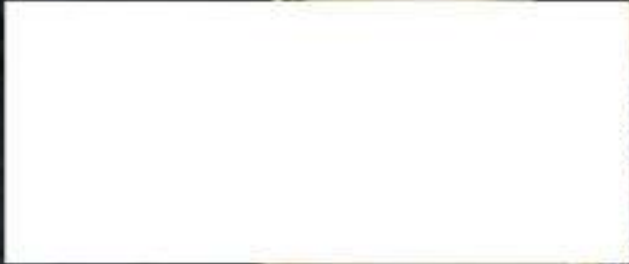


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The Carolina Inn

Chapel Hill, NC

With an 89-year history as a place where UNC-Chapel Hill alumni, students and visitors can call home, the most recent renovation of The Carolina Inn—its seventh, in fact—needed to strike a balance between the comfort of Colonial Revival and a more modern, updated look.

David W. Rau, principal of Richmond-based 3north, was tasked with remodeling the 187 guestrooms and renovating both function rooms and public areas for the property, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Rau had been involved with the hotel's last renovation in 1995. "It was successful at the time, but had become dated over the years," he said, noting that it was done in a formal English style, with big scroll floral chintzes—"a style appropriate to 1995."

Rau said that reaction to the redesign has been great, which is not surprising, considering how it started. 3north took what it calls an IQ Intangible Qualities approach, which includes extended research and a design charrette held at the school. People from the school, the management team, the F&B team and students gave feedback, giving them a sense of ownership and involvement, he said.

This time around, Rau said the most important component was to tell the story of UNC. "From a design perspective, it's a very traditional building," he said. "We wanted to keep that approach, but make it fresher, with a more contemporary feel, without losing the heritage of the place." Rau noted that, too often, when designing for historic buildings, designers make the mistake of going too formal. "It might look pretty, but it's not comfortable," he said. "It comes off cold." He noted that his firm worked with color, finishes and patterns that were more approachable and informal to offset that.

"We did more solid colors and texture," Rau said. "We did wovens, textured velvet and thicker weaves." He added that very little was done with floral. "It's more solid color blocks," he said and noted that the draperies are solid colors as well.

Local sourcing was also important to the project. "The university and the state had a strong program to buy in North Carolina to keep tax dollars in the state," Rau said. He noted that North Carolina is a great producer of furniture. "If we spent a little extra, we saved on shipping and had direct control over the quality of design," he said. In addition, much of the guestroom furniture was constructed from raw materials managed through the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. For instance, mattresses were made from bamboo fibers and soy products.

One of the reasons Rau went with a more simplistic design was to showcase the antiques and UNC memorabilia the hotel displays. "We tried to bring all of that forward and let it be the feature," he said. "Let the fabrics recede a little." Rau called the artwork program phenomenal. "It's like a gallery," he explained. He noted that the library had several collections of photographs, portraits of students that go all the way back to the 18th century and thousands of photos of famous alumni. The team focused on artwork of people. "A lot of traditional hotels put architectural photography," he said. "We've discovered people really like pictures of people."

Memorabilia comes in other forms as well. For example, 90 student-drawn cartoons from *The Daily Tar Heel* line the walls of the renovated Carolina Crossroads bar; framed examples of the original UNC fight song sheet music from the 1930s are displayed near the fitness center; and the John Sprunt Hill Ballroom features Ramses, the first UNC mascot, in the corners.

While all of the memorabilia speaks to the history of the school, Rau also noted that the renovation featured more comedic humanizing touches. One detail of note is the punching bag in the fitness center displaying the Duke University mascot and logo. "It was in the presentation as a joke," Rau laughed, adding that everyone loved it. "It's lighthearted and anchored it to UNC."

—Nicole Carlino



Design Details

Owner: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill **Designer:** 3north **Style:** Colonial Revival mixed with Contemporary **Signature Features:** UNC antiques and memorabilia; locally sourced furniture; color blocks and texture **Cost:** \$19 million
Specified Suppliers: Brintons; Cuddledown; P/Kaufmann, Inc; King's Chandelier; Craftique; American Atelier, Inc.; Hudson Valley Lighting

