

BUSINESS

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\$20 MILLION RENOVATION

Downtown hotel going state of the (glass) art

The Sheraton Tacoma Hotel is undergoing a metamorphosis, and will soon emerge as an upscale property called Hotel Murano, themed around art.

BY C.R. ROBERTS
The News Tribune

Gone is the fusty, fuddy-duddy downtown hotel Tacoma has long called home away from home. The swank of the Sheraton cooled long ago, and now rebirth is on the way.

Come November, the hotel will change its name. By next year, all 319 rooms will have been remodeled.

The Sheraton will become Hotel Murano, and its heart will turn to glass.

Art glass.

Each floor will profile an artist who works in the medium of glass, whether blown, strewn, molded or otherwise folded from liquid into solid. Glass will reign in the revitalized lobby, and a trio of glass Viking longboats — 16, 14 and 12 feet long — will soar as nods to a Nordic myth beneath the ceiling of the lower corridor.

"The whole concept is about glass," said Portland freelance curator Tessa Papas, who has been hired by owner Provenance Hotels to bedeck the halls, rooms and other spaces with glass and related artwork.

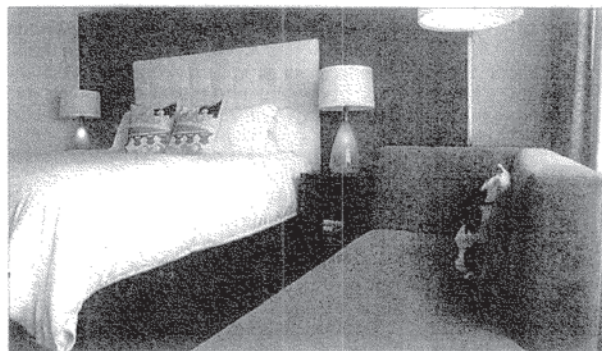
The concept extends to education, she said Wednesday, "to really educate people as to how people create their art. This is all about glass."

Papas has met with artists around the world — in Europe, Asia and throughout the Northwest — selecting works for the hotel.

Beyond glass, you can add a number of other new touches and amenities meant to tempt guests.

Get down. Don't like the standard pillow on your bed? Press the "Help Me" button on your phone to request something specifically soft, medium, firm or extra firm. Still needy? Ask for a U-neck or whole-body pillow.

It's not just the Gideons anymore. Need some comfort? You'll be able to order from the "Spiritual Menu." Choices include the King James or New American Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, the Torah, the Quran, the Book of Mormon and the Tao



Renovations at the Sheraton Tacoma Hotel are in the works, as this remodeled room on the 14th floor shows.

SHERATON

CONTINUED FROM D1

Te Ching. But what about succor for atheists or agnostics? Current Sheraton (and soon-to-be Hotel Murano) manager Mark Mathews quipped that the hotel might offer "a blank sheet of paper," but recovered to add that the search will continue for texts that properly represent that set of beliefs.

MyPod or theirs. Your iPod has a convenient in-room port. But let's say you forgot it. Press "Help Me" for a loaner preprogrammed with rock, jazz, reggae, hip hop, blues, classical or alternative rock.

Nuts and jolts. There's a mini-bar in case you're feeling a bit thirsty or peckish. The TV has a flat screen. The art on the wall weighs in with sketches from the floor's featured artist. There's Torretazione coffee and Tazo tea. Look for Aveda products in the bathroom. The lamps are blown

glass from Portland. And there will be a book featuring the featured the artists.

Near the top: A premier floor will offer a lounge proffering complementary wine and espresso. Two specialty suites will feature Bose stereos, wet bars and Jacuzzi tubs. On the 25th floor, a VIP lounge will display a work by Tacoma-born artist Dale Chihuly.

"Dale is ubiquitous," said Papas. "What he's wrought — he started this whole movement. This was an opportunity to pay homage to him."

Tacoma, she said, "is focused on glass."

She started looking for artists nearly a year ago, searching the Internet, doing her due artistic diligence for three months. She then visited studios, met the artists, and began tendering offers, explaining there was this concept for a glass-souled hotel in Tacoma.

Some of the artists asked, "Where?"

She explained, and nobody turned her down.

"Without exception, they've been thrilled," she said.

Portland-based Provenance Hotels, until January known as Aspen Hotel Group, is investing \$20 million in the project. Mathews said a typical hotel renovation tops out at \$8,000 "per key," which figures the total investment divided by the number of rooms.

The Murano clocks in at nearly eight times that amount or more than \$62,000 per room.

The project will be complete by the end of January, Mathews said. The name will change on Nov. 12, and renovations will continue two floors at a time with a buffer between occupied rooms and workers "so that guests aren't impacted."

The real impact might well be seen on the faces of the folks who come to town expecting what they used to know.

"To the best of my knowledge, no other hotel in the world has a specific theme of glass. I think this is really a first," Papas said.

"We're no longer a corporate hotel."

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Freelance curator Tessa Papas of Portland kneels beside glass artwork on the Dante Marioni-themed 14th floor of the Sheraton hotel in downtown Tacoma. Papas is in charge of the hotel's glass-inspired renovation. On Nov. 12, the Sheraton's name will change to Hotel Murano.