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# MIXED MEDIA

WRITTEN BY | KJ FIELDS

Contemporary Art  
and Art Deco Converge  
in an Innovative Hotel





21c Museum Hotels' Founder Steve Wilson shares his vision in this short video.

**A**rt Deco was a highly progressive design movement in its day, but the architects of Durham, N.C.'s 1937 Hill Building could scarcely imagine the vanguard displays that now inhabit the structure. Bringing new vibrancy to an underserved area of downtown, the 134,025-square-foot 21c Museum Hotel in Durham combines the panache of Art Deco elements with eye-catching contemporary art.

The owners of 21c Museum Hotels have a passion for integrating contemporary art into daily life, and their unique programmatic approach turned the Hill Building, formerly the Home Savings and Trust Company, into a hotel activated by public gallery spaces. The building was a Durham landmark because of its 17-story stepped architecture and the fact that it was designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon—the architects of New York's Empire State Building. When the New York-based design team at Deborah

Berke Partners, led by Principal Terrence Schroeder, first envisioned the project's adaptive reuse, they instantly saw the symmetry between the spirit of Art Deco and 21c's mission. "The Art Deco style was bold and it celebrated the 20th century," Schroeder affirms. "21c celebrates the 21st century with vivid, often provocative, works that encourage people to explore contemporary art."

### Evoking an Era

Intact Art Deco finishes lend

sophistication to 21c Museum Hotel Durham. For example, the elevator lobby is clad in green marble with terrazzo floors and a decorative aluminum leaf plaster ceiling. "The aluminum leaf is a bright metallic counterpoint to the green marble," Schroeder says. "A lot of our design work was to highlight the character of the Art Deco items we found and stitch together a holistic experience with contrasting spaces for art."

Designers located original drawings that detailed windows, radiator



INTACT ART DECO FINISHES LEND SOPHISTICATION TO 21c MUSEUM HOTEL DURHAM. FOR EXAMPLE, THE DOUBLE-HUNG STEEL SASH WINDOWS REMAIN, PRESERVING THE BUILDING'S CHARACTER AND GARNERING HISTORIC TAX CREDITS.



## RETROFIT TEAM

### ARCHITECT AND INTERIOR DESIGNER

// Deborah Berke Partners, New York,  
www.dberke.com

- Deborah Berke, FAIA, partner
- Stephen Brockman, senior principal
- Terrence Schroeder, principal
- Stephen Lam, project manager
- Virginia Gray, designer

### ARCHITECT OF RECORD //

Perfido, Weiskopf, Wagstaff + Goettel  
Architects, Pittsburgh,  
www.pwvwgarch.com

MEP ENGINEER // KLH Engineers, Fort  
Thomas, Ky., www.klhengrs.com

ENGINEER // Stewart Inc.,  
Raleigh, N.C., stewartinc.com

CIVIL CONSULTANT // Coulter Jewell  
Thames, Durham, N.C., cjtpa.com

LIGHTING CONSULTANT //  
IlluminationWorks, London,  
www.illuminationworks.com

ACOUSTICAL CONSULTANT // Babich  
Acoustics, Pittsburgh, (412) 228-0917

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER // Skanska,  
Durham, www.usa.skanska.com

STRUCTURAL SYSTEM RENOVATION //  
Phillips Iron Works, Raleigh,  
www.phillipsiw.com

RESTORATION OF EXISTING LIMESTONE  
AND POLISHED GRANITE CLADDING  
// Baker Restoration, Raleigh,  
bakerroofing.com

ROOFING CONTRACTOR // Baker  
Roofing, Raleigh, bakerroofing.com

THE OWNERS OF 21C MUSEUM HOTELS HAVE A PASSION FOR INTEGRATING CONTEMPORARY ART INTO DAILY LIFE, AND THEIR UNIQUE PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH TURNED THE HILL BUILDING ... INTO A HOTEL ACTIVATED BY PUBLIC GALLERY SPACES.

covers, wood paneling and decorative work throughout the building. Beautiful terrazzo flooring in different colors and patterns still remained (sometimes only in fragments) on 15 of the building's 17 floors. The top two stories are not served by the elevator; they housed mechanical equipment and unoccupied space, which they continue to do today.

The upper floors were formerly offices that divided nicely into the hotel's 125 guestrooms. Few of the original Art Deco touches survived in these areas other than small portions of flooring and aluminum metal grillwork covering the openings of the in-wall radiators. "We retained and refurbished the decorative grillwork and refurbished the terrazzo flooring," Schroeder says. In guest rooms, the designers kept the floors exposed and added area rugs. Throughout the building, they selected color palettes that either accentuate the floor colors or provide warm contrasts. "We used metallic tones like silver and copper to add hints of glamour while keeping the atmosphere very modern," Schroeder notes.

## Programmatic Collage

Incorporating the hotel's lobby, restaurant

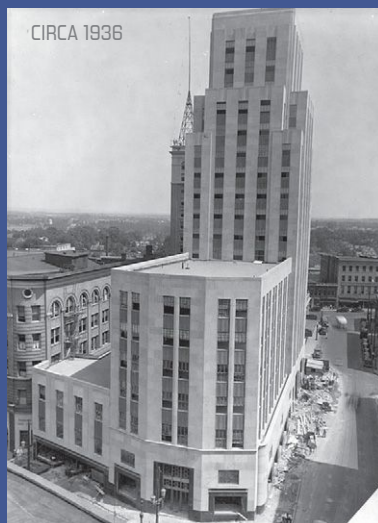
and ballroom all on the ground floor became impossible because of limited space. Schroeder and the team examined a number of design scenarios and decided to move the lobby to the second floor, which had been open office space. The front entrance leads to the marble elevator lobby where guests rise to the second floor to check in. Around the corner from the elevators, a historic staircase offers guests another intriguing access route. "21c commissioned a video art installation of Western sunsets along the staircase," Schroeder recalls. "The color changes on the screens are very dynamic and the stairwell is lined with mirrors to magnify the effect."

The Hill Building is on the National Register of Historic Places. The adaptive reuse project received tax credits from the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, and federal historic preservation tax incentives from the National Park Service, Washington, D.C. One tax-credit stipulation was that the team had to maintain the original double-height volume of the ground floor's former 4,450-square-foot department store, which also had a mezzanine. The team designed this space, just south of the main entry, into a restaurant.



THE HISTORIC BANK VAULT WITH ITS SAFETY DEPOSIT BOXES NOW ENCASES ART AND LOUNGE SEATING THAT ENTICES PEOPLE TO LINGER.





Constructed for the Home Savings and Trust Company, the Hill Building was a Durham landmark because of its 17-story stepped architecture and the fact that it was designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon—the architects of New York's Empire State Building.

## MATERIALS

**STEEL AND GLASS HOTEL ENTRY CANOPY** // Acurlite System, [acurlite.com](http://acurlite.com)

**SURE-WHITE EDPM MEMBRANE** // Carlisle Syntec Systems, [www.carlisesyntec.com](http://www.carlisesyntec.com)

**STOREFRONT AND GUEST ROOM TERRACE DOORS** // Kawneer, [www.kawneer.com](http://www.kawneer.com)

**SWITCHABLE GLASS IN PUBLIC RESTROOM** // Paragon Architectural Products, [glassengineer.com](http://glassengineer.com)

**VANISHING TV (21c suite and restaurant lounge)** // Seura, [www.seura.com](http://www.seura.com)

**NEW DOORS, HOLLOW METAL DOOR FRAMES AND DOOR HARDWARE** // Engineering Specialties, (704) 933-9496

**FIRE-RATED CURTAINWALL AND DOOR** // Alufam, [www.alufam-usa.com](http://www.alufam-usa.com)

**CUSTOM INVISIBLE MILLWORK DOORS (ballroom, art vitrine and coat closet), CABINETWORK AND CUSTOM WOODWORK** // Cleora Sterling Corp., [www.csterling.com](http://www.csterling.com)

**HOTEL ELECTRONIC LOCKS** // VingCard Elsafe, [www.assaabloyhospitality.com](http://www.assaabloyhospitality.com)

**ACOUSTICAL CEILINGS** // Feller NA, [www.fellert.com](http://www.fellert.com)

**PAINT** // Sherwin-Williams (throughout), [www.sherwin-williams.com](http://www.sherwin-williams.com), and Scuffmaster ScrubTough (typical guest corridor), [scuffmaster.com/scrub-tough](http://scuffmaster.com/scrub-tough)

**ZINC (RESTAURANT AND BAR)** // HandCrafted Metal, [www.handcraftedmetal.com](http://www.handcraftedmetal.com)

**WALLCOVERINGS** // Arc-Com Fabrics (spa), [www.arc-com.com](http://www.arc-com.com), and Wolf Gordon (21c suite), [www.wolfgordon.com](http://www.wolfgordon.com)

**FLOOR AND WALL TILE** // Nemo Tile Co. Inc., [www.nemotile.com](http://www.nemotile.com), Daltile, [www.daltile.com](http://www.daltile.com), and Stone Source, [www.stonesource.com](http://www.stonesource.com)

**BRENTWOOD STONE (bar and garde manger countertop)** // Architectural Minerals & Stone, [www.architecturalminerals.com](http://www.architecturalminerals.com)

**HISTORIC VAULT ART FLOOR TILE** // BANK (Unswep Floor Series): Leslie Lyons and JB Wilson

**RESILIENT FLOORING (spa and fitness area)** // Lonseal Loneco Midnight, [lonseal.com](http://lonseal.com)

**OFFICE FURNITURE** // Innerplan, [innerplan.com](http://innerplan.com)

**CASE GOODS** // Kimball Hospitality (guest rooms), [www.kimballhospitality.com](http://www.kimballhospitality.com), and Cheng Meng Furniture Beachwood Collective (public area), [chengmengfurniture.com](http://chengmengfurniture.com)

**UPHOLSTERY AND SEATING** // Carson's Hospitality, [carsonshospitality.com](http://carsonshospitality.com)

**DIMMING SYSTEM, LIGHTING CONTROLS** // Cooper Control, [www.cooperindustries.com](http://www.cooperindustries.com)

**PLUMBING FIXTURES** // Hansgrohe (guest rooms), [www.hansgrohe-usa.com](http://www.hansgrohe-usa.com)

**ENERGY MANAGEMENT** // Inncom by Honeywell (guest rooms), [www.inncom.com](http://www.inncom.com)

The new restaurant's bar and dining countertops are quartzitic sandstone quarried near Brentwood, Mo., chosen because the stone's color complements the hues in the terrazzo floor.

Single-use restrooms now line the mezzanine. "We made the route to the restrooms circuitous so people are led on a journey through artwork. You can take the video-art-installation stairwell that eventually leads to the lobby or the elevators, which make you pass through the mezzanine's art gallery," Schroeder explains.

The restrooms themselves are surprising. When the door to each restroom is open, both the door and accompanying wall area are transparent. Once a user steps inside and locks the door, the glass becomes translucent for privacy, thanks to switchable glass controlled by electrical circuit.

On the north side of the first floor, the hotel's ballroom took over the original banking hall, a grand 2,670-square-foot space paneled in lustrous floor-to-ceiling pecan wood.

The historic bank vault with its safety deposit boxes still exists on the lower level. In keeping with 21c's theme of creative exhibitions, the gleaming metal space now encases art and lounge seating that entices people to linger.

## Exterior Aesthetics

To preserve the original character of the building, the historic tax credits mandated

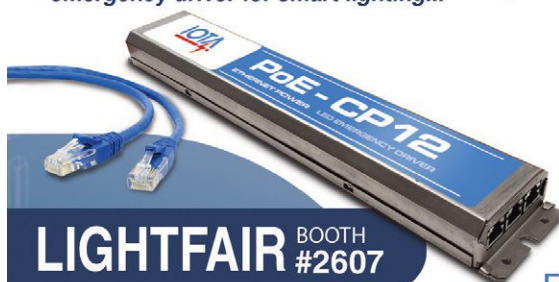
*(continues on page 70)*



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that the team retain the double-hung steel sash windows. "The windows were beautiful and we wanted to keep their aesthetic, but they weren't environmentally sensitive."

The team performed energy modeling and centered on a variable refrigerant flow (VRF) system as the most energy-efficient way to condition the spaces. Although the Durham climate is temperate, each glass lite was recaulked to give the window the best possible seal from the elements. For safety reasons, the windows are no longer operable.

Aluminum panels between the steel sash windows on the building's exterior give the limestone façade a banded look, and decorative aluminum grillwork stands above the entrances. To provide weather protection but maintain views to the Art Deco grillwork, the architects placed an unobtrusive canopy at the main entrance.

Hotel and restaurant uses require a loading dock, but the building had no accessible back side because of adjacent development. "We removed the sill on a small section of storefront along Main Street and transformed it into a door," Schroeder describes. "This created a discreet 6-foot-wide loading area that's barely visible on the façade."

### Welcoming Exhibitions

Curated and rotating contemporary art installations produce galleries in the lobby, ballroom and the hotel's pre-function space, restaurant, meeting rooms and circulation spaces. Other than times when the ballroom or meeting rooms are in use, the hotel's 10,000 square feet of exhibition space is free of charge and open to the public 24 hours a day.

21c's overarching objective is to forge connections between people and cutting-edge art. Although some of the pieces can be provocative, a friendly staff and the deliberate selection of comfortable furnishings make the spaces inviting. The public can lounge on the furniture or have a snack at the bar while viewing the installations. "It's an unconventional way to experience art," Schroeder says. "Exploration and playfulness is an important part of 21c's brand, and we worked to create spaces that let the art pieces shine. At the same time, we focused on wayfinding strategies to keep you moving through spaces, viewing the art and discovering more."