



SAN FRANCISCO GOES GREEN

From the boutiques to the big brands, hotels across San Francisco are taking sustainability increasingly seriously, finds Terri Peters.

As you might expect from a city long associated with the hippy movement, San Francisco is streets ahead of most other US cities in its approach to sustainability. 'Green' buildings, recycled materials and local and organic practices are plentiful. The city's taxis are Toyota Prius hybrids, there is a city-wide ban on plastic bags, and recently San Fran's largest convention centre was fitted with solar panels.

Whilst government is imposing sustainability through tighter building regulations and local directives, there is also increasing demand for sustainable goods and services from visitors who are choosing environmentally friendly transportation, conference facilities, and hotels. "San Francisco is at the cutting edge of the environmental movement," according to Joe D'Alessandro, President and CEO of the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau. "It's really part of the city's personality."

Green tourism may be on the increase, but like all US cities, San Francisco is suffering from falling occupancy levels and room rates due to the recession. According to research on the SFCVB website from PKF Consulting, in February 2009, the occupancy rate for hotels in San Francisco was only 57.6% (with an average price paid \$153.03), compared with 73.9% (and \$192.56) in February 2008. This is bad news for a city with tourism as its largest industry.

Nevertheless San Francisco's laid back attitude, vibrant mix of cultures and stunning natural resources will continue to attract people to the city – around 16 million visitors each year, generating around \$8 billion for the local economy according to SFCVB.

Boutique hotels are part of the city's charm, with recent expansion into the SoMa (South of Market Street) district. Here there have been several exciting new offerings such as the Good Hotel. With a focus on social sustainability and philanthropy, the Good Hotel is a unique property, with a local vibe. It shares its 'green' philosophy with its sister Joie de Vivre property, the Hotel Carlton, the city's first hotel with solar panels. Herve Blondel, General Manager of the new Good Hotel and former GM of the Hotel Carlton, says "It [green] may be a big word but if you look at San Francisco, we don't have landfill and the goal by 2020 or earlier is not to send any trash outside the city. Everything will have to be recycled." In fact, JdV plans to make all their properties LEED® certified by 2010.

It's not just independent hoteliers such as Joie de Vivre who are taking sustainability seriously in San Francisco. The InterContinental San Francisco, which opened in February 2008, has also announced plans to achieve LEED® certification by early 2010. Working in conjunction with the U.S. Green Building Council, the hotel is applying for certification in the "existing build operations and maintenance" category (EBOM) and will be evaluated on every facet of the property from construction and design elements to the types of amenities used in hotel guestrooms. "From working with local organic and sustainable farmers at our restaurant Luce, to our comprehensive recycling program throughout the property, we are constantly striving to run our business as efficiently and responsibly as possible for both our guests and our community," says General Manager Peter Koehler.

INTERCONTINENTAL SAN FRANCISCO



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF IHG PLC



Patri Merker Architects, Hornberger + Worstell, and BraytonHughes Design Studio have collaborated on designs for the new InterContinental San Francisco, owned by Continental Development Corporation.

The new InterContinental Hotel in San Francisco is a 32-storey hotel with a glossy glass façade that offers guests unparalleled views across the city and harbour with floor-to-ceiling windows. The four-star hotel (part of the global InterContinental Hotels Group) opened February 2008 in the SoMa district (South of Market Street) adjacent to the Moscone convention centre.

Designed by two local offices, with Patri Merker Architects as Design Architects and Hornberger + Worstell as Architects of Record, it is known locally as 'the blue radiator' or 'the blue Popsicle' because of the distinctive blue curtain walling and the supposed formal resemblance to a 1930's radiator. From the

outside, it looks more like an office building than a hotel (or a Popsicle) and there is no hiding the building's bulk. It's the largest hotel to be built in the city in twenty years, with approximately \$200m total investment. The hotel has 550 guestrooms and suites, a ground level bar and restaurant as well as extensive spa and conference facilities. Bucking the city-wide trend of refurbishing historic buildings for smaller hotels, this is the first newbuild hotel of any size in the city in three years.

Once inside, the most striking aspect of the hotel is the abundance of natural light. General Manager Peter Koehler explains: "All of our guestrooms have floor-to ceiling windows with fantastic city and or bay

views. Our guests love that. The presence of natural light in the meeting rooms are a great advantage for productivity and creativity." Even on cloudy days, the view from the hotel at nearly every level is striking in this relatively low area of the city. "Our spa and fitness centre have floor-to-ceiling windows, and guests can enjoy and relax in any one of our three outdoor terraces which provide pleasant venues," says Koehler. The lobby interior aims for a contemporary but not trendy feel, with a reception desk sheathed in a back-lit semi-transparent onyx and areas of muted custom carpet and travertine stone flooring. Interior designers BraytonHughes selected a striking mosaic tile pattern on the floor that leads to the bar



OPPOSITE PAGE (LEFT): The InterContinental building has been nicknamed the blue radiator by locals (RIGHT) BraytonHughes' designs for the lobby lounge use areas of mufed carpet and travertine stone flooring alongside timber wall panelling THIS PAGE (LEFT) The Luce restaurant (RIGHT) Bar 888

and restaurant. Timber wall panelling with accents of textured glass create a varied interior atmosphere. Lobby Bar 888 specialises in a wide selection of grappa and guests can dine on local wines and produce in the aptly named 'Luce' restaurant. Over the grand stair is a sculptural fibre-optic chandelier that leads guests up to three full levels of conference rooms and ballrooms of various sizes. The sixth floor is the location of a Club Lounge for frequent guests (or regular guests on payment of a fee). The sixth floor also houses a full service spa with ten treatment rooms, all using local, organic products. The sky-lit indoor lap pool looks inviting and the spa is wired to allow guests to bring their iPod and

hear their own music while getting treatments in the rooms. From material details such as the bamboo flooring to the local, organic product selection in the spa, there is a sustainable theme found throughout the hotel. "Our I-Spa uses 100% micro-fibre sheets and amenity robes to cut down on drying time and expendable energy during the cleaning process," explains Koehler. The hotel is arranged with only 22 guest rooms per floor to avoid the maze of endless corridors of many large hotels. 300-threadcount Frette linens, king size beds, flatscreen TVs, futuristic VIOP telephones, and iPod docking stations are standard, but the view is anything but. The rooms feature neutral finishes and

fabrics with accents of colors drawn from the region and city, such as "Golden Gate Bridge International Orange." Each room has timber furnishings, mosaic glass tiles, and locally designed light fixtures. The in-room work areas, key to the comfort of a business hotel, were designed to be as user-friendly as possible, following consultation with a focus group of thirty companies and user groups including meeting planners. Changes implemented as a result include higher level electricity sockets for laptop and phone chargers and in the bathroom, suggestions that the movable shaving mirror should be at the right height and position. The hotel has many environmental features and



ABOVE: Guestrooms feature floor-to-ceiling windows offering panoramic views over the San Francisco skyline

Koehler explains that the InterContinental plans to be certified by LEED® certified in 2010. Ongoing green practices include in-room recycling bins, a linen and towel reuse program, as well as a composting system that takes food waste from the restaurant, bar, banquets, and staff cafeteria and recycles it into fertilizer for local vineyards.

But it's in the stunning views of the city that the InterContinental really impresses its guests. The most striking example, is the two-level presidential suite at the top of the hotel. The suite has wrap around windows and an amazing 180 degree view. The 2000ft² suite features muted colours and textured furnishings, with many local art pieces handpicked by

Melanie Lundquist, wife of Continental Development Corporation's president Richard C Lundquist. With a dining room for eight, a luxurious lounge and bedroom, an extensive office and two separate entrances, there would never be any need to leave. In the bathroom, a large soaking tub set against a window frames a perfect view of the Golden Gate Bridge and Marin Headlands beyond. Whether you're staying in a standard room on the tenth floor, relaxing in the Terrace suite, sunbathing on one of the roof decks overlooking the city or even exercising in the fitness centre, there's a feeling that once inside this urban oasis, the city of San Francisco is truly at your feet.

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

INTERCONTINENTAL SAN FRANCISCO
888 Howard Street, San Francisco,
CA 94103, USA
Tel: +1 415 6166500
www.intercontinentalsanfrancisco.com

- 🏠 550 guestrooms
- 🍴 Luce Restaurant
- 🍸 Bar 888
- 🧘 I-Spa, Health Club
- + 43,000ft² of meeting and function space including 21 meeting rooms and two ballrooms