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The Project: Westin Palace Madrid

Located within Madrid's 'Triangle of Art' in the city centre, the Westin Palace Madrid is just a short walk from the city's famous Prado, Thyssen and Reina Sofia museums. The property has just completed the first in a series of three construction phases, in which it plans to renovate all 476 of its bedrooms. We caught up with Andrew Linwood and Eugenia Rolando at Areen Design to find out more



by **Lewis Catchpole** — January 8, 2019 in [Features](#)



PROJECT BRIEF: Complete renovation of all 476 bedrooms

BUDGET: Undisclosed

INTERIOR DESIGN: Areen Design

LOCATION: Madrid, Spain

Give us a quick brief of the project and its timeframe?

Andrew: The hotel is known by all the locals as 'The Palace', and it's an iconic hotel, a bit like Claridge's in [London](#). It was a very prestigious project for us as a company and for Eugenia as a Spanish speaking, almost native, so we were very pleased to take it on. Our brief was to [renovate](#) all of the property's 476 bedrooms. The property is right in the middle of Madrid, it overlooks the Prado Museum. The biggest challenge of the project was the budget, not so much the timeframe although that was quite tight. We have just completed stage one of the renovation.

Eugenia: The renovation is being completed by floors, so we finished the third floor and now they are about to start with the sixth floor at the end of the year. The property renovated the public areas only a few years ago, so this project was specifically focusing on the bedrooms.

Andrew: The whole project is a rolling renovation over the next two years. The owners are a company called Host Hotels, which used to be [Marriott](#), before it split into two separate companies.

Was there a specific brief in terms of designs?

Eugenia: What we tried to do with the design was to take some very specific ideas of the Spanish culture. For example, with the carpet design we took some of the traditional Spanish patterns and applied these to a larger scale across the carpets and also the headboards. We did some successful embroidery on the headboards, and luckily we found a company to do this in a traditional way. We took our design ideas from the Spanish culture and the result was quite successful.

Andrew: It was also about helping to revive the existing craftsmanship and artisan industry and we wanted to make sure that was reflected in the contemporary interior.

What was the overall cost of the project?

Andrew: We aren't able to disclose what the fit-out cost was, but let's just say it was extremely tight. We also handled the procurement of this project and our colleagues in the procurement department had to hunt far and wide to find supplies that could fulfill the budget. Some of the furniture came from Egypt, and other pieces came from all over the world.

Eugenia: Despite that, a lot of the manufacturing was also Spanish. The lighting company, the company that did the embroidery and others were all Spanish companies.

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Eugenia: The property was actually built as a hotel and has been operating for around 105 years now. It was one of the first buildings to be built with reinforced concrete and it has a big stained-glass dome above one of its [restaurants](#), which was the first of that kind in Spain at the time. It's a very famous hotel in Madrid, it's the hotel where Hollywood stars stay. If you have ever been to Madrid then you will know the hotel.

In terms of the process itself, did you have a clear structure of how each phase would play out?

Andrew: The project manager is coming here soon to discuss the implementation of the next phase. We lay it out beforehand, but the point is wherever or not the client chooses to adhere to that is a different matter. Although saying that, the whole project should be finished by the middle of next year.

When the refurbishment was actually taking place, were there any unwelcome surprises, or hair-raising moments?

Andrew: Unusually no. It wasn't a major intervention, we weren't taking down ceiling or pulling up floors – that's when you start finding problems in old hotels. There were no major surprises.

Eugenia: The renovation was quite big, but we didn't have to change the layouts of the rooms or anything like that. We changed all the items in the rooms, we changed all the carpets and the wallpapers but we didn't rearrange the layout so there were no major structural interventions. The electricals in the hotel were all very old, so it was quite challenging to change all of that and make it up to date, in terms of new connections, the internet and the IT.

Andrew: We did all the design work for that, we drew it all out, located these things and specified the various electrical outlets.

So there were no hurdles in terms of planning permission and the local authority?

Andrew: No, and there were no asbestos issues or anything like that either. It is an old building but these issues didn't arise during the renovation.

How does this project compare to some of your previous work?

Andrew: It went relatively smoothly compared with some of our other jobs. We have done a lot of renovations in the last two years or so, in various European capitals, and this one was pretty straight forward. The client is very business-like, and they had a professional project manager. It was professionally organised, with a professional team, and what people don't necessarily appreciate about a soft renovation is that you still need a team of several consultants to make the whole thing work. Even though you are basically only doing cushions and curtains, you still need a project manager and an electrical engineer.

What about in terms of scale?

Andrew: We've done much larger. We are currently consulting the contractor on a 10,000 room hotel in Saudi Arabia. We also worked on the world's largest [Holiday Inn](#) in Mecca, which is 1,250 rooms, which is about to open now. At the other end of the scale, we are helping out on a small boutique hotel with 18 rooms in the Ivory Coast. We are working with the architect there, so we work on a broad range of projects.

What advice would you give for smaller independent hotels taking on refurbishment projects?

Andrew: Don't do it. Seriously, I would advise hotels to make sure they have the right professional team in place because they will save you money in the long run. Whatever you are paying in professional fees, you will get back in the cost of the project and the time you save. It will be more efficiently done and will be finished faster, which means your renovated rooms will start earning you more money sooner.

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