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Marcel Breuer's Brutalist building in New Haven gets a second life as a net-zero hotel

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Photography by SEAMUS PAYNE



The iconic 1970s-era Marcel Breuer Brutalist Pirelli building in New Haven, Connecticut sat empty for more than 20 years before architect Bruce Becker of local integrated architecture and development firm Becker + Becker and his wife, Kraemer, bought it from IKEA in 2019 for \$1.2 million. Any adaptive reuse project of a historically protected landmark comes with its own set of challenges, but Becker had big plans for what would become the 165-room Hotel Marcel, a Tapestry Collection by Hilton property, setting out to create an all-electric, net-zero hotel designed to meet Passive House and LEED Platinum certification.

"There are two big ideas embedded in the design of Hotel Marcel," says Becker. "The first is to celebrate [the building] through the spirit of every detail of its creative reinvention as a boutique hotel. The second is to recycle the building—and many of its interior components—in a way that can serve as a model for sustainable hotel development."

When Brooklyn, New York-based Dutch East Design came on board, partners Larah Moravek, William Oberlin, and Dieter Cartwright had a monumental task ahead of them: retrofitting the former Armstrong Rubber Company headquarters (it was taken over by Pirelli Tire in 1988) into a hotel, paying homage to a revered building, and meeting a slew of sustainable goals, all packaged in a warm and inviting design.

Cartwright says they didn't want to create a museum to Breuer "but write a new chapter" by reintroducing Brutalism to the public. To contrast the concrete exoskeleton, for instance, the interiors are tactile and approachable, comprising warm woods, handmade terracotta tiles, and Annie Albers-designed fabrics and paintings that nod to the Bauhaus movement.

The design team was also required to maintain many original elements, including the concealed spline acoustic tile ceiling and the



1. The Marcel Breuer-designed Pirelli building in New Haven, Connecticut, known for its Brutalist concrete exterior marked by a central void, has been transformed into the net-zero Hotel Marcel.



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2. The stripped-back lounge area keeps things simple with midcentury-inspired furniture and artwork referencing the Bauhaus.

3. Upon arrival, guests are greeted by original granite flooring, the reimagined ceiling lights with faceted, prismatic translucent lenses, and a reception desk backed by full-height sheer drapery.

4. The column-free lobby is unified by a back wall clad with handmade terracotta tiles.

5. The existing stairwell, wrapped in precast concrete and original Breuer sconces, was retained and restored.

6. With 7,000 square feet of event space, one of the hotel's many prefunction vignettes boasts conceptual artwork by local artist Bob Gregson.

floorplan and wood paneling of the eighth-floor executive offices. "That, in its own, was a design challenge," Cartwright says, "but something we embraced with some artful and sophisticated details." The ceiling lights now feature faceted, prismatic translucent lenses and faceted wood decorative panels, while the offices have been transformed into nine midcentury-inspired rooms and suites.

On the sustainability front, much of the furnishings were sourced locally; triple-glazed windows were added to enhance energy efficiency of the building and meet Passive House design standards; the commercial kitchen and laundry systems are all electric; and lighting uses an energy-efficient DC power and control system known as power over ethernet (POE). Achieving net-zero status requires generating as much energy onsite as possible. To that end, the hotel is powered by more than 1,000 photovoltaic panels with some covering the roof and others mounted on canopies that provide covered parking.

As guests arrive at the property, they first catch a glimpse of the giant concrete block in the distance, but as they get closer, they see something different altogether with the solar panels surrounding the building and playful shadows created by the light dancing off the exterior. "Then you step inside, and you're greeted by original granite flooring and a beautiful reception desk backed by full-height sheer drapery," says Cartwright. "That's your first impression, and hopefully you experience the warmth of knowing this is special—this is something important, comfortable, and inviting." **hd**

beckerandbecker.com; dutcheastdesign.com; hotelmarcel.com



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7. The warm palette continues in the ground-floor BLDG restaurant, with lighting reclaimed from the original building and banquettes backed by a felt-covered wall.

8. The 165 guestrooms, all with different footprints, feature low furniture, as well as metal-framed desks backed by a felt-covered wall.



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Owners **Bruce and Kraemer Becker Management Company** **Charlestowne Architecture Firm** **Becker + Becker, Westport Connecticut Architecture** Project Team **Bruce Becker, Violette de la Salle, and Alice Tai** Interior Design Firm and Graphics **Dutch East Design, Brooklyn, New York** Interior Design Project Team **Dieter Cartwright, Larah Moravek, and William Oberlin** Contractor **Consigli** Purchasing Firm **Canoe Hospitality** Lighting **Focus Lighting Engineering** **GNBC Consulting Engineers and LN Consulting** Landscape **Blades & Goven** Envelope and Sustainability **Steven Winters Associates** Historic Consultant **MacRostie Historic Advisors**

EXTERIOR

Building **Marcel Breuer** Signage **Dutch East Design**

LOUNGE

Wall Reveal **Fry Reglet** Lighting **RBW** Furnishings **C&B, DWR, CIX, and Lily Jack** Rug **Jamie Stern Design** Sofa Fabric **Eric Shamrock** Window Surround **Stickley**

RECEPTION

Floor **Historic original by Marcel Breuer** Charcoal Wall and Stair Treads **Wassau Putty** Wall **Stone Source** Reception Desk **CIX** Lighting **ELA Lighting** Seating **Lily Jack** Fabric **Eric Shamrock** and **Knoll**

BLDG RESTAURANT

Floor **Porcelanosa** Furnishings **CIX, Origins, and Lily Jack** Upholstery Fabric **Richloom, Erica Shamrock, and Knoll** Sconce **RBW** Felt Wall **re:Felt** Historic retrofitted 1x4 Panels **Light Engine**

INTERIOR STAIRWELL

Light **Original as per Marcel Breuer**

CORNER SUITE

Desk and Window Surround **Stickley** Upholstery Fabric **Knoll** and **Arc Com** Desk Lamp **HB Lighting** Furnishings **AFM, Lily Jack, and TNT** Carpet **Durkan** Window Treatments **Power Shades**

PREFUNCTION AREA

Wall Reveal **Fry Reglet** Floor **Stone Source** Furnishings **Lily Jack** and **CIX** Settee Fabric **Richloom** Sconce **ELA** Lighting Art **Bob Gregson**