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Jane Capellini

Project: Hotel Chandler, NY

By **EVY APOSTOLATOS**

Jane Capellini believes great design is all about the fine details. So her Essex, CT-based firm, Capellini Design Associates, put that philosophy to work in the \$10-million renovation of the Hotel Chandler in Manhattan's Flatiron District.

Capellini's work on the project encompasses the 138-room boutique luxury hotel's lobby, cocktail and wine bar, library room and lounge, which are designed to feel as comfortable as home. Inspired by the building's innate charm, Capellini preserved the architecture's historical integrity and married it with contemporary comforts and distinctive furnishings to achieve a subtle elegance.

Capellini prides herself on making the design and execution run smoothly. She sees her role as identifying her client's taste, then refining it through expert choices that help "tell a story."

"One of the first things I look at for inspiration is my clients," she said. "I get a sense of what they are about, as the space has to be a reflection of them. It's really an evolution; there's usually a starting point, then I find one or two details that set me off and running. In this case, it was the building's facade and history that inspired me, as well as the idea of a circle or globe that speaks to the global customer we are catering to at the hotel."

Among the Hotel Chandler's design details are a built-in mosaic tile rug in the lobby, oversized arm chairs, a collection of 18th-century clock hands from Germany, copper details and the original facade. When Capellini first visited the hotel, she was struck by the exterior architectural details, determined to restore the dated marquis to its original splendor.

"I could not wait to tear the stone off and get it back to the way it should be," she said. "Beautiful architecture like that deserves to be as it was in its heyday. You can't ignore a building like this. It warms my heart that we are taking old architecture and making it the way it should be. I am very much a purist."

The renovation also incorporates natural materials, including glazed lava stone from France for the reception desk; slabs of hand-chiseled stone from Israel for the lobby floor; bulls-eye glass from New England; a mango root lamp from Guatemala; and French limestone keystones over the bar, which are carved in the shape of pineapples, long regarded in the Americas as symbols of hospitality. Such details have succeeded in granting Hotel Chandler membership in Small Luxury Hotels of the World. At present, it is one of only three New York City hotels to hold that status.

The hotel forgoes the over-the-top, hip style of many of the city's boutique hotels in favor of stately elegance that suits the classic architecture of the 1905 building. Capellini, who wanted to give the hotel a "residential feel," opted for "a cross between traditional and modern, which seems to be a style most people feel comfortable in," she said. "The whole space is transitional."

Consequently, the accommodations have an aura of calm and tranquility, making the hotel a true "home away from home," she said, adding that the blue hues and stark contrasts from the original design were replaced with warm colors. "The goal was to create a soothing palette, something earthier," Capellini said. "Design, especially in New York City, can get cold, stark and severe. I wanted to create something quiet, comfortable, earthy and organic that takes you out of the big city; a place where guests can wind down their day."

During demolition, Capellini's crew found a number of artifacts, most of which could not be salvaged, including mosaic floors and plaster molding. "At one point, we found a round theme going on, so I went with the idea of the circle, which is reminiscent of a globe. The world is really my client, so I wanted to design something appealing to many tastes and cultures. Bringing back the traditional shape of the original mosaic inlay floor is a perfect example of trying to take what we found and use it in the renovation."

Capellini's vision took nearly two years to complete. "I still have a sketch on a napkin of my original concept," she said. "Then, it became as big as life and became what it is today."

