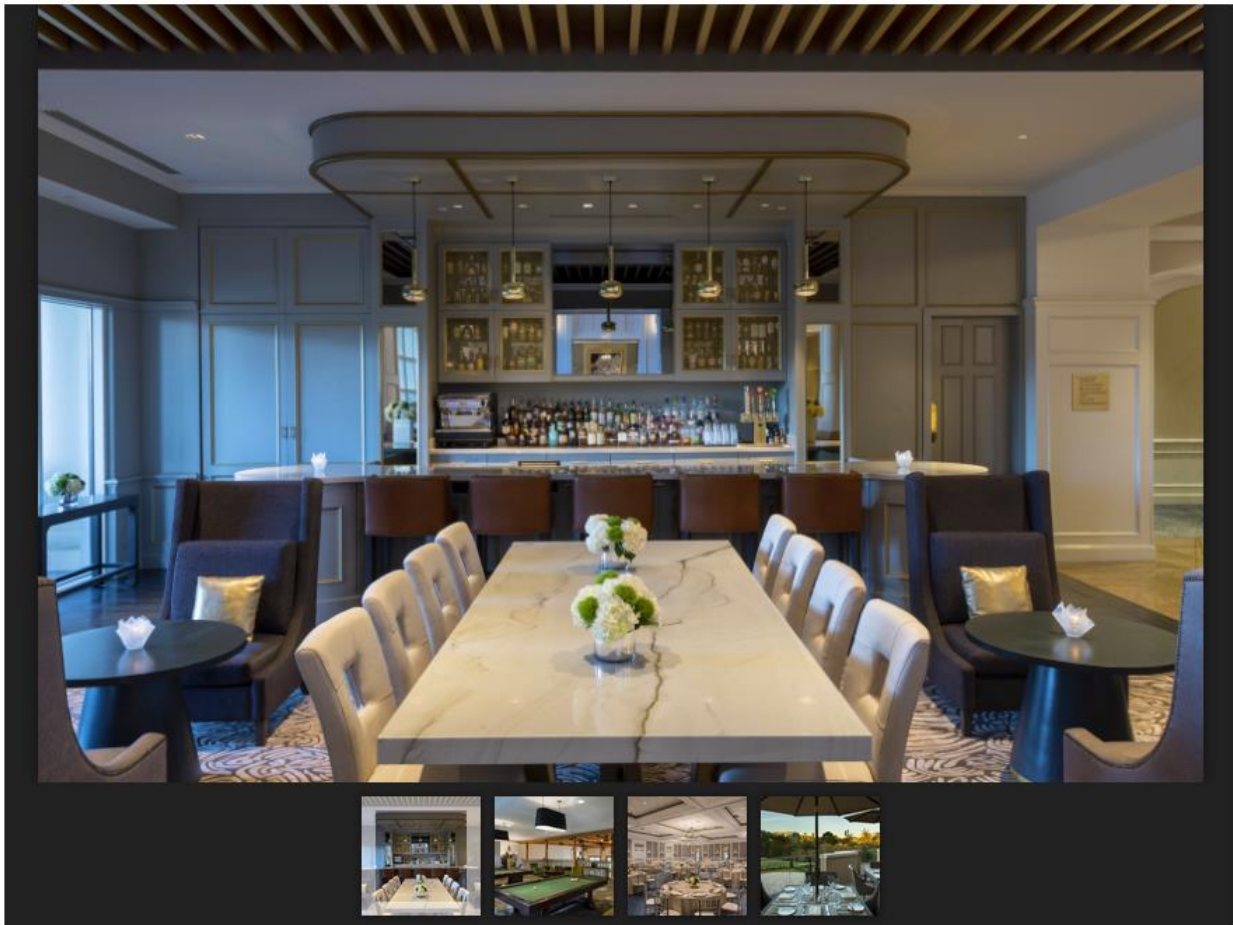


Renovations

North Carolina's Ballantyne celebrates history with renovation

by Jena Tesse Fox | Mar 15, 2019 10:21am



Just as it turned 18 years old in the autumn, the Ballantyne, a Luxury Collection Hotel in Charlotte, N.C., **emerged from a renovation** with a grown-up take on the area's history. Updating the property's softgoods, casegoods and furniture—and adding just a few structural touches—the new look creates a “modern sense of luxury without losing a sense of place,” said Javier Rosenberg, president of Northwood Hospitality, which owns and manages the Ballantyne.

A particular focus for the renovation, Rosenberg said, was making sure that the property's look reflected North Carolina's history and heritage. Working with design firm Blur Workshop, the hotel team looked at some things that make North Carolina distinctive.

The area's Scottish heritage was a big factor for the new design—"Ballantyne is a very Scottish name," he noted—and so the team selected tartan schemes in the carpeting. The hotel bar is named The Ryal after a historic Scottish coin, and has gold accents to celebrate not only the currency but North Carolina's place in history as the first state where gold was found, said Rosenberg.

In a nod to the state's history of flight, some carpets have feathered designs, celebrating the Wright Brothers' accomplishments at the seaside town of Kitty Hawk. Perhaps most notably, the land itself was a former hunting lodge, and one wing maintains that structural style. "The design was to bring forward a contemporary take on an old hunting lodge," Rosenberg said. The property also got a high-tech upgrade with radio frequency identification locks for mobile keys, digital signage and enhanced Wi-Fi.

The renovation itself only took four months, but the hotel team was planning the project for a year beforehand. "We obviously started with great bones," Rosenberg said, "[so] we knew there wouldn't be [much] structural work." The only walls that needed to be knocked down were around a formerly unused terrace that was modified into a "centerpoint" of the building with views of the golf course, and the addition of The Ryal bar as a social hub.

While Rosenberg did not share the cost of the renovation, he did say that it was a "multimillion" dollar project. "We were very particular that we crossed all T's and dotted all I's, and we were able to come in within our budget."

When planning a renovation, it is important to focus on the long-term value creation for the asset, Rosenberg said. "In this case, the [idea] was making sure we took the right scope that positions the hotel for success in the future. We did all the work we needed to do and we didn't cut corners."

Overcoming Challenges

With any project, there are both things you can plan for and unpleasant surprises, and everyone—from the hotel team to the designers and construction workers—must be ready for the unexpected even as they take pains to prepare for every contingency.

The biggest challenge the team faced was keeping the hotel in operation during the renovation, Rosenberg said. “It requires a lot of planning and patience, working with your team members to make sure everyone is aligned,” he said. Fortunately, it was a challenge the team was ready to take on. Construction work was scheduled to “minimize and mitigate” the impact on guests, using buffer floors between construction areas and where guests would be, and relocating the check-in to a quieter part of the property. Once the hotel team knew when the renovation would begin—and how long it was expected to last—they were able to close off the event spaces and relocate any scheduled meetings to other spaces. “When you plan, you can execute without impacting the guest experience,” Rosenberg said, noting that guest feedback remained positive throughout the process.

The other challenge was less expected, and tested the team’s ability to handle a crisis. Toward the end of the project, the whole North Carolina coastline was affected by Hurricane Florence, something they had not anticipated. “Hurricanes are not common here,” Rosenberg said. “Fortunately, we have experience because we do have resorts in Florida and we go through planning.” Working with team members from Northwood’s resorts, the team created an action plan to protect the hotel from the storm, but the renovation meant that they had to take extra steps to safeguard the construction equipment and furniture that had been moved to accommodate the work.

Any equipment that had been left outside had to be cleared away and disassembled, Rosenberg said, and the furniture was placed in containers and relocated to a warehouse. Following protocols from properties that have dealt with hurricanes before, the team made sure the hotel had backup power and additional food in storage, since deliveries would be affected. The hotel continued to operate, and the wind and rain did not hurt the property or severely affect the renovation. “You still have to prepare,” he said, citing the popular mantra of “proper prior planning prevents poor performance.” By being diligent and not taking unnecessary risks, the storm wound up being a “curveball” for the project, and the hotel did not suffer any losses.

Photo credit: The Ballantyne, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Charlotte