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Made Minnesotan

BY R.J. WEICK

Nearly two years ago, the infrastructural groundwork for the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport's inaugural world-class, luxury international hotel began to take shape in true artistic form as the 12-story-tall building began to stretch toward the sky and the distinctive folded curtain wall element rippled across its face. Travelers from across the globe could glimpse as the Minnesotan-envisioned InterContinental Hotel came together throughout the design and construction process from the soon-to-be connected Terminal 1-Lindbergh.

Scheduled to officially debut this summer, the InterContinental, Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport hotel brings together the sophisticated refinement and architectural detailing travelers have come to expect of luxury international hotels, with the distinctive style and material palette connecting it to the local region. The nearly \$110 million collaborative hotel project, which was made possible by the Minneapolis-based Graves Hospitality and Boston-based Intercontinental Real Estate Corporation, drew upon the expertise of another local Minnesotan firm of designers, architects, artisans, and innovators known as RSP Architects.

"Part of the reason we won the project were the initial design concepts. We wanted to really have a connection to the local geography and the local vernacular," said Scott Steinkamp, AIA, LEED AP, senior associate and senior project design architect with RSP

Architects.

"We did that through the use of materials—using some local stone as well as granite on the flooring—and then the trick was melding that with the aesthetic of the airport, which has more of an engineered look to it," Steinkamp added.

RSP Architects, a Minneapolis-based firm established in 1978, has provided a range of services, such as architectural design services, workspace strategies, master planning, interior design, and facility management analytics, to nationally and internationally based clients. Throughout the last four decades, the practice has grown to more than 300 employees and its portfolio to comprise diverse projects in markets such as hospitality, corporate, government, retail, education, and science and technology, among others.

The firm initially became involved in the project through a competitive bid process established by the Metropolitan Airport Commission and was selected as lead architect for the project, working collaboratively with Graves Hospitality and general contractor PCL Construction. RSP Architects developed renderings showcasing a strong sense of place influenced by local and natural elements inherent to Minnesota.

"Giving it that engineered look and mixing in some of the local materials and local flavor really from the beginning of the project helped us win," Steinkamp said. "One of the main parts of the design of the exterior of the building was this folded curtain wall

element. It is nine stories tall and is meant to mimic the rippling of water and the lakes as you are flying into the airport.”

Distinctive and dynamic, the curtain wall system was one of the design elements that carried throughout the entire process and integrated with an engineered-inspired aesthetic of the airport. Other aviation-inspired elements shine through in the sweeping lines on the roof as well as the winged porte-cochere for the front entrance of the InterContinental, Minneapolis—St. Paul Airport.

“It is really tying those elements together in the building,” Steinkamp said. “The other part of it is the InterContinental flag. They have more of an international presence I would say, so the other part of the design as we moved past the exterior was combining the local aesthetic with a more international flavor, giving it a little more sophistication as far as how we detailed our materials and used our materials within the space.”

Acknowledging the importance of the first impression the airport—and by extension, its first international hotel—can have for a city, RSP Architects strove to incorporate a palette of stone, wood, and glass reflective of the lakes, rivers, waterfalls, and warm woods found in the state. The hotel also pays homage to Minnesota’s reputation as an arts destination by featuring local artists and the creation of an Art Park in front of the building.

“From the beginning, there was a high level of creativity that we brought toward



solving this design. Beyond that, our team exhibited an ability and willingness to partner with all of the stakeholders for the project—to the benefit of not only the project itself, but the airport as well,” said Courtney Kuch, associate principal and project manager with RSP Architects.

“It’s really exciting for us to be able to design the first hotel at the Minneapolis airport, also realizing it is the first impression of the airport and the city for millions of travelers every year. It is very exciting think-

ing in those terms,” Kuch added.

With 12 stories and 291 rooms—including nine suites—two restaurants, a penthouse-level observation bar, signature InterContinental Club Lounge, business center, world-class spa, and nearly 25,000 square-feet of convention and associated spaces, the InterContinental, Minneapolis—St. Paul Airport aims to be an ultimate destination for both leisure and business guests. In line with its InterContinental Hotel and Resort brand, the hotel at MSP International Airport blends contemporary luxury while emphasizing its distinctive location through elements such as Kasota stone, Cold Spring granite, and integrated architectural art.

Nina Bouten, CID, LEED AP, senior project interior designer and associate at RSP Architects, said overall the hotel’s interior was intentionally kept warm due to the cooler climate in Minnesota, while also achieving a timeless aesthetic aligned with the InterContinental Hotels and Resorts brand.

“[InterContinental] was pretty open to us really establishing the design and the palette on the interior and their main concern was that it conveyed a sense of luxury and felt local, but also had the details that were there to convey the luxury brand,” Bouten said.

With its refined mix of textures—such as stone, glass, wood, and leather—warm ambiance, and amenities, the hotel is meant to be a retreat and a place of relaxation for guests, as well as a destination for business travelers and corporate events. The hotel’s

rooms are nearly 365 square-feet and feature local materials and high-end furnishings—some of which have been procured through Neil Locke & Associates out of Chicago—and its presidential suites on the top floor offer two bedrooms and a living space overlooking the Twin Cities.

From the fitness center and spa located on the third level providing convenient access to both hotel guests and airport travelers from the security checkpoint, and the dining spaces on the ground level, to the penthouse-level bar with floor-to-ceiling windows providing a panoramic view of the airport, river, and downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul, Bouten indicated the team strove take the interior selections and transform them to another level of sophistication through its use and detailing.

Rich stone is used to elevate the spa experience; an open staircase in the lobby creates an almost artistic and architectural statement as it ascends to the second level corporate, meeting, and ballroom spaces; and intimate club lounge and fireplace vignettes blend an inviting atmosphere with its fabrics, hues, textures, and ceiling detailing.

“The lobby is really designed for multiple functions, so there is a small dining area, grab-and-go coffee, a variety of seating types—lounge seating, seating set up if you are meeting someone or an Uber—there are high-tops, and plug-ins for your laptop,” Bouten said. “It is really set up and conducive to different vignettes and different functions.”



The design, which features high-end, high-quality, long-lasting finishes combined with a local aesthetic on the interior, also took its location and accessibility to the MSP International Airport into such as the Transportation Security Administration requirements for the climate-controlled skyway to Concourse C.

“We have a security checkpoint within the hotel that directly serves the airport terminals. There was a lot of coordination involved with that piece—being it is within the hotel footprint—with the TSA folks and getting the right size, location, and security requirements built into that part of the project,” Steinkamp said.

The skyway connecting the hotel to the terminal incorporates innovative technology as part of the TSA security checkpoint. Known as an unstaffed exit, the technology allows travelers to move from a secured location within an airport to an unsecured location without having it monitored by staff.

“We essentially paired with Dormakaba Group that makes this technology,” Steinkamp said. “It is a series of doorways you have to walk through and it locks down so it does not allow traffic back into the airport in the wrong direction.”

The overall height and exterior palette was also influenced by its airport proximity, as Federal Aviation Administration requirements dictate specific heights for buildings to maintain proper clearance, and selecting materials to mitigate noise levels, according to Kuch.

“We spent a fair amount of time, effort,

and energy making sure things like the curtain wall system and the exterior envelope had the right amount of sound transmission resistant qualities,” Kuch said.

For the InterContinental Hotel and Resort brand, each hotel in its portfolio is distinctive in style and is reflective of its surrounding environment, from an iconic and historic building exuding in Napoleonic grandeur to tranquil retreats in the South Pacific. The InterContinental, Minneapolis—St. Paul Airport weaves aviation-inspired elements among architectural and artistic tributes to its nearby Twin Cities while combining form with function with its seamless access by road, light rail, and skyway.

“Design to me is really coming up with a solution that satisfies the client, it is aesthetically pleasing, it is also works programmatically as well to serve the function of the space,” Bouten said. “It is bringing all of that together in one and finding a solution that is cohesive.”

As the first international luxury hotel opens this summer at MSP International Airport, it will undoubtedly live up to its home state as a veritable star of the north.

