

Checking In

THE LATEST INDUSTRY NEWS FOR HOTEL EXECUTIVES FROM CANADA AND AROUND THE WORLD

COLLABORATIVE ART

Social enterprise is transforming Vancouver's Skwachàys Lodge into a boutique accommodation **BY JACKIE SLOAT-SPENCER**



The Skwachàys Lodge isn't your standard hotel. It's a healing lodge, an Aboriginal art gallery, an artist residence and a boutique accommodation, all rolled into one. Pegged to be Canada's only Aboriginal arts hotel, it's set to officially open in April. The project has united local artists with award-winning design firms to create 18 one-of-a-kind suites, featuring unique paintings and carvings.

The property, owned by the Vancouver Native Housing Society (VNHS), opened in 2012. At the time, the lodge was used primarily as a healing centre and residence, which hosted out-of-town visitors from reserves as well as community members at risk of homelessness. It was also an art gallery, which showcased the occupants' works. Last year, the lodge staff also began accepting reservations for the unoccupied

rooms. But, it was after a chance visit from hotel executive Jon Zwickel that the lodge's potential as a boutique hotel was truly realized. "The idea came to me to expand the art experience into the rooms, so the entire stay was highly experiential, immersing the guest into the world of Aboriginal arts," explains Zwickel, principal at Surrey, B.C.-based InnVentures Hospitality Corp., an advisory services firm.

Zwickel convinced six design firms, including B+H Chil, BBA Design Consultants Inc. and Porada Design Group, to lend their services pro-bono, and partnered them with local artists to develop themed spaces based on Canadiana, poetry, water and wilderness teachings. "The designers and I started reaching out to the community of hospitality suppliers, and the response was overwhelming," he says. "Everyone from mattress manufacturers, to small millwork shops" donated supplies, including window treatments, lighting and more, he says.

The lodge, which will offer rooms for \$225 a night, is expected to attract tourists interested in learning about Canada's Aboriginal culture. Inside, guests will be able to visit the smudge room — where spiritual cleansing ceremonies are performed — and the sweat lodge on the sixth floor. "Someone could come to the hotel, and [they] could have a smudge or a sweat; [they] could also have an experience in our lounge area," explains David Eddy, CEO of VNHS. "Our artists could come in and talk about their particular culture based on their particular band." This act of social enterprise is so well-ingrained in the project, sums up Eddy. "We adopted the theme of community building through the transformative power of arts and running it through everything we do."



WAX POETIC

Adele Rankin, senior associate of the B+H Chil design company, worked with Vancouver artist Clifton Fred to design three unique rooms inside the Skwachàys Lodge in Vancouver. "We ended up designing the rooms with a huge immersive experience into both [Fred's] artwork and the meaning behind it," says Rankin, giving an example of the Poem Suite, which features wall coverings awash in the artist's poetry, written by hand in charcoal. "We want[ed] to ensure we didn't provide anything in those rooms that was going to distract from the art — that's the main focus. Everything that we've surrounded it [with] is very neutral, very serene, almost minimalist, and the focus is really on [Fred]," she says.



CROWD SOURCING

The transformation of 18 rooms inside Vancouver's Skwachàys Lodge came with the hefty price tag of \$180,000, of which 20 per cent had been raised at press time. Anticipating the costs of funding the room design, the team launched a capital funds campaign to source room furnishings, TVs, equipment and more. For more information, visit skwachays.com.