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PARADISE FOUND

PUTTING LBC ON THE MAP WITH A VACATION MARVEL

by KATIE PEGLER

Upon entering the double, white-paneled and glass doors into Downtown Long Beach's new 138-room luxury boutique hotel, only one word comes to mind: stunning. Opened just under two months ago, the modern and sleek building is in the epicenter of the Pike Rainbow Harbor, with all of life's necessities within walking distance. Put simply, **AVIA** Long Beach offers everything guests could dream of in sleeping quarters for the night, whether that includes hipsters, solo business travelers, a cultural creative group of friends or a "we have kids, but we're still cool" family on vacation.

The high-rise cityscape in the background and urban chic vibe is almost a bit confusing when checking into AVIA off Bayside Drive, making guests second-guess if they accidentally ended up in San Francisco, New York City, Amsterdam or Tokyo on a perfect late summer afternoon. Not so; welcome to Downtown Long Beach. Yet there's an ironic twist. This urban destination is one of the first four new-concept luxury boutique hotels from LodgeWorks, L.P., a Wichita, Kansas-based hospitality development and management company.

How does a Midwest company capture the cool and serene vibe of the hotel? With the assistance and input from local tastemakers, LodgeWorks recruited top hospitality industry specialists, including

designers Colum McCartan (Hotel Vitale and Hotel Adagio in San Francisco and Le Parker Meridien in New York), Heller-Manus of San Francisco, J. Webb Design & Associates of Kansas City and Krehbiel Architecture and Law/Kingdon, Inc., in Wichita.

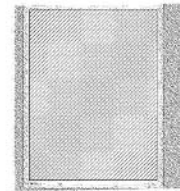
The selection of design talent paid off and it is immediately apparent with the lobby. With spa-green floor tiles, wrapped columns with lighted niches reserved for art, a custom-designed mirror and tree sculpture, it immediately sets the tone to wander inside the AVIA Kitchen, Wine Bar + Lounge and outdoor courtyard — all adjacent to the main lobby and registration.

At check in, guests are told they might fall much too in love with the room's bed, and are urged to make it to the bar for a nightly wine tasting. Also, under no circumstances should the sunset over Sunset Harbor from the Rooftop Pool Terrace be missed. After ascending in an elevator, guests walk down blue-halogen-lighted hallways that are immediately calming, and the adventure at AVIA continues upon entering the suite. With the dual-curtains open, the rooms offer breathtaking views of the harbor and Aquarium Way walkway (which mimics ocean waves, but momentarily convinces one that a rollercoaster was recently installed next to the Ferris wheel).

With a small living room with leather couch, desk, mini-bar with sensors (yes, touch it and the system knows immediately), wood-paneled swivel with built-in flat-screen TV and nooks, crannies and mirrors galore, the room is already perfect. But one glance into the bedroom area, however, and it becomes apparent AVIA is not only exactly what the region needed, but will also lend a magical escape to anyone preoccupied with "reading the writing on the wall" as he or she drifts off to sleep.

"Don't wake me up / Don't wake me up if I'm dreaming / California Dreams / Just let me lay here in the sun / Until my dream is done / Palm trees, ocean breeze, let's go cruising ..." This is the quote on the backside of the wood-paneled swivel, written backwards in silver letters and therefore only readable when looking into the circular mirror over the bed and off center — meant to mimic the setting sun. Though wishful thinking would make the words have a better backstory, they're the lyrics from "California Dreamin'," the opening theme song on the 1990s *California Dreams* sitcom.

All rooms feature McCartan-designed furniture and lighting fixtures, while the bathrooms boast Turkish marble with walk-in showers and waterfall showerheads. Other in-room amenities include a refreshment bar, featuring Dean & DeLuca snacks,



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complimentary wired and wireless Internet, MP3 docking station with alarm clock and radio, and blackout drapes. And that delightful bed? It offers Italian cotton matelasse coverlets with crisp linens and pillows galore.

As for the AVIA Kitchen and Wine Bar + Lounge — each on separate sides of the lobby — it's not the least stuffy or pretentious. The company strived for "relaxation with a touch of elegance," aiming for the atmosphere of a cocktail party. The AVIA Kitchen, set up like a true "cook's kitchen," offers an expansive daily breakfast buffet

alongside local signature dishes, while also featuring small plates and tastings during the evening, highlighting culinary traditions and fresh ingredients of California.

The Wine Bar + Lounge continues with this close-to-home idea by showcasing small production wineries from California and the Northwest, as well as finely crafted microbrews, premier wines and premium cocktails. For these two concepts, LodgeWorks worked with the Chicago-based Phillips+Co., food and beverage expert Paul Keeler and professional Adam Ghali.

Before departing for a night on the town,

which all AVIA properties embrace, a stop at the eighth-floor Rooftop Pool Terrace is necessary. Including a swimming pool deck, a bar, three private cabanas, a telescope and a patio that channels 1960s Palm Springs, as well as an array of bamboo and ice plants, it's tranquil, modern and fun with 360-degree views of the skyline and harbor.

Perhaps the only complaint with AVIA Long Beach is that all guests must eventually check out, although a monthly reservation is always an option.

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