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By Mary Beth Klatt
Photography by Teviot Creative



chicago blu



A Radisson brand's stateside debut





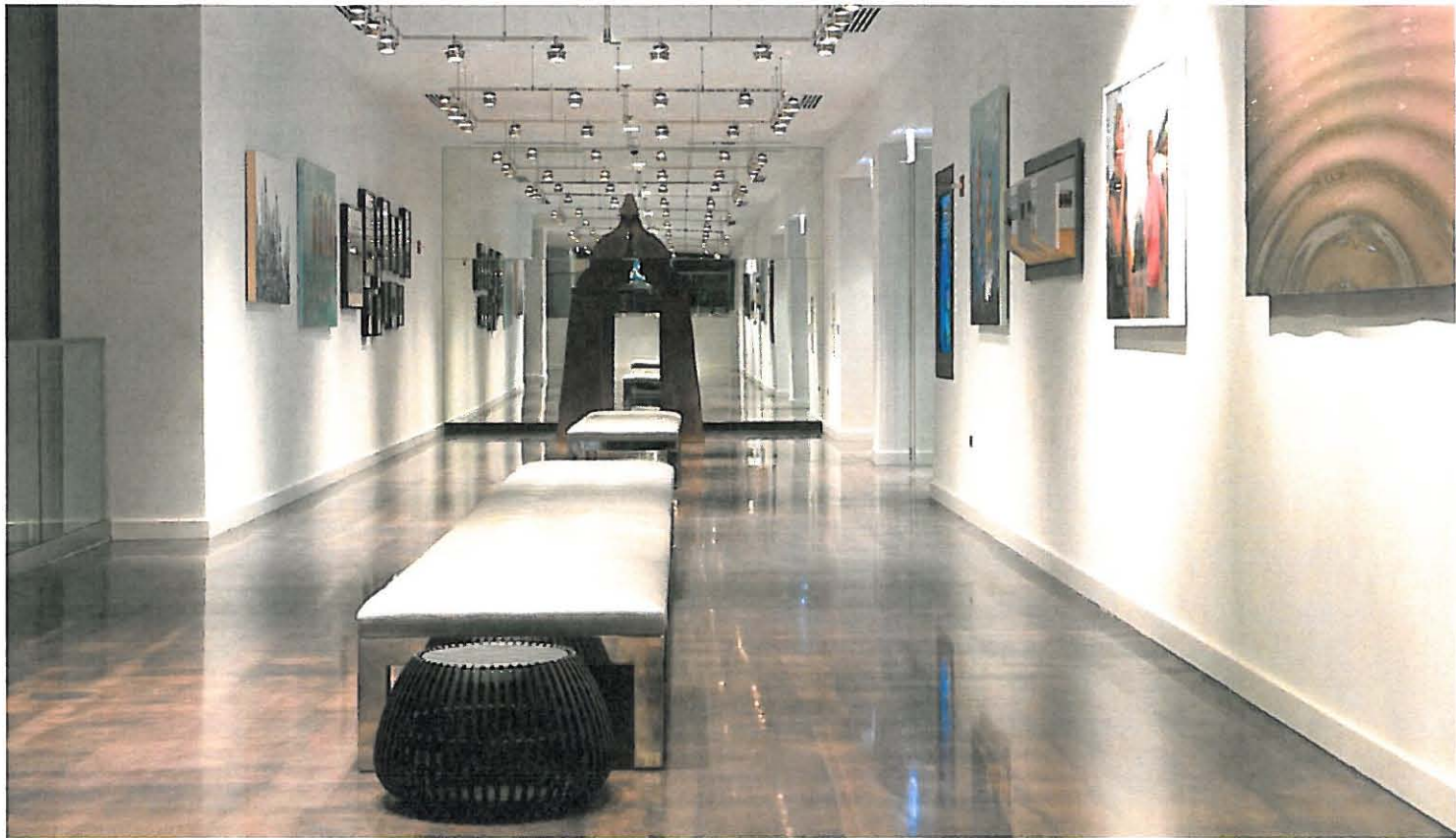
Graven Images creative director Jim Hamilton has always been struck by the similarities between Chicago and his homeland of Scotland. The 38 brawny bridges that span the Windy City's river especially reminded him of that connection. "Amazing, bold, strong, and incredible feats of engineering brought back memories of the massive ships that were built in my hometown of Clydebank near Glasgow," he explains.

So it makes sense that those bridges, the Marina Towers, and the Richard J. Daley Center inspired him to pay homage to the city's great architectural heritage inside the 18-story Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel—the U.S. debut of Carlson's brand—which is housed in the much-lauded, undulating Aqua residential skyscraper designed by Jeanne Gang.

But Hamilton didn't want to copy what's been already done. So he dined at 200 local restaurants (including the city's iconic Billy Goat tavern), snapping hundreds of photos. Of all the images, he was most fascinated by the iron grates that protect young trees in downtown. They became the blueprint for the pattern for the flooring and rugs throughout the hotel's public spaces, while reclaimed brick walls with glass insets are a nod to blue-collar brick bungalows and highway lights.

"The approach into Chicago when driving from the airport always brings a smile to my face—seeing the towers in the distance, which is unlike any city in the UK," he says.

Opposite page, clockwise from top: A huge, handmade rug softens the Radisson Blu Aqua lobby's concrete surfaces, while a 50-foot-long gas fireplace, the world's longest, and an Egyptian brass medallion screen wall add dramatic elements; hand-pieced white-and-black mosaic tile in Filini restaurant's bar extends the hotel's steel-grate pattern used elsewhere; and the 18-story hotel is housed in Jeanne Gang's undulating residential skyscraper. *This page, from top:* A 20-ton cantilevered steel staircase leads to spacious Italian restaurant, Filini; guests check in at mirrored desks set against a weathered steel wall.



The 20-ton cantilevered steel staircase, which leads to Filini restaurant, reflects these high-rises, with rustic, raw steel resembling the buildings' trusses. The hand-pieced, black-and-white mosaic tile in the restaurant and bar repeats the grate pattern on a much larger scale, and Hamilton himself drew the illustration of an abstract view of the Chicago River for the lobby's huge, handmade rug that softens the cast concrete surfaces.

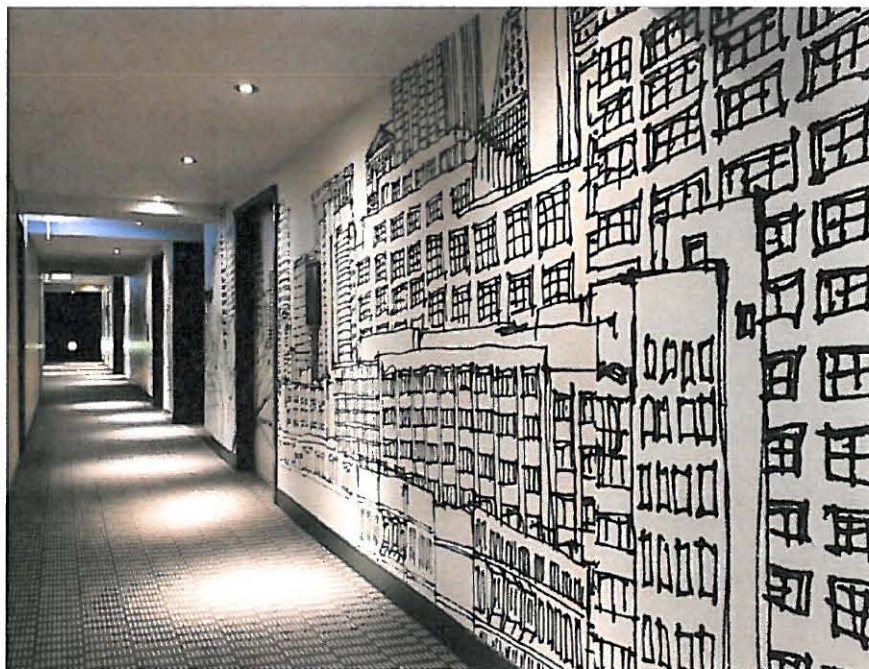
But the hotel interior isn't strictly all about Chicago. For instance, a large Egyptian brass medallion screen wall by Randa Fahmy and its

coordinating inset 50-foot-long fireplace are the first things guests see after checking in. While the gas fireplace was a challenge with its lengthy façade and construction, it's now a candidate for entry in the *Guinness World Records* book as the world's longest fireplace.

Upstairs, the rooms follow two of the Radisson Blu guestroom design schemes—Mansion House and Naturally Cool. Swedish designer Christian Lundwall (in collaboration with Minneapolis-based LLdP) took a fashion-inspired approach to the guestrooms. Mansion House rooms feature rich



Opposite page, from top: The living room of a Naturally Cool guestroom; sliding glass doors and deep-soaking tubs await in the bathroom. *This page, clockwise from top:* A linear cast-iron and steel ramp connects the internal lobby corridor to the art gallery and meeting spaces in the rear of the hotel; custom wallpaper in the guestroom corridors feature a sketch drawing of Chicago's skyline and buildings; and Naturally Cool rooms are outfitted with white beds, metal lamps, wood flooring, and paper art.





timber and chrome finishes for a sophisticated feel, since Lundwall says, “the Mansion House guest is a world traveler and stylish. The room has an opulent feel that’s glittering, glossy, and somewhat masculine.” Meanwhile, the Naturally Cool rooms are more contemporary and have a “calming spa-like environment” thanks to white beds, metal lamps, wood flooring, and dramatic paper art. “We wanted

to develop the guestrooms to match the beauty of the exterior building and the overall interior design of the hotel,” he says. “I feel that the Naturally Cool fits one hundred percent with the overall interior design and the Mansion House adds a nice contrast to prove opposites attract.” **hd**
www.studiogang.net; www.graven.co.uk; lwa.se; lldpus.com; www.radissonblu.com



Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel

Chicago

Owner Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group and Magellan Development Group

Management Company Carlson Hotels Management Corporation

Aqua Tower Architecture Firm Studio Gang Architects, Chicago

Architecture Project Team Jeanne Gang
Hotel Architect Loewenberg Architects, Chicago

Interior Design Firm Graven Images, Glasgow, Scotland (public spaces and restaurant); LWA, Gothenburg, Sweden, and LLDP, Minneapolis (guestrooms)

Interior Design Project Team Jim Hamilton, Graven Images; Christian Lundwall, LWA

Project Managers Phil Malcolm and Tom Trout, Carlson; and Kris Schwengel, Magellan

Main Contractor Bovis Lend Lease
Millworker J.R. Jones

Purchasing Firm The Parker Company

Lighting Charter Sills

Photography Jesse Kalisher

Chicago Line Drawings Steve Slaske

Curtains and Blinds Miceli

Hardwood Flooring Surface Plus

FILINI BAR AND RESTAURANT

Flooring Bovis Lend Lease; designed by Graven Images

Dining Tables One World Interiors

Dining Chairs Emeco and Piet Boon

Barstools Spatial Furniture

Tile Dene Happell

Custom Booth Dining Tables J.R. Jones; designed by Graven Images

BLUE BAR/LOBBY BAR

Lounge Chairs Tom Dixon

Coffee Tables e15

RECEPTION

Corten Wall and Concrete Floor Bovis Lend Lease

LOBBY LOUNGE

Brass Screen Randa Fahmy

Reclaimed Brick Wall Installed by Bovis Lend Lease

Floor Lamp Moooi

Sofas Viccarbe

Custom Rug Gravity Flooring; designed by Graven Images

Coffee Tables e15

GUESTROOM CORRIDOR

Custom Wallpaper Steve Slaske

Custom Carpet Brintons; designed by Graven Images

GUESTROOMS

Furniture Custom by LLDP