

STAR

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DESIGN



An artist rendering of the East Loggia at the Grand Galvez, where renovations should be complete in June 2022.

Courtesy of Seawall Hospitality

‘Queen of the Gulf’

New owners make their mark on historic hotel, starting with a pink exterior

By Diane Cowen
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An old meeting space is now a construction site inside the newly renamed Grand Galvez, wood shavings scattered across the newly installed floors as workers recover and restore one section of Galveston’s historic hotel.

It’s where Peacock Alley once stood, a grand hallway where guests and local residents strutted in their finest clothes to the music hall on the west side of the hotel. At some point in the hotel’s history, Peacock Alley’s plaster moldings and arched doorways were covered up when a prior owner decided they could live without a wider hallway in order to have larger private meeting rooms.

Artist renderings show the space with black-and-white marble floors, white walls and black trim, with potted palms providing pops of emerald green. Crystal chandeliers tucked inside oversized gold bells dangle from above.

The space — as the entire hotel eventually will be — is filled with



Justin Rex / Contributor

The Grand Galvez exterior is shifting from white to Sherwin-Williams “Texas Light Clay,” a color match of the Beverly Hills Hotel.

cue from the favorite designers of the hotel’s new owners, Mark and Lorenda Wyant of Dallas-based Seawall Hospitality. They love the style of French designer Philippe Starck, Dutch designer Marcel Wanders and the bold mix of color and patterns of American Dorothy Draper.

The Wyants jumped in to buy what was then Hotel Galvez, after a

deal that Dallas-based SRH Hospitality was working on to buy both the Galvez and the historic Tremont Hotel from Mitchell Historic Properties fell through during the pandemic. SRH followed through to buy the Tremont and the Wyants purchased the Galvez, closing on May 12. Renovations on both properties should finish in 2022.

“I’ve been coming to Galveston

my whole life,” Mark Wyant said, while Lorenda, a Houston native, noted that she came to the Galvez for her high school prom. “The first hotel I built here was a Holiday Inn Express and the second one is next door to us, it’s now a Doubletree. If you grew up in Dallas, you’d drive down to Galveston on the weekends.”

What is now the West Loggia will be the hotel’s bar — bathed in wood, brass and crystal, and evoking an ambience of Jay Gatsby and the Jazz Age — which is set to open in mid-December. The hotel’s restaurant will reopen by March 15 next year, followed by its 224 guest rooms — which will be redone in stages — by June 1.

The Wyants flipped through renderings during a recent visit to Galveston, still undecided about some of the flooring. An early plan had red carpet in one area, but they decided the was overwhelming and shifted to wood floors. Looking at them again, the wood suddenly looked dull to Lorenda. After noting that the wood had already been

Design continues on D6

DESIGN

From page D1

ordered, Mark had to agree. Design is still a bit of a work in progress. Renderings of the bar have red carpet with giant butterflies scattered into the weave. They may not make the final cut, either.

Some things are certain – the new lobby treatment will have a “Queen of the Gulf” tile mosaic in the floor near the check-in desk, styled to look and feel more like a train station ticket counter or bank teller’s cage. The current ceiling, with beams and wallpaper, will get a more grown-up look with gold leaf.

In the East Loggia, a potential future home for High Tea on weekends, the black-and-white floor will repeat, and wicker chairs will line the hall, aglow from Baccarat crystal chandeliers.

Pitchforks and pink paint

As Mark Wyant opens his iPad to show artist renderings, he points out a Sherwin-Williams paint mix sticker labeled “Texas Light Clay.”

The sticker comes with a story.

Whenever Wyant drove past the Galvez with his mother, Jana Wyant, a vocal partner in his business, she’d wonder out loud why they didn’t paint it pink. The idea stuck with her son, who rattles off several favorite hotels that are pink, including the Royal Hawaiian – where he’d stay when he was an American Airlines pilot flying from Dallas to Hawaii – and the Beverly Hills Hotel.

They gathered samples of pink paint and put swaths of color on different parts of the building, causing more than a kerfuffle along the way. Galveston residents were up in arms that the pride of the island was being defaced.



Justin Pitt / Contributor

Mark and Lorenda Wyant show off a meeting room under renovation in the Grand Galvez in Galveston. In the background is Peacock Alley, a grand hallway being brought back to life.

“It was never a secret that I wanted to paint it pink. Right after closing, we were out there and painted some paint samples on the side of the building. One of them was bright Taco Cabana/Pepto Bismol pink. Actually, it was brighter than Pepto,” Mark Wyant said. “And that’s when the local paper decided to take a picture of it. Oh, Lord. I could see the bonfires and pitchforks from Dallas. They were upset.”

He got the message and got serious about finding the right pink.

“Let’s go,” Mark Wyant said to his wife one day. They hopped on a plane and flew to Beverly Hills, determined to match the color on that hotel, which opened just a year after the Galvez.

They checked into the hotel and promptly took dozens of paint chips outside, comparing



Courtesy of Seawall Hospitality

An artist rendering of what will be the front check-in desk, inspired by an old-time train station or bank teller’s cage.

the colors. Approached by hotel management, the Wyants fessed up, and their reward was a trip to the maintenance room, where

the manager handed them a can of paint.

“Most people go to Beverly Hills and shop on Rodeo Drive.

Lorenda and I went there and spent half a day at Sherwin-Williams,” he said.

They came home with a color-match mix, and the label from the can is their constant reminder of what the hotel means to Galvestonians.

Remembering its roots

Though the Galvez opened when Victorian and Edwardian style dominated, the Wyants are fast forwarding a decade to the Jazz Age for décor.

Still, they want to be true to many of the hotel’s origins, so plans include a lobby display case that will pay tribute to the hotel’s history and its founders. The hotel has only had a handful of owners through the years, including W.L. Moody, Dr. Denton Cooley, George P. Mitchell’s group and, now, the Wyants.

They’ve also sent a section of original stair rail to have molds made and new railing poured to identically match what was originally in the hotel. There’s just a single small wall in the stairs that still has it, but it’s trapped behind another brass rail that’s ADA compliant. The newly recast rail will be a few inches higher to meet current code.

When finished, that stairs off of the lobby will be a grander welcome, with red and green carpet – a nod to their love of the Dorothy Draper/Carleton Varney-decorated Greenbrier hotel in West Virginia – paneled walls and beautiful lighting.

Modern updates are in store, too, with tech upgrades that will let guests have Alexa operating lights, music and even window treatments.

A white marble fountain is under construction in Italy now. Eventually, it will be placed at the entrance to the Grand Galvez to greet visitors with an elegant splash.

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