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CersoStaicoff maintained the location of the reception area from the old Sheraton, but Hotel Murano's new glass desk, custom-designed by Orfeo Quagliata, now acts as a beacon to facilitate wayfinding (this page). Guests sense this unique gallery/hotel experience as soon as they step through the full-height glass front doors (opposite) and see extensive glass artwork, including a chandelier by Massimo Micheluzzi and the cast-glass sculpture "Pianist's Dress" by Karen LaMonte.



glass act

Art and hospitality merge to celebrate the eye-catching work of glass artisans at Hotel Murano, designed by CorsoStacoff

By Danine Alati
Photography by John Clark and David Phelps

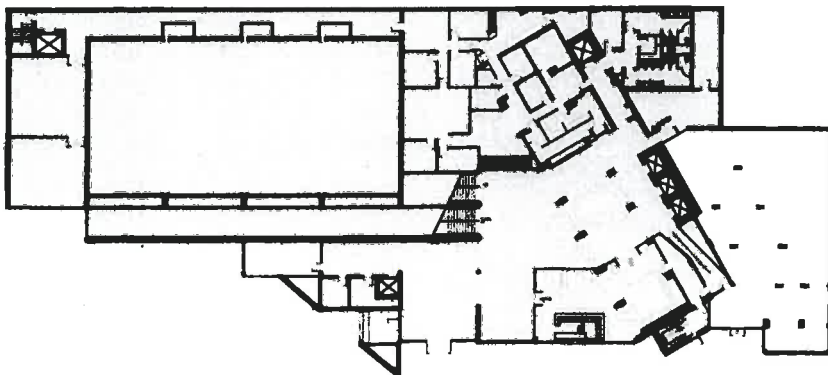
When a hotelier wants to transform a convention center Sheraton into a decidedly different hotel experience but is undecided as to exactly what that experience should be, the scenario could open up a world of opportunity to a design firm. To some, the task could be daunting. But Denise Corso and James Staicoff of Portland-based CorsoStaicoff took this opportunity to turn a bland, outdated 1980s hotel into a newly branded, first-rate luxury hospitality experience.

“Denise is brilliant at branding,” Staicoff says of his partner. “She comes up with a concept and brings it to life through all aspects of the project.” In this case, the designers considered the neighborhood surrounding the hotel, the emerging Tacoma, Wash., community that is home to the Museum of Glass and the glasswork master Dale Chihuly, and they saw glass as a fitting inspiration for what would become Hotel Murano, named for the Venetian island known for its exquisite glass artisans.

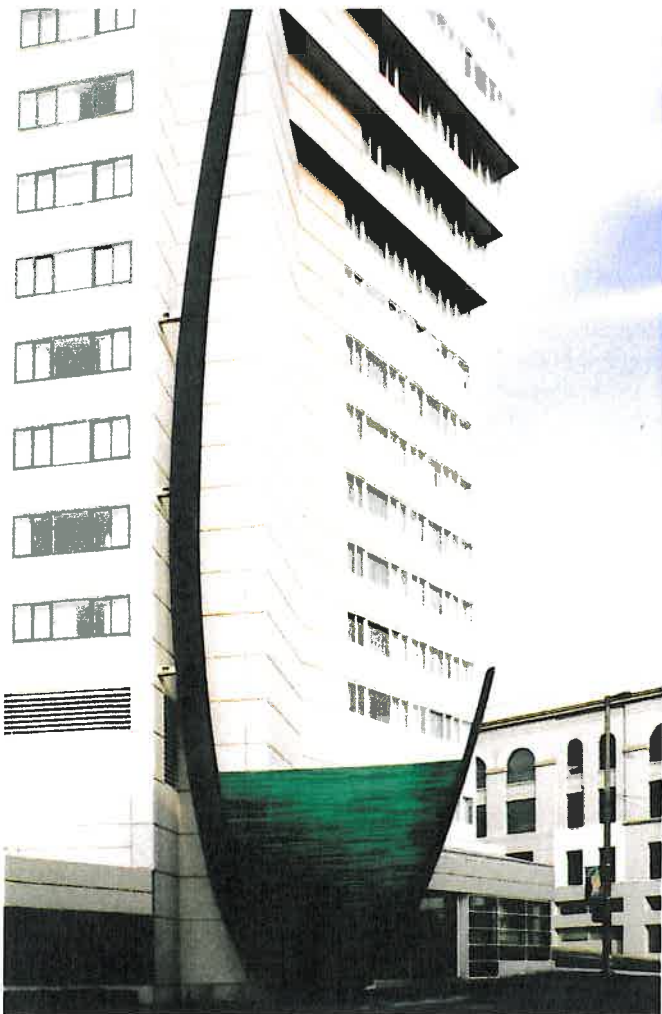


CorsoStaicoff worked closely with Tessa Papas, art curator for Provenance Hotels, which owns and operates five hotels including Hotel Murano. As a major art collector himself, Provenance Hotels CEO Gordon Sondland favored CorsoStaicoff's idea of centering the theme of this property on art glass. "We wanted the designers and our art curator Tessa Papas to integrate the modern aspects of the building's structure with international design and the international glass that we procured," says Sondland. "We wanted the design to push the art to the forefront by complementing it without overshadowing it."

"We knew the concept was a million-dollar idea," Corso recalls. "We went to Tessa and discussed the vocabulary of it. It was imperative that we worked with her. We trust her taste, and this collaboration was critical to the design." Through a long and arduous process, Papas flew all over the world discerning which glass artists should be highlighted in this unique gallery/hotel before finally selecting 21, one to be featured on each of the hotel's guestroom floors, and another 20 or so for the breakout area and secondary entrance off of the ballroom. The glass-clad elevators open on each floor to a display vignette of a particular artist, and the entire hallway is dedicated to his/her work. "Chihuly doesn't have a floor himself," Staicoff explains, "because he was so instrumental in the entire concept. This hotel is really about him and everything that he helped to create."



The backdrop in the corridors remains spare—black walls, spotlights, and carpeting in a striped pattern to make the halls feel wider and a black, white, and grey palette that does not distract from the colorful artwork. "The art is really the hero of the space," Staicoff says. And Corso adds, "In an effort to design an experience, the materials and colors were informed by the art. Most of the budget was spent in public areas and on the art, which challenged us to be more creative in private spaces." Guestrooms remain simple, maintaining a black, white, and grey palette and linear theme picked up from the hallway carpet, the glass reception desk, and glass wall behind the lobby bar.



The exterior steel plate and glass sculpture "Orizon" by Costas Varotsos (left) sets the tone for Hotel Murano. Gigantic kiln-formed, fused, cold-worked glass viking boats by Vibeke Skov, commissioned exclusively for the Hotel Murano, hover over the grand hallway to give the double-height space—down a level from the main lobby—a more human scale (opposite). Although the glass art penetrates every facet of the hotel, including the wall behind the lobby bar, designed by CorsoStacoff using stacked glass (above), designers avoided a cold museum aesthetic by employing warm woods, plush textures, low light levels, and even a fireplace in the lounge off the reception area (top).

design



With one glass artisan featured on each of the 21 guestroom floors (below), the backdrop of each corridor is kept spare, as not to compete with the art. With most of the budget spent on artwork and public spaces, the designers judiciously designed guestrooms using a simple palette of materials (above left and right).



The designers' goal was to create a variety of experiences all under one roof and integrate the art in the design scheme the whole way. "Rather than just placing pieces of art, we incorporated art in the architecture," says Corso. "Sometimes art galleries can feel ominous and cold. The question was how to keep the comfort of the hotel with this concept. The client was worried about the concrete and hard surfaces, but we inserted a Northwest feel and employed furnishings that made it more comfortable. It's not all metal, glass, and steel." Designers grouped furnishings, used low-levels of illumination, warm colors, copious amounts of wood, and plush textures, and a raised up lounge area even offers seating by a working fireplace.

From the custom steel plate and glass exterior sculpture "Orizon" by Costas Varotsos and the entry door pulls and glass reception desk by Orfeo Quagliata, to the lobby chandelier by Massimo Micheluzzi and gigantic viking boats by Vibeke Skov hovering over the grand hall, the role of glass art in this hotel is evident at every turn. "Guests always stop to comment on the art, which is of the utmost importance to us. We want our art-filled hotels to spark conversation among our guests.... They mingle and discuss what they see and think about the art," Sondland says, adding, "The Hotel Murano continues to attract the convention center crowd but has also opened up a new world of clientele for us. We see business people from all over the nation, and visitors who typically stayed in Seattle are now staying in Tacoma." The hotel bar is a main attraction, a destination spot for locals, as is the fourth-floor restaurant called Bite also designed by CorsoStaicoff. A holistic experience of art, architecture, food, and drink rolled into one "artfully articulated space," according to Sondland, Hotel Murano offers everything to quench the thirst of a true renaissance spirit. ☐

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