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November+December 2012: The Heroes Issue

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An overhead light sculpture adds visual interest to The Hotel Wilshire's lobby.

Robert Miller (hotel), Courtesy of KNA Design (Nix)



Kirk Nix, KNA Design

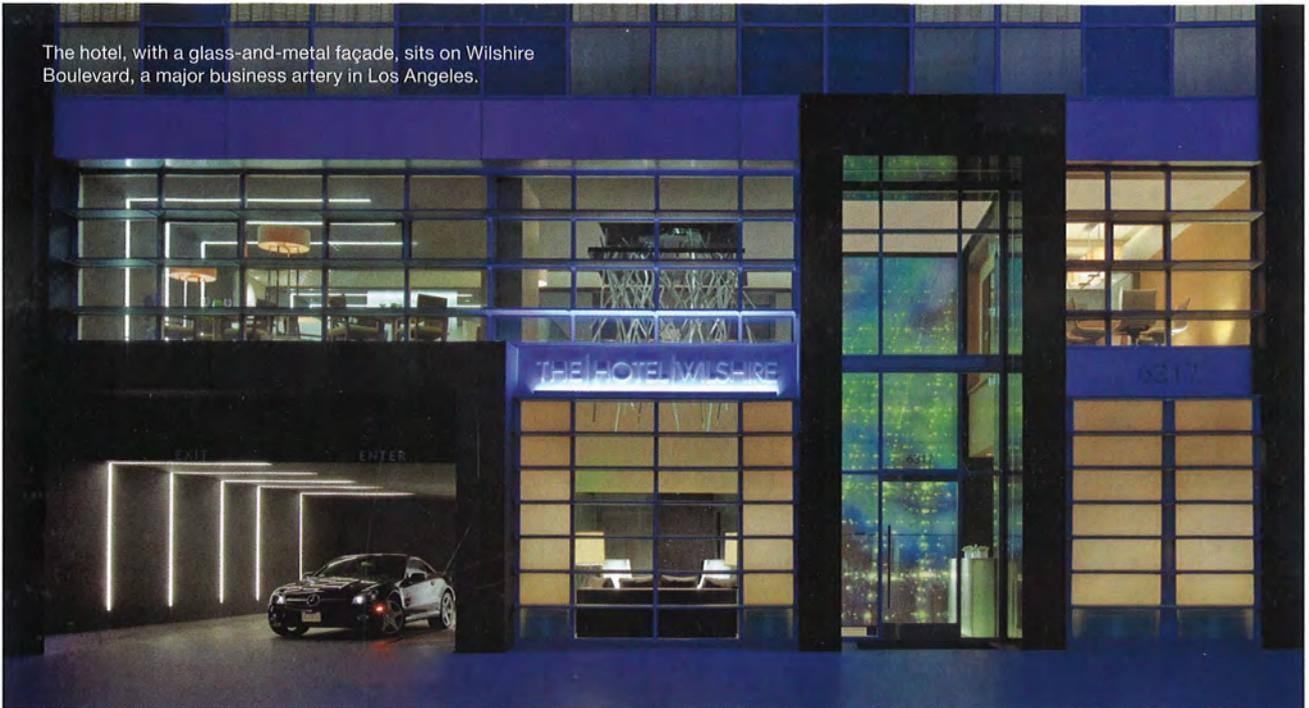
## Prescription for a Boutique Conversion

KNA Design transforms a ho-hum medical office building into a luxury hotel for today's corporate road warriors.

BY MATTHEW HALL

## THE HOTEL WILSHIRE

The hotel, with a glass-and-metal façade, sits on Wilshire Boulevard, a major business artery in Los Angeles.



Rightly or not, many travelers equate business hotels with uninspired design. Seeking to shake that stigma is The Hotel Wilshire, which is housed in a former medical office building on a busy thoroughfare that connects a string of Los Angeles commercial districts.

“Our challenge was to create a business hotel that would be modern and current, without being trendy—or boring,” says KNA Design principal Kirk Nix, whose firm was hired by owner OSM Investment to convert the interiors of a six-story, 1950s-era building into a 74-key boutique hotel.

Nix says the hotel’s color palette plays a central role in creating the desired environment. “We used neutral colors—gray, brown, cream and beige—teamed with the jolt of a yellow signature color to keep the design from becoming dated,” he explains. “It will be easy enough to change the signa-



Guest rooms feature neutral tones with splashes of yellow.



"Nothing But Blue Skies" wall posters are among numerous artworks throughout the hotel that make figurative references to Los Angeles.

ture color for a different vibe without revising the entire color and material scheme of the design."

The hotel's colors get some major street-level exposure, thanks to a set of double-height windows on the building's first floor. Once inside, KNA sought to create visual

interest in the lobby via what principal Christian Schnyder describes as a pair of "large gestures." One is a custom light sculpture over the lobby's seating area, and the other is a two-story art installation that depicts L.A.'s city grid. "That's meant to show what the city looks like when approaching it by plane at

night," Schnyder says.

Designers sprinkled several other abstract visual references to Los Angeles throughout the building. The hotel's elevator lobbies, for example, feature walls adorned with a series of four large photographs showing car lights at night. "Those



The Hotel Wilshire's penthouse suite features a private outdoor patio and lounge area.

images are overexposed, which creates red and white lines that are abstract, but understood as car lights," says Schnyder.

Guest rooms are also home to L.A.-oriented art pieces, including small photos on headboard walls showing either a woman diving into water or standing at the edge of water, a reference to the city's proximity to the ocean; "Nothing But Blue Skies" wall posters, a reflection of the locale's seemingly perpetual sunshine; and photos of a woman's face with prominent red lips, in honor of what Schnyder describes as "L.A.'s fascination with beauty."

The guest rooms sit on floor plates that were not originally configured to house such accommodations. To convert the building's office layouts into living spaces, the project team began by removing the

Because it caters mainly to business travelers, the hotel has a luxurious board room for on-site meetings.





The six-story hotel makes the most of its roof, which is home to a pool, cabanas and a restaurant.

structure's interior walls.

"That still left us with the challenge of working around the existing structural columns and beams," notes Schnyder. "But by working closely with the architect and engineers on the project, we were able to route the rooms' MEP (mechanical/electrical/plumbing) requirements without impacting the layouts too much."

Most of the hotel's guest rooms are relatively small (typically 275 sq. ft.). To make those spaces feel larger, KNA senior designer Erika Zoeller says, "we limited their materials palette to a select few finishes. For example, the walls are covered in cream-colored vinyl, giving the rooms some texture, while the headboard walls

are painted in a dark brown for contrast and relief."

Finally, to keep the spaces from feeling "corporate"—the last thing business travelers typically want—Schnyder and Zoeller specified custom furnishings for the rooms (including nightstands and wall-hung millwork pieces flanking the heads of the beds), and arranged other elements in asymmetrical ways (the photos on the headboard walls are off-center, as are the TVs within the rooms).

"We didn't try to make big statements in the rooms," says Nix, "but did work to infuse them with some visual interest and energy that would distinguish The Hotel Wilshire from the typical business hotel." **BD**

## PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

<b>OWNER</b> OSM Investment	<b>DRAPERY</b> Coast Drapery
<b>OPERATOR</b> Greystone Hotels	<b>FABRICS</b> Kravet Valley Forge
<b>DESIGN FIRM/PURCHASING AGENT</b> KNA Design	<b>FLOOR COVERINGS/MATERIALS</b> Amtico Vinyl Flooring Christopher Farr Clayton Miller Carpets
<b>ARCHITECT</b> Killefer Flammang Architects	<b>FURNITURE</b> Skypad
<b>GENERAL CONTRACTOR</b> R.D. Olson Construction	<b>LIGHTING</b> Hallmark
<b>ART</b> Soho Myriad	<b>MIRRORS</b> ADI Azul Design
<b>BATH FIXTURES</b> Symmons Industries	<b>WALL COVERINGS/MATERIALS</b> Wolf Gordon
<b>BED COVERINGS/LINENS</b> Maxwell Rodgers Valley Forge	
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