

500 WEST FLORIDA STREET
MILWAUKEE, WI 53204

THEIRONHORSEHOTEL.COM
1.888.543.IRON (4766)



THE IRON HORSE
HOTEL™

MEDIA CONTACT
BRIGETTE BREITENBACH

BRIGETTE@COMPANYBONLINE.COM
1.414.750.7298

hospitalitydesign

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE - RIDE FREE

OCTOBER 6, 2009

BY TARA MASTRELLI

Tim Dixon knows the meaning of serendipity. The Milwaukee-based developer had been looking at old properties in the area, when he received a call regarding an historic 100,000-square-foot brick and heavy timber warehouse. He first thought of lofts, condos, some hybrid mix, and then decided on a hotel because of its proximity to the convention center, but still wasn't sold on the idea. Two weeks after he signed the agreement, Harley Davidson announced the super secret location of their new museum, right across the street.



"After I did the business plan I went and bought a bike," says Dixon. "I had ridden before, but I didn't go on the rallies and rides, and didn't embrace the sub-culture." The key to Iron Horse Hotel's success: a crossover target market of bikers and suits. "Suits during the day; leather at night. When we market, we've hit both."



Dixon turned to long-time collaborators and local firm, the Kubala Washatko Architects, to create a durable, sustainable, sophisticated space, while retaining the industrial character of the building. "We gutted a lot of the interior," says architect Michelle Olsen, who has worked on Harley Davidson dealerships all over the country, and herself is the proud owner of a 20-year-old collectible Honda sport bike. The interior Cream City brick walls, wood columns, and wood

ceilings were sandblasted and left exposed, and ductwork was left unpainted. “We’re not big on covering things up. Leaving things exposed, that’s kind of our style.”

In the 100 loft-style guestrooms a color palette of silver, Verde green, and shades of terracotta recall the rich hues of metal in its different states: new, patina, and rusted. “To achieve a play on the masculine and feminine, we contrasted durable rugged materials with the murals,” says Olsen. The 18 floor-to-ceiling murals were created by local artist Charles Dwyer using original photographs of women from Milwaukee printed onto vinyl wallcovering and hand-embellished.



Sustainability is found throughout: guestrooms feature occupancy sensors, fire doors were re-used as doors, flooring is made of recycled tires, and the team also worked with the local Milwaukee Tech High School to transform 300-year old Hemlock timbers from the building into custom boot benches for each guestroom.

“We’re making our numbers,” says Dixon of the hotel, a member of Desires Hotels. “What we didn’t know is that bikers are only about 10 percent of our market, but they’re about 90 percent of our atmosphere. We have a huge lobby scene. Being in leathers you don’t know if you’re talking to a janitor or a CEO.”

READ ONLINE AT HDMAG.COM