

Rooms with a view

L.A. designer brings
world-class touches to
new River Walk Hotel

BY JAN KILBY

When Dodd Mitchell, interior designer for the new Hotel Valencia San Antonio Riverwalk, was growing up in California, his passion for design was obvious. He loved building forts in his backyard.

"As soon as I'd get it done, I'd design the rooms," he recalls. "My mom says since I was four years old I was constantly redoing my room."

Mitchell, now 36, has spent the past 18 years building his design career. He started by sweeping floors for a company that built sets for television commercials. After that, he progressed to building, decorating and designing sets.

Through his later work designing interiors for bars, he developed his design philosophy: Design space with the Earth in mind. His preference was to use natural materials like leather, stone and wood and natural elements like water and fire.

His classic yet contemporary rooms are as dramatic-looking as Hollywood studio sets, and feature international fashions and include furnishings as comfortable as Americans demand.

Doing business as dM Associates, Mitchell has designed bars, restaurants and small hotels in California, Utah and British Columbia.

The Valencia Group's hotel is his first large-scale project.

Mitchell is designing the interiors of two Valencia hotels, one in San Antonio and one in San Jose, Calif.

Doyle A. Graham, Jr., president of the hotel group, and Doyle A. Graham, Sr., its CEO, selected 3D/International (3D/I) as the architectural firm.

Set to open in November, the San Antonio hotel has already booked guest and meeting room space through 2004.

Luxury market

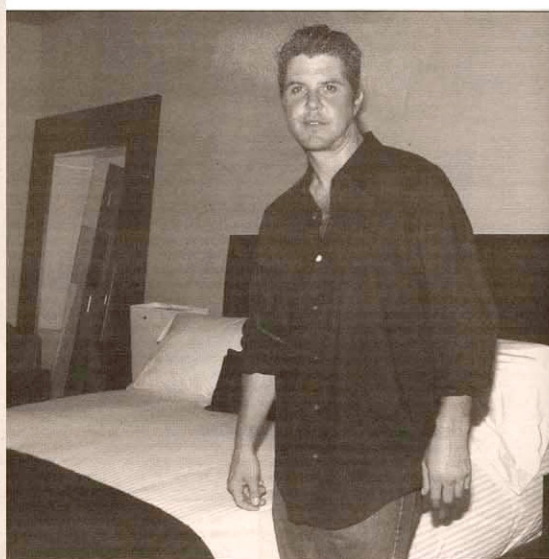
In planning the exclusive luxury hotel, designers sought to create an appeal to both the business and leisure travelers. A Tuscan motif was used for the 213 guest rooms.

Guest rooms 350 square feet in size will overlook the River Walk, Theater District or an interior open-air courtyard.

Five 750 square-foot studio suites will also have a river view.

A 1,700 square-foot presidential suite will feature a parlor and balcony overlooking the River Walk, two bedrooms, a dining room and bathrooms.

Included on the building site is the historic Giles Building, which is being renovated and restored to its 1920s-era design, explains Roy Kretschmer, the new general manager for the hotel.



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Designer Dodd Mitchell wants business travelers to feel at home at Hotel Valencia San Antonio Riverwalk.



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A model room at Hotel Valencia showcases Dodd Mitchell's talents.

The hotel will have a main entrance off Houston Street, as well as an additional entryway from the River Walk, with valet parking service for guests.

Mitchell's use of natural materials and forces will be evident as soon as guests enter the hotel's ground floor, he says. In a design reminiscent of a 15th-century monastery, the first floor entrance area will have inverted vaulted chipped-brick archways overlooking a space featuring fireplaces and dramatic reverse waterfall systems, he says.

A grand staircase and elevators will lead guests up to the second-floor to the registration and concierge desks. The floor will also feature a lobby lounge area and a restaurant with seating for 60 in an indoor area and another 60 on a riverfront terrace. In addition, a private solarium-style dining room will seat 14.

The bar on the second floor will feature a leather floor.

Hotel owners are also leasing space for an upscale Chinese bistro, the Bamboo, on the building's River Walk side.

Meeting space of 2,500 square feet is also available.

A touch of luxury

Mitchell designed the hotel's interior, except for the kitchen, which was assigned to Houston-based kitchen designer Tom Cook.

Mitchell selected triple-padded plush red carpet and ebony-stained hardwood for the flooring in public areas.

Jim Suggs, vice president of 3D/I, expects guests will be pleased with the décor.

"People haven't seen hotel rooms like this," he says. "We did everything in our power to keep our hotel room from looking like a hotel room," says Doyle Graham Jr., the Valencia Group's president.

Matthew Nuss, the Valencia Group's vice president of operations, says the company especially wanted to appeal to business travelers by offering a residential feel but with state-of-the-art technology and lighting.

Keeping it natural

While the rest of the hotel continues to be built, the team has completed a model guest room available for viewing.

Earth tones of black, white and khaki and a high ceiling give the guest room an elegant continental look while making it appear restful to those entering. The entryway features ebony-stained Brazilian cherry wood floors.

"If there's one thing that doesn't go out of style, it's Mother Nature, so by using those colors, it's not trendy," Mitchell says.

Indirect lighting gives the room the appearance of a secluded sanctuary. On one side of the entry door lie dark wood built-in units containing a minibar, drawers, a shelf containing an extra bed pillow and a closet with an opaque glass door. On the other side is a bathroom with another opaque glass door and a teak-wood vanity, white marble counter and stainless steel sink, a white tub and shower. The bathroom floors are white marble.

Rooms feature Mitchell's selection of black wall-to-wall carpeting.