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Saguaro hotel promises to be bright spot on Civic Center



The Saguaro, the refurbished downtown hotel on Scottsdale Civic Center Plaza, reopened Nov. 3 with a bold statement with bedazzling colors.

By Peter Corbett

Pity the Saguaro hotel guest who wakes up in the morning after too many margaritas.

The refurbished downtown hotel on Scottsdale Civic Center Plaza is a riot of color that might unnerve overindulged visitors without sunglasses.

The Saguaro, which reopened Thursday, has made a bold statement with bedazzling colors - carrot-stick orange, sun-kissed yellow, charmed violet, mountain-larkspur blue, new-lime green, deep-carnation pink and white.

New tones, furniture and room décor are part of a \$10 million renovation by

the hotel's owner, the Sydell Group Ltd. of New York, for a property known as the Hotel Theodore, Mondrian Scottsdale and James Hotel over the past eight years.

"We felt the hotel was a little dull, with a lot of black in the rooms. We thought the rooms should be more bright and cheery," said Andrew Zobler, Sydell founder and CEO. "We wanted to give it more of a connection to the Arizona desert."

Arizona's Sonoran Desert, with its iconic saguaros, has its splashes of brightly colored blossoms, poppies, purple cactus pads and the bright

green of paloverde trees.

This latest colorful chapter of the 35-year-old hotel follows two other renovations since 2003 by New York-based companies that had their own visions for a Scottsdale lifestyle hotel.

The Sydell Group bought the bank-repossessed hotel in February for \$16.25 million. It appointed San Francisco-based Joie de Vivre Hotels to manage the Saguaro.

Rachel Sacco, Scottsdale Convention and Visitors Bureau president, said Joie de Vivre "totally understands their audience" and creates a great experience for guests.



Drinkwater name nixed

Sydell had intended to call it the Drinkwater hotel as a nod to late Scottsdale Mayor Herb Drinkwater. But the name was not well received so Sydell decided to “pick something that was representative of the desert,” Zobler said.

Guests will see some tall saguaros upon arrival and a cactus garden on the 6.6-acre property southwest of Drinkwater Boulevard and Indian School Road.

New York architects Peter Stenberg and Paul Aferiat, known for their use of color, redesigned the Saguardo. In an October 2010 *Architectural Digest* article about their own home, Aferiat talks about choosing colors that “don’t absorb or deaden light but amplify it.”

Peter A. Lendrum and Associates, a Valley firm, signed the Saguardo hotel, which was one of the first Doubletree Hotels.

The Saguardo’s latest renovation includes work on the lobby, rooms and pool areas. Also, new lighting and carpeting for the outdoor corridors were installed.

Whitewashed wood floors in the lobby have a new blond finish. Planters with queen palms and benches have been added.

The lobby is meant to be like a big living room where guests can gather throughout the day, Zobler said.

It has a coffee shop, which is expected to open this week, as well as

a pair of big communal tables, lots of electrical outlets for laptops, hanging globe lights and Mexican equipale chairs made with purple leather.

Two other restaurants also will operate at the hotel.

One is Old Town Whiskey, which is opening this week. It is outfitted with mustard-yellow leather sofas and features specialty whiskeys. The restaurant will be operated by Jose Garces, a James Beard Award-winning chef.

The other is Distrito, featuring the cuisine of Mexico City. Garces has opened eight restaurants in Philadelphia and Chicago over the past six years, including the original Distrito in Philadelphia.

Distrito, set to open by mid-December, includes patio dining overlooking the Civic Center Plaza.

Better links to plaza

The Saguardo plans to open the property up to better connect with the plaza and Old Town, said Zobler, adding that the previous operators had opted to make the hotel an exclusive sanctuary. A new entrance on Drinkwater Boulevard is intended to be more inviting as well.

The Saguardo’s 194 guest rooms, including 17 suites, are small by today’s standards. They have colorful coverlets over white comforters and brightly colored accent walls, 42-inch flat-screen TVs, patios or balconies and a bottled-water minibar.

Room rates advertised online include grand-opening specials of \$169 for one night to \$129 per night for three nights.

Guests have their choice of overlooking the circular Calma pool, for quiet relaxation, or the long, narrow Picante pool, designed for the daytime party crowd. The Calma pool area includes a small yoga garden with a shaded hammock.

The livelier pool deck includes new orange and yellow chaise longues and four cabanas with flat-screen TVs, fireplaces and misting systems.

“We want it to be active and fun, but we’re thinking of having a more universal appeal rather than a particular age group,” Zobler said of the hotel’s targeted audience.

“The culture is really important to us,” he said. “In some of the early boutique hotels, the paradigm was of the hotel as a nightclub. But there has been a move away from that.”

Zobler was a senior vice president for Starwood who was involved in the launch of the W hotel brand.

The Saguardo general manager is Alan Klein, a Scottsdale native who attended Kiva Elementary School and graduated from Chaparral High School in 1984. He spent the past 11 years at the Westward Look Resort in Tucson.

“We’re bringing color back to the property, bringing life back to it,” he said of the Saguardo.