



# SAN FRANCISCO GOES GREEN

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

**A**s 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.

WORDS BY TERRI PETERS

# HOTEL VERTIGO SAN FRANCISCO



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF HOTEL VERTIGO

Thomas Schoos has created the interiors for Personality Hotels' renovation of the historic hotel where Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film 'Vertigo' was set.

Opened in February 2009, Hotel Vertigo will be familiar to Hitchcock fans, who may recognise it as the Empire Hotel from the 1958 classic film 'Vertigo', but this extensively refurbished design hotel on lower Nob Hill, San Francisco, caters to more than just film buffs. The ambitious three year, \$5 million renovation of the six storey hotel is nearly complete and will feature new interiors in the bar, lobby, restaurant and all rooms. The 120-room property has been a hotel since the 1920s when it housed a Prohibition-era 'speakeasy'. This newest renovation has seen the interiors go from run-down and floral to high-concept and graphic thanks to interior designer Thomas Schoos.

Hotel Vertigo is part of the family-owned Personality Hotels Group headed by Yvonne Lembi-Detert, a local interior designer turned entrepreneur. Personality Hotels is the largest privately-owned boutique hotel operator in San Francisco, with seven distinctive properties, all in renovated historic buildings. Thomas Schoos, a German-born, Los Angeles-based designer is known for his theatrical designs for nightclubs and restaurants as well as homes for American movie stars such as Jessica Simpson and Will Smith. Currently working on hotels in Dubai and Thailand, Schoos also provided designs for the transformation of another Personality Hotels group property, the Hotel Frank. Hotel Vertigo's glamorous, double-height lobby has

a grand staircase, once used by the scriptwriters on Vertigo as inspiration, with large windows onto the street. Airy and luxurious with original 1920s columns and gleaming white Carrara marble floors, the lobby is an impressive space, with a long white leather sofa running the length of one wall. There is history here and the hotel plays on the Vertigo theme at every chance. Hitchcock films are screened on the wall and 'Madeline' biscuits (named after a character in the movie) are offered to guests at check in. Staff wear bespoke grey uniforms subtly inspired by the film. Eccentric design touches include kitsch porcelain dog and cat figurines that sit in the windows facing onto the street, like faithful pets



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Thomas Schoos' design scheme feature a colour palette of white and orange with distinctive white horsehead lamps and 300 threadcount linen bedding with orange piping

waiting to greet returning guests.

Guestrooms feature a vibrant palette of white contrasted with bright orange accents, such as crisp white 300 threadcount Italian linen bedding with orange piping. "We have already had inquiries into how to purchase our chairs, mirrors and duvet sets," says General Manager Peter Friedman. In the bathroom, guests find a custom dark walnut vanity with crocodile-skin patterned bathroom tiles and a bath with oversized rain showerhead. Low vintage chairs in the bedroom have been re-upholstered in glossy vinyl stitched with the hotel's logo. Sheer orange drapes complement Thomas Schoos's signature plaid window coverings. Highlights include vintage

looking decorations in the rooms, such as ornate white mirrors and horse-head lamps on the glossy white lacquered nightstands. The penthouse is named Number Thirteen (a number very rare in hotels) in honour of Hitchcock's very first, yet uncompleted film. The five suites are named after characters in the film: The Carlotta, The Midge, The Gavin, The Madeleine and The Scottie. The view down the main staircase from the top floor is appropriately vertiginous.

"San Francisco is a melting pot of cultures and varying global influences. Throughout it all, however, it retains its sense of neighborhood charm and comfort," says Schoos. "We aimed to bring a sense of international appeal into a space that still feels like home."

## EXPRESS CHECKOUT

**HOTEL VERTIGO**  
940 Sutter Street, San Francisco,  
CA 94109, USA  
Tel: +1 415 885 6800  
[www.hotelvertigo.com](http://www.hotelvertigo.com)

- ➔ 101 guestrooms
- 🍷 Tyler Florence Restaurant (opening Autumn 2009)
- + Meeting space