

Cahners

INTERIOR DESIGN

\$7.95

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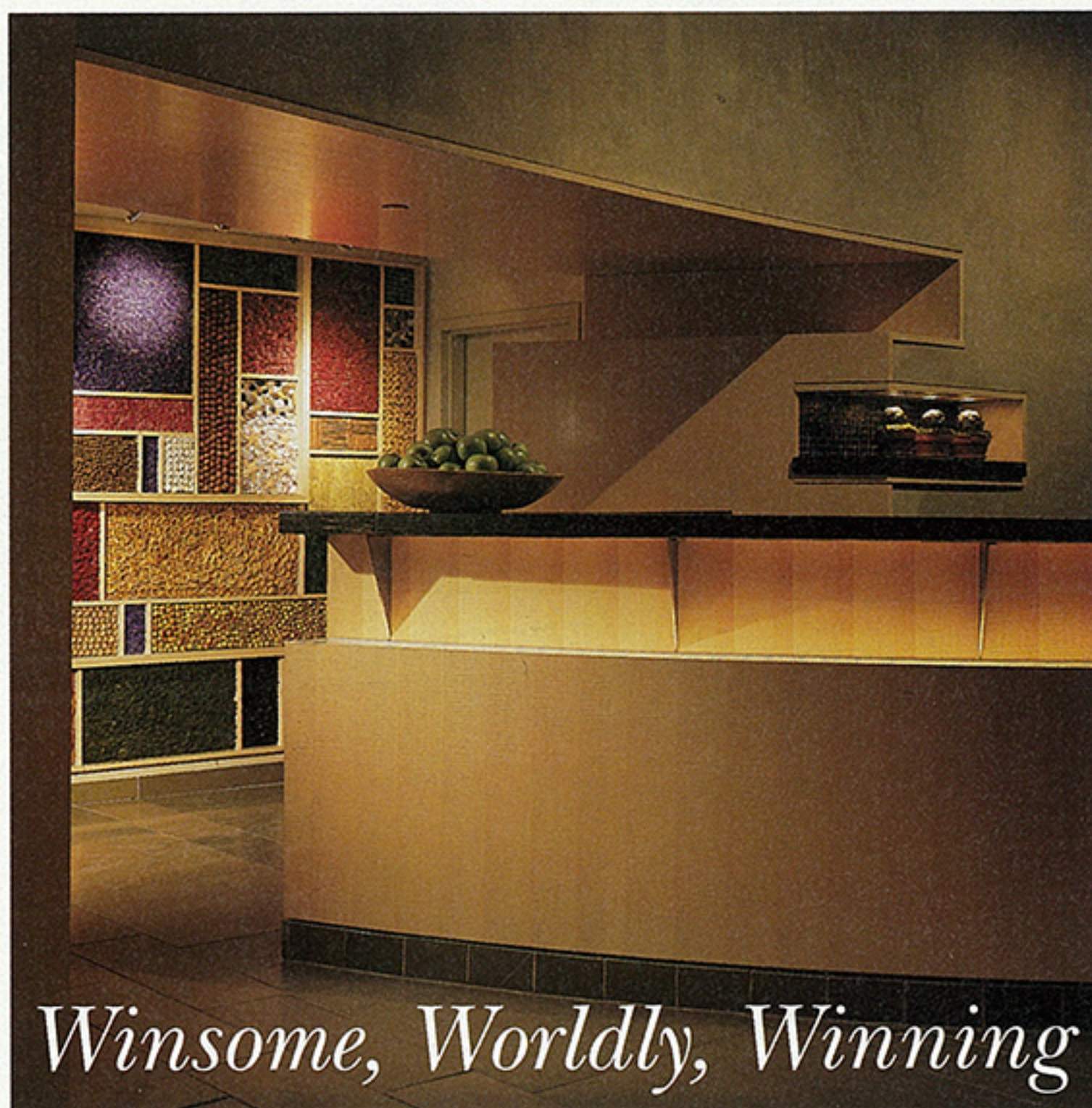
Checking into Rockwell Group's W Hotel
Coast to Coast: Designers' Own Residences
Salons on the Cutting Edge



\$7.95 US / \$8.95 CAN



W identifies Manhattan's newest designer hotel, magically conjured by Rockwell Group.



Winsome, Worldly, Winning

WITHIN THE SMALL SPAN of Manhattan's East 47th to 51st Streets at Lexington Avenue are, on the west-facing side alone, six major hospitality centers. Each occupies sizable premium space and offers hundreds of guest-rooms; all have, over the years, changed ownership and names more than once. Yet despite some variance in exterior treatments, there has been no perception of individuality for any one hotel: façades appear to blend into one another, forming a bland blanc-mange of anonymity. None, in short, has an identity or recognition factor associated with the particular property (with one exception: in the 1970s, there appeared a flashy parvenu named the Summit, not surprisingly the work of Morris Lapidus; it faded from the Manhattan hotel scene quietly).

But with the advent of W New York Hotel—owned by Starwood Hotels &

Resorts Worldwide, Inc., and designed by Rockwell Group—the picture at Lexington between 49th and 50th has changed. Most recently flying the flag of Doral, the newcomer (W hereafter) arrests initial attention by dint of its awning-like overhang formed by seven tempered glass panels jutting out across the sidewalk; tilted slightly upward, the transparent panels are propped by beams and columns clad with brushed stainless steel. After dark, when fiber-optic spotlights raise specks of sparkle, the entire configuration brings to mind a species of sleek industrial sculpture. It not only provides shelter for queued-up taxi seekers but also sets apart W from its rivals at either side.

To begin the reconstruction process of the 1928-built structure, the Rockwell team—composed of 33 members headed by senior associate-in-charge Edmond Bakos and →

Opposite: Break-out area leading to one of five function rooms. Arches hold fiber-optic lights beamed at steel-and-glass canopy facing Lexington Avenue.

Above: Reception desk, set against end portion of "Garden Wall" with collage of seed pods, leaves, dried grasses, and more.

CUSTOM CLUB CHAIRS: ARTCO (FABRICATION); FABRICS: ARKAY; JOSEPH NOBLE; CARNEGIE; GRETCHEN BELLINGER. CUSTOM SIDE TABLES: ARTCO. SIDE TABLE/STOOL, TABLE LAMP WITH ASH VENEER SHADE: CHRIS LEHRECKE THROUGH PUCCI INTERNATIONAL. FLOWERS, DRIED FRUITS THROUGHOUT: TRISH O'SULLIVAN. CARPET: TUVA LOOMS. AERON CHAIRS: HERMAN MILLER THROUGH TOBRON OFFICE FURNITURE. LIGHTING DESIGNER: JOHNSON SCHWINGHAMMER. ARCHITECT OF RECORD: HELPERN ARCHITECTS. CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: STRUCTURE TONE. DESK AND "NATURE WALL" MILLWORK: PATELLA. WALL INSERTS: DRY NATURE DESIGN. SCHIST COUNTER TOPS, KOTA STONE FLOORING THROUGHOUT: PORT MORRIS. PLASTERWORK: VISIONS-IN-PLASTER.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL WARCHOL (UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE)



director of interiors Alice Yiu—did away with the bricked-in front section of a previously added second floor. This opened up space for the 49th Street-facing lounge, now rising to 22-ft. double height at its apex. It also exposed previously hidden arched windows facing the avenue. Superannuated plumbing and electrical conduits were replaced; two top floors were added, making it possible to raise the guestroom count to 725, including 50 suites, some with terraces.

Single-room units cover 280 sq. ft. each and are classified as Signature or Standard, indicating the bed's being placed at center or against a wall respectively. Though the conventional placement appears less crowded, Rockwell maintains that guests particularly like the Signature version with its unusual headboard cutouts (see last spread). Suites measure up to 700 sq. ft. All beds have fine percale sheets bordered with silk-screened sayings going from "Walk with Confidence"

to "Sleep with Angels" and twelve more variants in-between. Guests have been known to buy bedding items to take home.

On the second level are five mutable meeting/conference rooms offering all the electronic paraphernalia favored by businesspeople. Rising from this floor and also breaking through the ceiling is a ballroom. A spacious spa is on the fourth floor. At street level are the Heartbeat Restaurant, Whiskey Blue Bar, and Cool Juice dispensary that, Janus-like, looks to the street and to the lobby's Oasis bar.

None of the above, however, hints at the special charms conveyed by the interiors treatment. Walking through the hotel one encounters, just in the lounge, tree-stumps that, upon inspection, turn out to be chess and backgammon game tables; a waterfall cascading down glazing and revealing glimpses of the adjacent restaurant; floor lamps whose pole tops bifurcate into branch-
es; shiny metal containers filled with papy- →

Opposite: Lounge, looking to fireplace and linked to lobby; columns are draped with diaphanous silks that flutter as people pass.

Above, left: Cool Juice bar, also visible from street, is seen here from Oasis bar section. Photography: Todd Eberle.

Above, right: Another lounge view, looking to 49th Street-facing "Forest Wall" windows composition. Photography: Todd Eberle.

CARPET: TUVIA LOOMS. CUSTOM FIREPLACE TABLES: AUGUST STUDIOS. GLASS MOSAIC TILES: TILES, A REFINED SELECTION; INSTALLATION: PORT MORRIS. SILK-SCREENED LINENS AT COLUMNS: STEPHANIE MALOSSANE (LONDON); HARDWARE: FRAN TAUBMAN. END/GAME TABLES: CHRIS LEHRECKE THROUGH PUCCI INTERNATIONAL. SEATING: ARTCO; FABRICS: ARKAY (SLIPCOVERS); KRAVET (OTTOMANS); TIMOROUS BEASTIES OF GLASGOW (PILLOWS); MUNROD (FIREPLACE FABRIC CUSHIONS); DUALOY (LEATHER). CUSTOM FLOOR LAMPS: FRAN TAUBMAN; SHADES: ABAT JOURS. GLASS THROUGHOUT: BENDHEIM (EMBEDDED GINKGO LEAVES); RUDY ART GLASS (BLUE AND GREEN). LEATHER CLUB CHAIRS: CRATE & BARREL. RAILINGS: AVAL ARCHITECTURE METALS. MILLWORK: PATELLA. ZINC COUNTERTOP: SANCHEZ & NITZBERG. STOOLS: TED BOERNER THROUGH DENNIS MILLER; FABRICS: KRAVET; TIMOROUS BEASTIES. SCRIM SHADE: DFB.

Heartbeat Restaurant, operated by Drew Nieporent, adjoins lounge. Six support columns are covered with individually-cut glass tiles; hung textiles include burlap-and-cotton quilts and handpainted sheers. Photography: Todd Eberle.

CUSTOM BANQUETTE QUILT FABRICS: TIMOROUS BEASTIES; CARLA WEISBERG; OSBORNE & LITTLE; KRAVET; CIRCLE FABRICS; CORA JAMES (FABRICATION); DFB (INSTALLATION). CUSTOM BANQUETTE: MUNROD. TABLE BASES: SHELBY WILLIAMS. CARPET: STARK. COLUMN GLASS TILES: DAN BLEIER STUDIO; PORT MORRIS (INSTALLATION). CHAIRS: THONET THROUGH BSC; FABRICS: JOSEPH NOBLE; POLLACK.





rus or other flora; columns draped in silk-screened organza that flutters faintly as people pass; and wall and window lengths decorated with collages of leaves, bits of plants, vegetables, seed pods, grasses, and other icons of natural foods and healthy living. Also deployed are hung fabrics with similar imagery, and a multitude of different substances in smoothly burnished or ruggedly textured guises. A small sampling of materials includes kota stone (flooring), schist (counters), bush-hammered limestone, blue glass tiles, variedly treated glass, patinated bronze, hand-forged iron, ash, limed oak, etc. The guestrooms' special attractions include indoor window boxes with growing grass and watering cans.

Asked, by way of summation, whether hotel commissions might prompt Rockwell

to adapt his successful "theme restaurants" formula to hospitality centers—after all, W's promotional materials already refer to "The four elements of life: earth, wind, water, and fire," "urban oasis," "Forest (or Garden, or Canyon) Walls" and the like—he registers dissent. "Theme," in his vocabulary, means a certain market position. It's a matter of semantics, he avers. He looks for a broad definition, one that extends to character and narrative, and is of benefit to his clients. A catchy slogan or shibboleth is not enough—one has to determine what is best for the job. In the case of W, that meant finding inspiration for making hotel guests feel rejuvenated, refreshed, and eager to return. Last Q: Whence the W? It stands for Warmth, Witty, Wonderful, and Welcoming, one is told, and came from Starwood chief Barry Sternlicht

and his wife. He, the client, further is credited for his unceasing involvement in the job. The \$80 million venture took two and a half years to complete. Though more W hotels are planned for New York and other U.S. cities, each will be designed to complement the pertinent locality. —Monica Geran

Above and opposite: Three views of Signature guest room, the bed placed at center and the headboard made of patinated bronze. Its cutout, facing front door, is seen at top, right. Photograph opposite is by Todd Eberle.

CUSTOM FURNITURE, HEADBOARD: ARTCO. CARPETING: FORUM CARPET. FABRICS: DONGHIA; ARKAY TEXTILES; ARCHPELAGO (CUSTOM SHEETS). WALL STENCILING: MOD-ERWORKS. TABLE, FLOOR LAMPS: GENESIS LIGHTING; SHADES: GALBRAITH & PAUL CO. WINDOW TREATMENT: BRAMSON HOUSE.

