

BACK TO BASICS **Boutique**



Avia, a New Hotel Collection by Lodgeworks and McCartan, Debuts in 2009

BY REBECCA GOLDBERG

Believe it or not, there are some destinations in this vast country that have not been served by the boutique sensibility. They do not have a hotel that speaks to and exclusively fits within the community while elevating its style and voice — yet.

Lodgeworks, a Wichita-based firm which has incubated several successful hotel brands, has created a new hotel collection, Avia, to meet that need with design firm McCartan.

Four culturally rich, offbeat locations were identified: Napa, Savannah, Long Beach and The Woodlands (in Texas). The Lodgeworks team felt that with the right product, they could tap these markets and create a niche for regional hotels that give the guest a strong sense of place.

As Cheryl Doll, Lodgeworks VP of brands and marketing described, the path that built Avia was inclusive.

"We asked local stakeholders and tastemakers what would serve their destination," said Doll. "It was interesting to see the connectivity in their responses. These are not primary urban markets, however, these markets have travelers and locals that have experience with those products. All were hungry to see the boutique experience land in their cities."

From there, the design story began to develop. Doll, and Lodgeworks president Tony Isaacs, sought out Colum McCartan, principal of McCartan.

"We knew that we could deliver personalized service," said

Issacs. "And we knew that we needed a design element to give the guest something interesting to stay in. We want to offer an unusual stay and at the end of the weekend, they're going to say, 'I really learned something about Napa or Savannah and I had a gracious host.'"

McCartan was challenged to create a new hotel concept, on a strict budget, and one that would feel homey. The offbeat locations of the hotel served as an advantage creating an implicit residential feel. The project was in line with McCartan's philosophy — that design is at its best when it fills a need.

"This is what design is about — solving problems," said McCartan.

The hotels are meant to reflect locations which are quite carefully edited, yet there are some constants in the spaces.

"In the guestrooms, the bathroom experience has been increased dramatically in size and each hotel has witty plays on furnishings and colors," said McCartan.

The common areas of the hotel are not overly crafted to build a scene. Instead, they hark back to the idea that the space should be an outlet to the community. The properties feature a boutique restaurant space; Avia Kitchen and Wine Bar, which gives guests the option to stay in and take advantage of the residential hospitality.

"I like something that Cheryl said. 'It's like being at a great dinner party rather than a great hotel,'" said McCartan. **BD**