



REINVENTING A FAIRYTALE

HBA Transforms Quirky China Castle Into Luxury Five-Star Hotel



Hong Kong, 19 September, 2014 – Global hospitality design leader HBA has transformed an enchanting European-inspired castle in China into a modern five-star fairytale – now reinvented as The Castle Hotel in Starwood Hotels & Resorts’ ‘Luxury Collection’.

The romantic castle overlooking Dalian’s Xinghai Bay was originally constructed in 2002, inspired by the famous Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria, Germany – home to the mad King Ludwig II.

It was built to house a Seashell Museum and apartments, but despite becoming a beloved, iconic local landmark, was extremely under-utilized and largely vacant.

On taking ownership, the Dalian Yifang Group set about its transformation into a unique luxury hotel – among few in the world inside a castle – and social hub for the beautiful coastal city, bringing on HBA to realize their vision.

Since relatively low ceiling height was not conducive to a five-star hotel, existing towers were demolished and rebuilt as new 19-level towers. Windows were added and enlarged. New rooftop terraces incorporate romantic European-style gardens reminiscent of southern Spain and formal Italian Romanesque villas.

Inspired by King Ludwig’s passion for Greek mythology, statues of Poseidon, Aphrodite, Piper, and the Four Seasons adorn the gardens alongside a driveway leading to a grand Porte Cochere entry, encircling the central, lavish fountain.

A new guestroom wing maximizes the number of guestrooms, capitalising on ocean views to the south. Tasked with transforming the interior – comprising 292 guest rooms, 29 suites and 67 apartments as well as a collection of restaurants, lounges and even an authentic German beer pub – HBA sought to “*complement the grand scale of the castle with an opulent yet contemporary design that respects the building’s European heritage but also reflects the regional heritage and its new role as a five-star hotel*”, comments HBA Partner and co-lead designer Kathleen Dauber.

“Design of the interiors was very much done to complement the exterior – rooted in highly refined European elegance, and not a kitschy expression of medieval European elements.”

Upon entering the Lobby, guests are transported to another world; a world where fantasy becomes reality, where a place which only exists in the imagination can be seen and experienced in person. The space opens with rich stone flooring inlaid with elegant designs leading to a Great Room with a soaring ceiling and large, classical, glass skylight. In this heart of the castle, beautiful artwork accents the walls of a grand staircase, while the sides open to a Lounge and Patisserie, linking social spaces.

If the Lobby is the heart of the castle then the Lobby Lounge is its soul. At a glamorous bar you can almost imagine Cary Grant or Fred Astaire having a drink and listening to the band. Custom painted coffers enrich the high-ceiling space. Artwork behind the bar and framing the stage add a fantasy quality. On a more playful note the Patisserie features a display counter with expansive white carrera stone and a floating glass top. Showcasing fanciful cakes, sandwiches, pastries, cappuccinos and frappuccinos, the café space is light and youthful with white seating, a custom mural and parquet flooring. *“It ties into the romantic, castle emotion in how the space feels but with a more youthful attitude”*, adds Ms. Dauber.

The grand stair makes weddings, meetings and celebrations all the more special, leading to a Ballroom reminiscent of a grand hall found in a French castle, but with a modern twist. Rich wood columns, elegant chandeliers, plush upholstered walls and custom-designed carpets create a room replete with luxury and comfort.

Restaurant venues are designed as “discovered” elements of the castle. The All Day Dining was originally conceived as the gathering hall and kitchen, historically used only for staff. “We have taken this room and opened it up for use of all,” she said, modernized with the old ceiling removed and replaced with a signature cove element allowing height and grandness. Private dining rooms at either end cater for groups. An exterior balcony has also been opened, with views over the city.

The Chinese restaurant was conceptualized as the former dining hall of the castle, with private dining rooms in what were the library, sitting rooms and parlours. The dining hall ceiling was rediscovered beneath the former ceiling and is now exposed as a design highlight, with an overall ambience of drama and elegance along with rich interior detailing.

Guestrooms reflect the castle ambience “but in a modern interpretation and with all the cutting edge technology possible”. One of the most important highlights is that most rooms have panoramic views overlooking Dalian. Another focal element is the bed – replete with elegant white linens from Europe accented by a lush upholstered headboard in which a hint of the castle influence can be found in the embroidery.

Courtesy of the castle’s architecture of turrets and balconies, suites have unique configurations as retreats from the world outside. Larger suites have media rooms, studies and other unique areas. Careful thought also went into Dalian’s rich history and traditions through the centuries. Miguel Baeza, Partner HBA San Francisco and co-lead designer, states: *“As an international trading hub with a unique blend of European, Russian, Japanese and traditional Chinese architecture, we invoked this rich heritage into the design wherever possible.”*

“We also took great care to make sure that the design and the feeling inside were authentic. This was after all, a castle. The spaces had to be grand and majestic. They had to feel genuine. Ultimately we

wanted to convey the notion that this castle was brought over from Europe piece by piece – and meticulously re-assembled in the hillsides of Dalian.”

With its lush, green and enchanting location on Lotus Mountain overlooking Xinghai Square, Xinghai Bay and the Yellow Sea, The Castle Hotel is now also an iconic starting point for the romantic Binhai Road, a popular coastal route that winds along China’s northern coast.

Dalian Castle was already an iconic building in Northern China. Transformed into The Castle Hotel, it is now destined for international renown as Starwood’s newest and perhaps quirkiest Luxury Collection hotel.

[ENDS]

About HBA

World-renowned as the “Number 1 Hospitality Design Firm” (Interior Design) and honored in 2013 by the Gold Key Awards, Hospitality Design, Perspective Awards, the Boutique Design Awards and the European Hotel Design Awards; HBA/Hirsch Bedner Associates, unveils the world’s most anticipated hotels, resorts, and spas. Leading the hospitality interior design industry since 1965, HBA remains keenly attuned to the pulse of changing industry trends governed by today’s sophisticated traveler. The company’s international presence, depth of experience, and detailed industry knowledge enables them to identify interior design trends at their source, make definitive predictions about new directions and innovations, and influence design standards at a global level. HBA’s ultimate objective is to add value, raise standards and enhance the brand of a project’s owner and operator.

HBA creates the signature look of traditional luxury brands, independent contemporary boutiques, urban resort spas, world-class residences, restaurants, casinos, and cruise ships. From continent to continent, each HBA interior is the result of a unique and sensitive response to location, architecture, and client vision. With over 1,500 designers around the globe in 17 offices and a recent expansion in Asia, HBA is a true global company with more than 75% of its employees now outside the United States. HBA’s international presence, combined with its extensive knowledge of the interior design industry, has facilitated the ability to rewrite the language of design with each new project.

For HBA in Atlanta, Bangkok, Beijing, Dubai, Hong Kong, Istanbul, Kuala Lumpur, London, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Moscow, New Delhi, San Francisco, Shanghai, Singapore, Tokyo, visit www.hba.com.