



# Shining gem

CID EXPLORES HBA'S FUSION OF MEDITERRANEAN, ARABIC BEACH AND BEAUX-ARTS INFLUENCES AT THE ST. REGIS SAADIYAT ISLAND RESORT

## CASE STUDY

The St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi, sits nestled like a gem between a Gary Player-designed golf course and the white powdery beaches of the Arabian Gulf. Epitomising St. Regis' heritage of excellence and elegance, it is the first luxury beach resort in Abu Dhabi.

Opened in late December, 2011, the resort is a recent addition to the brand's portfolio and the first of three resorts planned for the Middle East.

Created in 1904 by John Jacob Astor IV, the brand has continually strived to be the finest hotel in the world. According to a statement: "Every St. Regis address is a unique reflection of its location, a showcase of architecture and design that continues the distinctive originality of the first St. Regis hotel."

Designed by Hirsch Bedner Associates (HBA), the resort's interiors artfully marry a contemporary Mediterranean architectural style with local Arabic beach influences, all with a gentle nod to the original Beaux-Arts classic on New York's Fifth Avenue.

HBA's challenging design interpretation delivered, with refinement and tasteful moderation.

The Arabian Gulf is celebrated throughout the entire resort. According to HBA associate Ira Imerlishvili: "The most distinguishable feature is the million dollar view you see upon entering the resort's dramatic lobby. The entire back wall is made of frameless glass overlooking the sea, offering amazing unobstructed views unlike any other in Abu Dhabi."

Architectural firm Woods Bagot designed the resort's arch-shaped footprint to capitalise on water views at every possible juncture, connecting the exterior to the interior. HBA carried the beach narrative throughout, with a natural palette of creams, blues and golds.

Conveying tendrils of seaweed, ribbons of blue and green Italian marble interweave amongst tumbled and polished Bianco Delicato marble floors in the lobby area. Custom tufted wool rugs in rich ochres, golds and blues carry through the aquatic theme with watery imagery of sea kelp, anemones and coral.

Walls of hand-rubbed plaster provide a subtle backdrop to the bespoke glass light fixtures. Designed and manufactured by Preciosa Lighting, the signature



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Lobby.

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55&5<sup>th</sup>, The Grill.



lobby chandelier in subtle golds and ochres combines hand-blown glass, cut crystal, metal frames, and LED light tubes programmed to pulsate.

Preciosa's sculptural glass references depictions of sea creatures; the chandelier is additionally set off by an inset gold mosaic dome. A chandelier trio, also by Preciosa, energises the lobby staircase with a stand-out and decidedly modern combination of acrylic, crystal, and fibre-optics.

Furnishings in the lobby and adjacent drawing room support the relaxed atmosphere of the beach concept without being contrived. Pleasantly gnarled driftwood table bases with glass tops are offset by rattan, leather in deep chocolate, misty grey velvet upholstery and airy, loosely woven drapery. Cleft slate mixed with black and gold glass mosaic walls at the nearby Sucre Patisserie provide a dramatic contrast to the colourful display of macaroons and chocolates made by the hotel.

Equally as striking is the Manhattan Lounge, also on the main floor. Besides its namesake, another touchpoint referencing its New York lineage is the

signature artwork over the bar, typical of all St. Regis addresses.

New York's St. Regis bar displays Maxwell Parrish's famous "Old King Cole" mural. This piece, created by a local artist, abstractly references Abu Dhabi's past by incorporating an Arabic thread, dark wood mashrabiya panels backed by persimmon upholstery mix with timber floors, opulent rugs, onyx lanterns and a high ceiling.

The Manhattan Lounge is masculine and invitingly dark, departing from the lighter tempo of the rest of the resort. According to the St. Regis: "The Manhattan Lounge is primed to become a watering hole and powerhouse room for deals and discussions."

55&5<sup>th</sup>, The Grill is the resort's distinguished restaurant, and additional reference to its New York pedigree. 55<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue is the physical location of the original St. Regis hotel. HBA deftly fused complexity with clarity in the restaurant's interior. Marble walls oriented to accentuate horizontal striations are enhanced by black marble horizontal banding, reaching from the floor to its lofty ceiling. Black wood timber

floors and smoky Venetian glass chandeliers are contrasted by an intricately framed ceiling. Playful glass bauble light fixtures break up the geometry of the space while subtly hinting at fizzy champagne bubbles.

A cleverly woven brushed metal wall surface, additionally framed and backlit, nods at an Art Deco inspiration. Black leather furniture plays a subdued step-sister to the princess of the room — the walls, ceiling, and exquisite light fixtures. Completing the experience is an upper level loft, complete with genuine red brick walls and bespoke light fixture integrating as reflectors a field of overturned glasses.

Clean lines of a timber beam ceiling and folding green glass exterior walls complement the contemporary Asian fusion theme of Sontaya restaurant. Open and airy, Sontaya sits amidst a maze of pools overlooking the Gulf. Its geometry is discreetly punctuated by the warm disc-shaped reflectors of its tiered pendant light fixtures. Elsewhere, high-gloss white walls ornamented by horizontal decorative tile and a jade green glass feature entrance wall


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Sontaya restaurant exterior.

## CASE STUDY



Intertwining the public spaces to the private guest rooms is stylised imagery of local mangrove trees interpreted in the corridor carpet pattern. The resort's 377 guest rooms carry on the same Mediterranean resort theme. The palette is natural and restful; stone floors are softly honed.

Candice D'Cruz, director of marketing and communications, St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort says a significant 30% of each guest room is dedicated to the bath. Rustic stone insets, an overhead doorless shower, and separate his/her open vanity areas, casually finished with sliding rattan baskets harmonise the bath with its tranquil setting. Soothing browns and creams are punctuated by turquoise coral bed quilts to resonate the Gulf's waters. Natural fibre on cabinetry fronts delicately echoes sea grass.

From sea to sand, to the influences of the Mediterranean, to the luxury of the gilded age, HBA designed truly special interiors at the St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort. Citing the vision of the Astors, the St. Regis brand has sought to create a "collection of distinguished destinations, each with its own vivid and distinct personality". If each property could be likened to a precious stone, the St. Regis Saadiyat Island Resort, Abu Dhabi would be a radiant pearl. 

enhances Sontaya's minimalist and contemplative setting.

- 4 Ocean Suite bedroom. Maximising tranquillity is a way to describe the St. Regis' Iridium Spa. As the hotel relayed, the name was inspired by the Greek goddess Iris who "transcends the sea and sky as a messenger and manifests as a rainbow". Iridium is also one of the world's rarest and most precious metals. Meshing the two inspirations with HBA's skilful design nonetheless makes Iridium Spa a truly luxurious destination.
- 5 Grand staircase.
- 6 The Manhattan Lounge.
- 7 Iridium Spa. Diverting from the typical pastel, dreamy spa interior, Iridium's interior is

visually complex for a spa, yet exceptionally relaxing. With a neutral palette heavily reliant on blacks and greys, the spa presents a mysterious environment to promote deep introspection. Intricate high-contrast tile work in jacuzzi areas hint at Islamic geometry, as does the sumptuous iridescent circular mosaic inlaid floor at the spa's reception. Muted silver leaf metallic inset ceiling domes, crushed paper-like chandeliers with scintillating fibre-optics, and a black and gold mosaic hamam are just a few of the unique details that make Iridium Spa a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.