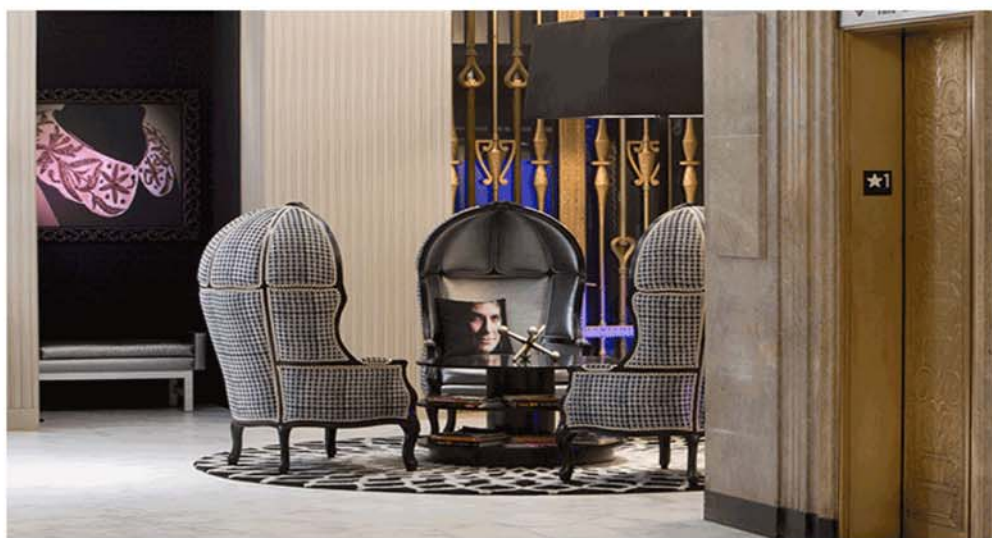


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Renaissance Albany Hotel and Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown Hotel

Brienne Walsh • May 11, 2016



Photos: Renaissance Albany Hotel and Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown Hotel

The first Renaissance hotel Toby Schermerhorn and Robert Laschever of Frederick, Maryland-based Cauhaus Design created was in Woodbridge, New Jersey. It was 2007, and the married couple had been freelancing for the in-house design team at Marriott since Schermerhorn left a fulltime position there in 1997 to start Cauhaus with Laschever. Their Renaissance Woodbridge Hotel impressed the brand so much that Cauhaus was put on a list of preferred designers, and they have since created 25 Renaissance hotels around the U.S.— and a total of 50 for Marriott over the course of their careers.

“Brands need people who understand them,” explains Schermerhorn of her firm’s success with Renaissance. “When you’re converting to brand or renovating the hotel you want to be on the inside. You want to be moving where the brand is moving, and get to it quickly.”

The design directive they receive from Renaissance for each property is more conceptual than concrete. The brand’s motto is “live life to discover,” and they want discovery moments throughout their properties, Laschever explains. “It lends itself to a concept of theater. We think of the hotel as a series of stage sets.”

As much as possible, the designers try to connect to the specific location. The 203-room Renaissance Albany in New York, for example, is located in the historic DeWitt Clinton Hotel building near Empire State Plaza—which houses the Egg, a performing arts venue shaped like half a hard-boiled egg on a pedestal. Inspired by the architecture, Cauhaus carries the theme throughout the Renaissance—in egg pods and egg reception desks, and a wall installation that looks like cracked eggs in the elevator lobby.

The firm was also inspired by the Dutch immigrants that originally settled Albany and the rest of New York. There are traditional Dutch references throughout, from patterns that utilize Delft blue, to wallcoverings that resemble Dutch tiles, to tulip chairs in the lobby that refer to the Dutch mania for the flower. Carpets look like antique rugs one might find in a 17th century Dutch home, and in the elevator banks on the guest floors, there is a reproduction of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, who is trapped behind a water table that rises and falls according to the levels of the Hudson River.

The story continues in the guestrooms, which resemble airy lofts, and even in Albany’s four public washrooms, located near onsite restaurant Wellington’s, embody a different time period—modern, Art Deco, 17th century Dutch, and fort from the Colonial period. They perfectly fit into Cauhaus’ aim, that their designs have “instant wit, instant charm, instant ability to transform,” Schermerhorn says.

The team applied this directive to the Renaissance Cincinnati Downtown hotel, located in a former bank originally designed by Daniel Burnham, the architect who also constructed New York’s Flatiron building. In crafting the property, with 283 rooms and 40 suites across 19 floors, “our goal mainly was not to muck up the structure,” confesses Laschever. “While most of the time, we design for the neighborhood—this time, we designed for the building.”

Schermerhorn and Laschever left the bones of the building basically untouched, drawing on a theme of banks and finance to dress it up. The bathrooms, for example, look like bank vaults, and the chairs in the lobby are made from material that resembles quarters.

Art Deco inspirations abound. The guestrooms, former offices, each have unique layouts and reflect the high sophistication of the architecture, but also what Schermerhorn describes as Cincinnati’s “cool and casual” vibe.

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