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Lost Property

LONDON

Curio Collection expands its presence in the capital, opening an escapism-inspired hotel where being lost is all part of the fun.

Words: Ben Thomas
Photography: © Viktor Kery

Converting an existing structure in the City of London is no mean feat, but to do so within a conservation area like St Paul's requires even greater perseverance, as hotel investment firm and developer Dominvs Group found out with its most recent project.

Following three years of planning negotiations, the company was given the green light to begin transforming a site on Ludgate Hill – the main thoroughfare leading to St Paul's Cathedral – between narrow one-way streets Creed Lane and Ludgate Square. Owing to the compact footprint, construction company McAleer & Rushe knew it would be a challenge to revive the former office building, especially given that the new hotel was to follow the same massing as its predecessor, abutting the neighbouring structures on two elevations.

Despite the complexity of the development, as well as disruptions caused by a slew of lockdowns later in the build, McAleer & Rushe persisted with construction and the BREEAM Excellent property was soon complete, rising

six storeys above ground and descending several levels below, with an exterior that combines precast brick and stone panels, curtain walling and mansard roofs. And while the construction process did involve the demolition of existing buildings behind a Grade II-listed façade, the partial retention of the latter – specifically the section facing Ludgate Hill – ensures that the hotel remains in keeping with the vernacular.

Inside, the layout has been largely dictated by the existing floorplate – meaning no two guestrooms are alike – however the designers were afforded more creative freedom with the interiors and branding, helped in part by the relaxed brand standards of Hilton's Curio Collection label. With that in mind, London-based design agency Yard Creative set about developing an identity that captures the feeling of being lost, settling on the name Lost Property after considering the hotel's location, somewhat hidden between the two lanes.

Permeating through the collateral and into the interior scheme, this sense of escape informs



Centred around the theme of being lost, the hotel's design brings together an eclectic mix of artwork, motifs and materials

everything from the colour palette to the choice of materials throughout. "The branding sets the tone for the design narrative," explains Ashley McCabe, Lead Interior Designer at Ica Studio, who worked closely with Rani Ahluwalia of Dominvs Group and Key Interior & Designs during the creative process. "Rani had a clear vision from the get-go and brought a great deal of energy. Working with a client who is also an interior designer meant the brief was more of a journey than a challenge, opening up new possibilities and resulting in prompt decisions."

Bringing Ahluwalia's vision to fruition, McCabe and the Ica team curated an eclectic mix of art installations, motifs and tactile materials that allow each space to develop its own identity. Nowhere is this more prevalent than at Found, the aptly named restaurant and bar that anchors the ground floor. While a bold resin bar and Art Deco-style lighting catch the eye on arrival, it's the glass chandelier hanging above an iridescent blue epoxy table that soon takes centre stage. Specially commissioned

by Ahluwalia herself, the ornate sculpture was crafted in Italy from Murano glass and features a flock of extinct birds – or lost natural treasures – that together form the silhouette of a two-metre-long hovering eagle.

The idea of lost treasures continues through the public spaces. Bespoke wallpaper by Timorous Beasties showcases more birdlife, while a tactile wall installation behind the reception desk plays out the moment Prime Minister Winston Churchill met Queen Elizabeth II. Designed by Artistic Licence, the piece comprises a series of 3D panels and also features local landmarks such as the British Museum, Westminster Abbey and Bank Underground Station. "We brought Rani's ideas to life by sketching, designing and producing the panels in bas-relief," says the Nottinghamshire-based studio, adding that many of the individual elements were sculpted in clay, with moulds and casts created using Jesmonite resin. "We carved and inscribed details from various materials, wrapping them all with a stone finish."



Artistic installations also play a key role at ground-floor coffee house Tattle, which has its own separate entrance to offer direct access from the street. Drinks and pastries are served against a backdrop of sage green and timber panelling, while shapely Murano pendants cast a warm glow and a display of mounted teacups feature handpainted quotes that subtly reflect the narrative.

Like Tattle, many of the Ludgate Hill facing guestrooms – particularly those on the upper floors – catch glimpses of the nearby cathedral and its iconic spires. Here, the interiors take on a bolder identity, with the 150 rooms alternating between a vibrant red or deep blue colour palette. Art Deco and Mid-Century inspired shapes accompany English brass fittings, while lighting has been supplied by Chelsom and marble bathrooms are kitted-out with sanitaryware from Kohler. There's playful touches too, such as the abstract prints of bowler hats that nod to those originally produced by London hatmakers, as well as references to the

locale; carpets by Ulster for example draw from the black and white tiles that line the floor of St Paul's. "Lost Property embodies the culture and spirit of the community in which it resides; it's a celebration of individual spirit defined by the uniqueness of the Curio collection," concludes McCabe. "Several instances throughout the design therefore mimic the architectural forms and aesthetic features of St Paul's Cathedral; the building was of great inspiration."

With London's oldest district sparking the imagination, the design team felt it was only right to explore the history of British craftsmanship along the way, tapping into the bygone techniques that had perhaps been lost over time. And it's this fusion of past and present that gives the newly constructed hotel its authenticity and charm, complementing the immediate vicinity while forging its own path through a series of intimate, multi-layered spaces. Guests may well find themselves getting lost amongst the many design details here, but that's all part of the fun.



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner / Developer: Dominus Group
Operator: Madison Group
Architecture: Consarc Design
Interior Design: Ica Studio, Key Interior & Designs
Graphic Design and Branding: The Yard Creative
Lighting Design: Nulty
Art Consultant: Wrapped LA, Artistic Licence
Main Contractor: McAleer & Rushe
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