

WATERMARK

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The Transformation

Built in 1928, this elegant brick building combines designs of Spanish Colonial Revival with influences of zig-zag modern (most visible in the glazed tile and decorative brickwork). The building represents an excellent example of a combination of Spanish Colonial Revival, Art Deco and Renaissance influences. The stunning edifice of terracotta is artfully paired with Malibu style ceramic tile. Inside, the hand-stenciled ceilings and wood paneling are reminiscent of Hearst Castle, and murals, painted by artist Norman Kennedy, depict early life at Ventura's Mission.

The intention of the owners was to keep the integrity of the original design, while modifying the existing building to function as a restaurant and bar. The goal was to enhance the structure and dramatize the historic elements, by leaving the interesting and significant details of the interior and maintaining the Spanish Colonial and Deco styles.

Like many historic buildings, Watermark presented its own unique set of design and structural challenges. Some buildings create more challenges than others, and as Mark Hartley explains, "I am passionate about historic preservation, but this is my most difficult project to date including the extensive renovation of my 1832 farmhouse in Tennessee, and my office in Nashville which dates to 1918."

To begin with, Hartley and his architect Marc Whitman and contractor, Peter Livingston, were faced with the challenge of incorporating three separate spaces with level changes on the ground floor into one new one, to create a combined bar area and main dining room – and do so seamlessly.

To create the main dining room and bar, the wall between an adjacent retail space that was part of the original building was removed and the old floors replaced to make the floor contiguous and level, as well as ADA compliant.

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Ramps had to be added to connect the bar with the main dining room and bathrooms so that they are handicap accessible, and an elevator added to provide access to the roof. An entirely new back stairwell was added leading from the kitchen to the third floor for service purposes.

Additionally, the whole building had to be seismically retrofitted. And to create the roof top bar without compromising the original historic structure, huge amounts of steel – 62,000 pounds to be exact – had to be installed, creating a framework that suspends the new third floor over the building while also supporting the elevator shaft.

To gain approval from the City of Ventura's design review board, the exterior design of the new 'floor' and rooftop elevator shaft had to be designed to be consistent with the existing historic Spanish Colonial Revival and Zig Zag Modern exterior.

For the interior, the subtle hues of the remarkably preserved mural by famed illustrator and painter Norman Kennedy in the dining room became the inspiration for Interior designer Kathleen Coady.

In the main dining room she recommended a subtle rust-red, burnt orange and cornelian velveteen brocade by Pindler & Pindler for the booth's seat back that blends harmoniously with the cognac leather seats. The draperies for the oversized windows are made from dark maroon velveteen in a nod to the buildings 1920's ancestry.

The warmth of the room is underscored by the glow of the under-lit gold onyx wrap around bar. Echoing the palette of the murals, the walls are painted in a soft faux finish of gold, rust and green.

The new floors are covered in Oro Toscano travertine marble with embossed copper accents emblematic of the original pressed tin ceilings found throughout the building. Portions of those same ceiling panels were

repurposed as backlit lighting fixtures in the downstairs restrooms.

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Other original intact details were repurposed as well. The bank's vault, which was too massive and overbuilt to remove, has been morphed into a repository for high-end celebratory drinks, such as rare cognacs, aged single-malt scotches and rare tequilas. The document vault, located on the mezzanine, now houses the mechanics of the elevator.

The stunning intact 1928 hand-painted poured-in-place plaster ceiling has been meticulously restored. Remarkably, the same master craftsman who had been retained to repair it years ago when it was discovered beneath modern dropped ceilings, was found to work his magic again. Restored with paints that were hand blended to perfectly match the medallions on the 'faux' wood beams, most people have trouble believing the ceiling is not hand-carved.

All the new cabinetry, the bar and booths were created from African Mahogany by master cabinetmakers to perfectly match the extensive original woodwork and wainscoting on the main floor. In addition to the six booths that sit directly beneath the oversized windows, a series of banquettes sit opposite, with open seating at free-standing tables in the center of the room, creating both a sense of intimacy and theater.

More seating is available on the mezzanine level, behind the ornate original wrought iron rail with its restored art deco octagonal clock, providing dinner patrons with a bird's eye view of the main dining room. A small fireplace was added, along with a custom built temperature-controlled wine cabinet and a large Italian country-style table that seats twelve - creating the ideal setting for private parties and wine dinners. The mezzanine area was also expanded with a wrap around balcony that looks over the downstairs bar creating a secluded place for patrons to wait for their tables and watch the excitement below.

Also allowing guests to take in the action of the dining room is a massive 80-year old mirror in an exquisite hand carved gilt baroque frame (originally from the Montecito Ballet School) that reflects the room from its new perch in the

bar.

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Three Italianate iron and mica fixtures illuminate the dining room. Venetian style teardrop fixtures hang over the bar, and patrons at the booths are lit by petit bell shaped droplights that compliment the room's main fixtures. Sconces reflect light off the wood paneling behind the banquettes. During the day, light floods in through oversized picture windows with views to Chestnut Street, topped by vintage mottled glass leaded windows.

While one enters Watermark through the original bronze doors topped with an elaborate carved wood lintel featuring classic Spanish motifs, many of Watermark's most intriguing interior details were sourced by Mark Hartley in his travels throughout the country. Always on the lookout for architecturally interesting pieces, he brought to the project everything from 1930's deco sconces from the Union Hotel in Detroit, to an elaborate turn-of-the-century stained glass window that has been turned into a backlit ceiling fixture on the mezzanine level. Even the exit signs are vintage, also dating back to the '30's.

W²O – Where Watermark Meets Oxygen

One of the biggest challenges was to make the new rooftop bar work with the existing original exterior, and to create an interior space that complemented the ground floor. Rather than mimic the historic past, the solution was to create a contemporary space that referenced the sky and sea, with stormy sea colored cement floors and a dark blue ceiling. The elevator car creates a transition and alludes to what's in store above, as the same swirled blue cast acrylic relief on the car's exterior walls also surrounds the rooftop bar. The back wall of the elevator shaft features 4' x 6' original images of Ventura landmarks taken by local photographers that can easily be viewed through the glass walled elevator.

Seating is both informal and inviting. Sprawling oversized self-contained booths have backs and seats embellished with stripes and spirals in a palette of marine blue and iridescent greens. Complementing the color scheme are iridescent Ann Sacks 'Fire and Ice' cobalt tiled walls providing blocks of bold

color, and zebra-wood paneling lining the room beneath the large windows.

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Designed to celebrate the surrounding elements, the roof can be retracted depending on the weather. A pyramidal shaped skylight sits over the marine blue glass bar, and three monitors there will, when not airing significant sporting events, play vintage films and time-lapse videos.

There are eye catching 'artful' details throughout W²O including a mesmerizing white jelly fish tank, a strategically positioned glass and copper hanging sculpture entitled "*What the Sun Said*" by Ventura artist Greg Kailian, that captures and mirrors the colors of the setting sun, and a multimedia painting with an embedded video monitor playing tape of the artist Seco creating the painting that surrounds it. A hand-blown glass Jellyfish light, by neon art sculptor Eric Ehienberger, hangs over the bar.

Floors are cement sealed with high gloss marine blue to match the ocean in the distance. Off W²O's private dining room, Malibu tiles on the balcony reference the tiles inset into the buildings original brick exterior.

Even the bathrooms are married to their downstairs counterparts, with nods to the intact original bathroom on the mezzanine level and its 1920's style tilework. W²O's Restrooms are tiled with 'steel' glazed oversized tiles with mother-of-pearl inserts - white in the women's and dark opalescence in the men's. The sinks are solid bronze, as are the sinks downstairs.

The renovation of Watermark has taken 18 months but to owner Mark Hartley it has been worth every minute. "The building deserved to have the best possible restoration; however, I didn't want it to be frozen in the past. My goal is for Watermark to have a dual personality - beautifully and gracefully restored to its original character with embellishments appropriate to its era, contrasted with a contemporary and hip counterpart in the form of the roof top bar, W²O."

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