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TALES OF THE GRAND HOTELS

Renaissance Revival

Portland has hotel fever—big, beautiful showplaces are in the works, with restaurants and event spaces. If we build them, will they come?

BY PATRICK VENNE

STAFF ILLUSTRATION/ROBERT WITKOWSKI

Uptown sophisticate—the stately Portland *Press Herald* headquarters at the top of Exchange Street is soon to be reincarnated as a lifestyle hotel.

APRIL 2013 25

How do you top the Top of the East? You more than double its size.



From top: As far as the eye can see from the Top of the East, now under renovation atop the soon-to-be Westin Portland Harborview; the former Eastland Park Hotel's landmark sign will nevertheless remain on Portland's skyline.

Keenly aware of how their presence will transform Portland's existing assets, a new renaissance of hotels is rising—quite literally—to meet an impressive demand for Portland's unique quality of place.

In the heart of the Arts District, investors are steadily working toward upgrading the 12-story landmark formerly known as the Eastland Park Hotel into the **WESTIN PORTLAND HARBORVIEW**. According to Jeffrey Cappellieri, Westin's area director of sales and marketing, the developers hope the hotel will play a role in transforming the Arts District into "one of Portland's most dynamic

FROM TOP: CYNTHIA FARR-WEINFELD; COURTESY; PORTLAND HARBORVIEW/DAILY GRAY, INC.



neighborhoods for creativity, food, music, and business.” While this evolution is well underway already, Westin’s contribution will include 16,000 square feet of top-of-the-line, versatile event and exhibition space. The 1927 Eastland Grand Ballroom, for instance, will be restored to its original breathtaking proportions, replete with ‘grand staircase’ and balcony as each originally existed. And talk about lofty aspirations. The Westin’s bid to recapture the top of the market is dramatized by more than doubling the size of the Top of the East to turn it into a venue

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(l to r): David Mitchell, Christopher Rogers, Lauren Schaefer-Bove, Zara Machatine, Steve Guthrie, Dana Ricker

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HIGH GLASS—The Hyatt Place shooting up on the corner of Union and Fore streets will transform a former empty lot.

more on par with the Top of the Mark in San Francisco, offering sweeping vistas of the Portland skyline, harbor, and beyond. The Westin is ambitiously scheduled to open in December after deep restoration from top to bottom, all the way to raw cement.

Several blocks east, on the corner of Exchange and Congress streets, the former headquarters of the *Portland Press Herald* is being completely reimaged. The historic home to reporters, typesetters, and other Gannett and Blethen nighthawks will undergo a \$20-million renovation and become, in the third quarter of 2014, a 110-room, high-end boutique “lifestyle” hotel—in the vein of the CharlesMark in Boston. The customized space, designed by Portland’s Archetype Architects, may very well be known as **THE EXCHANGE**, a name floated more in light of the venue’s ability to serve as a nexus for the cultural traffic—ideas, scenes, conversation, art, tastes, and history—than for its eponymous street location. According to developer Jim Brady, an experienced Portland investor behind the project, it will be a “high-design” hotel marketed toward sophisticated visitors attracted by Portland’s vibrancy. “Steps away, miles apart” is how he describes the warm, innovative, and creative space he hopes to develop as an “experiential” hotel with a “phenomenal” restaurant space. That is, while The Exchange sits merely “steps away” from the Old Port’s many offerings, it will be “miles apart” from anything else in the market today.

Brady studied the experiential trend, visiting the award-winning Iron Horse Hotel in Milwaukee. Set in a converted 100-year-old warehouse with a highly rated restaurant, an outdoor lounge abutting an active railroad, motorcycle memorabilia in the lobby, and lots of personality, the Iron Horse “out-

STAFF ILLUSTRATION/CHRIS RICCARDO/EAST BROWN COW

GRAND HOTELS

performs its market significantly. They created an experience," says Brady, "not just a hotel." And central to that experience is the value added by the "adaptive reuse" of a historic building. Brady ventures The Liberty Hotel in Boston's former Charles Street Jail as another example.

Deeper into the Old Port, on the corner of Fore and Union streets on what was until recently a gaping hole in the glittering Old Port street scene, a 123-room **HYATT PLACE** of bespoke design by Portland's Canal 5 Studio will soon rise on an empty lot fronting Pearl (on Fore Street) and Gingko Blue (Union Street). Not a bad way to toast the city. According to Tim Soley, whose company owns the portfolio of buildings and land surrounding the site known as Canal Plaza, this development is "one of the best uses of the block" and will contribute to Portland's "rebirth" and its evolution "from a big town to a small city." Hyatt Place will energize the confluence of two important city streets and shoot for a starry new standard of exterior design. The



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bold all-glass first floor will have a rhythm which, according to Soley, is meant to be a “playful counterpoint to the structures across the street,” connecting residents and visitors alike to “both current reality and past history.” The 24-hour activity generated by Hyatt Place will bring a big shot of new energy to the Old Port, and capitalize upon the “intangibles” that draw so many visitors to its one-of-a-kind establishments every year. We all know that downtown Portland has, as Soley describes it, “a bit of magic,” but the Hyatt Place will let a younger international set feel they’re rediscovering this for the first time.

The city’s enchantments are also being expanded by Vin Veroneau, president of Portland-based J.B. Brown & Sons, who cut his teeth on the Boston market.

At the western edge of the Old Port, at the corner of Commercial and Maple streets

(Continued on page 82)

LUXURY IN OLD ORCHARD

Outside Portland, the epiphenomenon of new hotels is echoed by the nearly completed **ALOUETTE SUITES**, designed by Portland architect **MARK MUELLER** to bring a luxury client base to a memorable sweep of **OLD ORCHARD BEACH**. “We think our story is exciting as part of the Portland scene and also as part of the revitalization of Old Orchard Beach on its own,” says **FRED KENNEDY** of the ripple effect. Yes, but why exactly now, in 2013? “We’re a small, family-run business, and we’re beginning our 14th year in Old Orchard. Old Orchard Beach has perhaps lagged a bit behind other vacation destinations in Maine for keeping pace with the newest and best guest accommodations—the new Alouette Suites signals a changed attitude and a desire to move Old Orchard Beach back to the top echelon of vacation spots in New England.”

The move will delight “our present clientele and open new markets.”

Specifically, he’s engaging a demographic responding to “the extended-stay offerings... with high-end one- and two-bedroom suites, all with private beach views and kitchens.” A number of these four-season suites include “fireplaces, spa bathrooms, soaking tubs, on-site sauna, and top-notch health guest membership. Guests can enjoy a full breakfast available each morning in our own Alouette Cafe throughout the year.”



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From left: A 44-room hotel is now under construction on Great Diamond Island; the Courtyard Marriott planned for Commercial Street at Maple Street will contribute to the Old Port's expansion to the west.



Renaissance Revival (continued from page 31) in the Gorham's Corner district, Veroneau's commercial and industrial real estate management and development firm (founded in 1828 by John Bundy Brown, the merchant prince and hotelier who helped invent and market Portland the first time around) is actively developing a shimmering \$17.5-million, mixed-use palace encompassing 131 hotel rooms of a **COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT** to open in June 2014. The sweeping project will also house first-floor retail or restaurant space and 14 high-end apartments on the sixth floor. According to Veroneau, "This property

extends the Old Port west" and will offer the "best of both worlds" by providing a relaxed atmosphere of relative quiet while affording patrons and guests a location easily walkable to the social activities of nearby blocks. The hotel may also, at some point, serve as the anchor to a larger block of residential and commercial developments on sites to its north and west. And if the success of this project is any indication of the likelihood of longer-term plans coming to fruition, a thriving neighborhood is sure to emerge here. "Interest has been robust," Veroneau says, in future high-end "market-

rate" apartments with considerable amenities and likely rental rates of \$2,500 to \$3,000 per month.

Why all the optimism and investment? Whatever the weather, our star is rising. Portland's explosion of new development is being fueled in large part by its status as a destination city. Even during a global economic downturn, the city has successfully added rooms to its downtown sub-market and continues to see major hotels proposed even outside of the downtown core, including one at the heart of the multi-million dollar multi-venue attraction known as

FROM LEFT: ARCHETYPE ARCHITECTS; STAFF ILLUSTRATION/ ROBERT WITKOWSKI/COURTESY J.B. BROWN & ASSOC/OPECHEE CONSTRUCTION CORPORATION

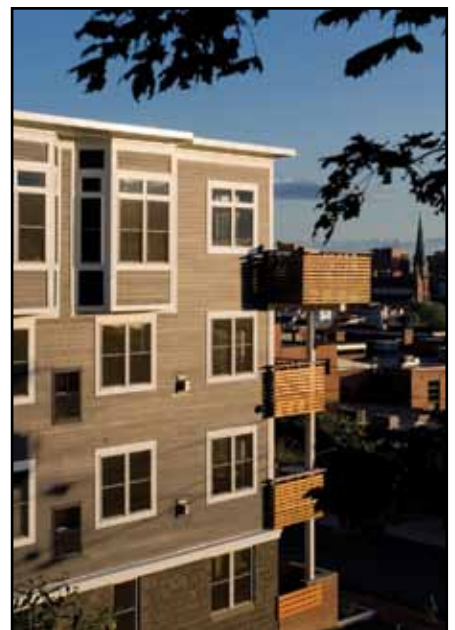


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WINDHAM FOLLOWS THE TREND



"People have been looking out this way for a long time," says Windham's economic development director **Tom Bartell**. "There's been a need for recognized, branded hotel space for business travel as well as for tourism. I keep hearing about business travelers calling in this area having to take hotel rooms in Portland because they can't find anything out here." He confirms that **Heyland Development** of York had their plan approved in January to build a 74-room **MainStay Suites** and 9,000 square feet of retail space in three phases on Route 302 in Windham. **MainStay Suites** is part of the **ChoiceHotels** network, focused on extended stays and rooms with kitchenettes.

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the **FOREFRONT AT THOMPSON'S POINT**. As proposed, the 30-acre site adjacent to the Downeaster train and Concord Trailways bus stations will house the Maine Red Claws basketball team, a hotel, a mixed-use event center, parking garage, restaurant, and office buildings. Success breeds success—of a year-round nature.

"But of course, a lot can go wrong," says Charles Colgan, professor of public policy and management at USM's Muskie School of Public Service. "I think the economy is poised to improve, and my forecasts show this. The hotel development reflects the increase in business travel to Portland" on top of its ever-increasing reputation as a tourist destination. But?

"Markets have a way of building things until they are over-supplied," he continues. "If they do all build these hotels and they all do open within a year or so of each other, rooms will be cheap. And this will be a great for the consumer.

"Hotels are like vegetable sellers—they have a perishable commodity. A room unsold tonight can't be sold tomorrow. They have



The Forefront at Thompson's Point, viewed from Interstate 295 in this rendering, is ambitiously planned to include a number of attractions beyond the hotel and restaurant.

to be competitive. An oversupply is not a bad thing for Portland." The great thing is, "someone out there is making some big bets on Portland, and each of these builders has its own strategy. They've calculated expected, acceptable vacancy rate numbers, but they won't share them."

"I'll be amazed if they're all going to pull it off," says Cape Elizabeth investment guru Evan Livada. "Obviously, interest rates are at the lowest in the history of the world, so it's a great time to borrow, and Portland is getting a tremendous reputation as the best little city in the country, but who knows?"

"I wish them all the luck. In the summer they'll do very well, but I don't see how they won't be fighting for market share in the winter... But they said we'd have too many

high-end restaurants, too, didn't they?" Livada laughs.

Additional demand for the city's unique attributes is sure to be generated through the enormous supply of newcomers destined to explore our city streets in the very near future.

"It's kind of a 'back to the future' trend in the way people travel," says Charles Colgan. "The car vacation, where you just keep driving, is fading because of the cost of gas. People are going back to destination vacations. You go somewhere, stay a week, and you want a place with a lot going on. Which is why you go to Portland."

And perhaps Great Diamond Island, too. A 44-room hotel in Diamond Cove, designed by busy Archetype Architects for Hart Hotels (whose in-town flagship is the Portland Har-



Research a Great Retirement

Former Washington DC area residents who own a summer farmhouse in Waldoboro, Carolyn Bryant and Don Sarles bought a cottage at Thornton Oaks in early 2010 as their winter home.

Carolyn says "Bowdoin College provides a fine library that I can use for musicological research (though officially retired, I've continued editing and writing for Oxford University Press). The local public library has also been extremely helpful in finding abstruse journals and scholarly books for me." Don, a long-time choral singer, has joined an excellent choir.

"We especially appreciate the strong sense of community at Thornton Oaks. We have formed close friendships and feel very much at home."

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The paradigm shift continues in Biddeford. **SCOTT JOSLIN**, chief operating officer of **THE MILLS AT PEPPERELL**, is heading up an effort to transform

Building 20 into an industrial-tech boutique hotel, with original windows and floors and exposed beams. The 6,000-square-foot, 180-seat restaurant, anchored by a well-known chef, will command the street level, along with an industrial-chic bar celebrating the textile mill's work ethic and Franco-American roots.

The next three floors will be given over to 40 rooms. Building No. 20, vacant since the days of West Point Pepperell, will include 10,000 square feet of conference/event space. The venture will receive a reported \$5 million from its owner, the Mills at Pepperell. Joslin's target market is "UNE alums & clientele, SMMC clients, business and Amtrak travelers, and summer travelers looking for off-the-beaten-path attractions."

bor Hotel) is under construction, with a projected opening in the spring of 2014.

Colgan, who studies coastal cities and their economies, suggests, "If you look at similar-sized East Coast cities, you'll see more hotel development. Charleston, South Carolina is a good example."

Charleston Area Convention and Visitors

Bureau deputy director Perrin Lawson echoes Colgan's conviction that when there is investment commitment from proven hotel groups, "you know there was a whole lot of study beforehand" of the local market to earn that commitment. "Plus, the classification of the tourism and hospitality industry has changed in recent years. It's

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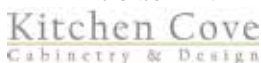
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legitimate economic development that is intertwined with other industries. Demand is not nearly as cyclical as it used to be; there are not nearly the peaks and valleys. Tourism today is a quality-of-life issue. You want to live here because it's the sort of place you'd want to visit if you didn't."

Portland's appeal is no longer limited to warmer months. No longer are we a stopover for those venturing to summer destinations downeast or elsewhere, a drab cluster of motor hotels with lackluster twin-lobster specials *à la Vallee's* at the former Exit 8. There's something singular about the heart of Portland (consider the new, redefining energy, for example, at Boone's restaurant on the waterfront), and it's entirely unrelated to Maine's status as a popular summertime getaway. Is it appropriate, then, to say Portland has "arrived?"

No. In light of its record of prosperity throughout the centuries, a more appropriate characterization is, "We're back." ■

» For more, visit at portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2013/03/new-hotels-extras



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2013 Calendar of Events

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April 12-14 ~ 23rd Annual Patriots Day Celebration

Join us as we go back to our roots, with historical characters walking the streets, musterings, and fife & drum concerts. Re-enactments, cookout, taste-tests, and craft fair round out the weekend.

May 11 ~ Aids Walk

May 25-27 ~ NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt Display

June 7-8 ~ Annual Chamber Music Festival

June 29 ~ Ogunquit Lifeguard Dash - All are welcome. Benefits Ogunquit Lifeguard Rescue equipment. 5K beach run.

July ~ July 4th Fireworks

August 22 ~ 40th Annual Sidewalk Art Show & Sale More than 70 artists showcase and sell their work on the sidewalks and parking lots of downtown Ogunquit. (Raindate: August 23rd)

September ~ Capriccio - A two-week long celebration of the arts. September 7th Capriccio Festival of Kites-Sponsored by Ogunquit Rotary Club and Ogunquit Performing Arts. 207-646-2261. (Rain date: September 8th)

September 14 ~ Annual Lobster Dash - 5 mile beach run. FMI visit www.lobsterdash.com.

October 25-27 ~ 10th Annual OgunquitFest A fun-filled weekend of fall-themed events including pumpkin and cookie decorating, costume parade, classic car show, craft show, fun house, high heel race, bed race, wagon rides, storytelling, and a scarecrow contest and more!

November 10 ~ 5th Annual Celebrations by the Sea Wedding Expo brings together a variety of experienced local vendors and professionals who can help you plan your special day by the sea.

December 7-8 & 13-15 ~ 27th Annual Christmas by the Sea Celebration. Concerts, caroling, tastings, visit with Santa, parades, tree lightings, Santa's Village, ornament making, storytelling, bonfire, hay rides, craft shows.

All Event dates and times are subject to change.

Your 4 Season Destination

OGUNQUIT MAINE

Beautiful Place by the Sea

OGUNQUIT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

36 Main Street (US Rt 1)
Ogunquit, ME 03907

207-646-2939

www.ogunquit.org

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