

PROJECT: St. Paul Hotel
PUBLICATION: Canadian Interiors, July/August 2002

JULY/AUGUST 2002

CANADIAN
Canada's review of interior architecture and design

INTERIORS

BEST OF CANADA DESIGN

BASIC BLACK
AT MONTREAL'S
ST. PAUL HOTEL

DESIGN SHOWS:
CHICAGO, MILAN
AND NEW YORK

ALVAR AALTO
REVISITED

TOOTHsome
TWOSOME
IN VANCOUVER



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A study of contrasts

St. Paul Hotel, Montreal
Acanto Design, Montreal

The St. Paul, in Montreal, was recently named one of the world's coolest new hotels. Judges for the Best of Canada Design Awards, who had already decided that this hotel was hot, selected it as best in project design.

Photography by Jean Blais



BEST PROJECT

The subtle interaction of space, time and light intrigued Ana Borrallo of Acanto Interiors, Montreal, when she became involved with the St. Paul Hotel in 1999.

Her husband, Javier Planas, president of Iber Management, had purchased the former Canadian Express headquarters, a regally imposing and ornate, sandstone building, constructed in 1900 at the corner of McGill and St. Paul streets in Old Montreal. Working on behalf of Spanish investors, owners of two apartment/hotels in Montreal, he planned to develop the dilapidated, heritage site, left empty for more than 10 years, into an upscale hotel.

Borrallo, with architectural firm, In Situ Design, New York, was fascinated by the potential, finding the project a study of contrasts. My philosophy, she says, was to create a hotel that would be timeless in terms of design, classical but expressing modernity. "I wanted to work with the architecture not make a statement about design."

The 120-room hotel, including 15 penthouse suites, was completed at a cost of \$16-million. When it opened in June 2001, it immediately drew international attention. In May, *Conde Nast Traveller* included the St. Paul as one of 32 chosen worldwide as the "coolest new hotels."

Borrallo took her inspiration from the massive solidness of the exterior choosing to present light and space in the interior. "Since the hotel should be background for guests as they arrive and depart, I wanted to keep the interior tones muted and neutral."

She chose the themes of Earth, Air, Fire and Ice as recurring motifs.

The lobby is pared down simplicity, grey Italian stone floors with couches and chairs in blue/grey, rust and olive tones, dyed beaver skins in matching colours casu-



Facing page at top: lobby fireplace. **Bottom:** meeting room. **This page, clockwise from top left:** lobby; exterior facade; linen-canopy bed; a bedroom suite; Bar Cru, raw bar

ally strewn across the backs. At one end is a fireplace, a looming 12-foot high wall of Spanish alabaster. At the other, tucked inside the entrance to the restaurant, is the solid bulk of a bar in dark bronze. The restaurant is cool and restrained, cream with rosewood tables. Mirrors on the back wall reflect the dining scene.

Borrallo describes the main floor as ethereal; the second floor, she says, is decidedly more cozy. Four conference rooms, repeating the lobby colour themes, meet at a central earth-toned lounge. But it is the raw bar, Bar Cru, overlooking McGill Street, that attracts attention for its exotic richness. "The windows come to just 15 inches off the floor, which reminded me of Turkish architecture, says Borrallo. So I designed sofas that are lower to the ground to create a mood of relaxation. Above the lounges, in white and red crushed velvet with deep salmon-toned Thai silk cushions, are two exquisite, hanging lamps of mother of pearl discs. "I bought them in Paris and although the dealer wasn't sure, I think they are by Verner Pantone."

Other classic design pieces are scattered

throughout the hotel, including a Charles Eames boardroom table, Mies van der Rohe chairs in a small meeting room and two signed Thonet chairs. They blend with the rest of the furniture designed by Borrallo.

No two bedrooms are exactly alike although all share common elements – tiles and ceramics from Portugal, bathroom fixtures from Germany. But on each floor, there is one special room where the bed is tucked behind a canopy of fine linen. The black penthouse suite, its bed enclosed by white linen curtains, is booked months in advance.

"We wanted to establish an authenticity of materials and space," explains Borrallo. "Everything is real. We have tried to achieve a sense of luxury in a simple, understated way."

Sheri Craig

Judges' comments:

Poldma: What I like about this is the scale of the space and the way it pulls a lot of things together.

Mentions: The hotel is beautifully designed.