



A Hotel for Creatives



An Interview with Clay Andrews,
General Manager, Hotel Figueroa

Renderings of the updated Hotel Figueroa

EDITORS' NOTE Clay Andrews has held his current post since July 2014. Before this, he held the roles of General Manager/Vice President of Warner Center Marriott; General Manager of Hotel ZaZa, Davison Hotel Company, Hilton Pasadena, and Renaissance Agoura Hills Hotel; General Manager and Food & Beverage for Wyndham International; Regional Director of Food & Beverage for Wyndham Hotel at Los Angeles Airport; Director of Meeting Services for Wyndham Aruba Beach Resort and Casino; and Director of Outlets at Wyndham Hotel-Plesanton Hilton.



Clay Andrews

PROPERTY BRIEF Hotel Figueroa (hotelfigueroa.com) will be restored to its 1920s Spanish Colonial splendor in June 2017. There are 268 room and suites, all designed with comfortable elegance and in-room technology in mind for today's modern traveler. With destination restaurants, a grand and expansive lobby, intimate mezzanine bar, and breathtaking pool area, Hotel Figueroa stands at the center of Downtown LA's vibrant arts scene, attracting locals, foodies, artists, and all manner of creatives, as well as the discerning traveler. Hotel Figueroa is located across the street from LA Live, the Staples Center, and the Los Angeles Convention Center and is in close proximity to the Los Angeles Performing Arts Center, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), and The Broad museum.

Would you discuss the heritage of the property and the vision around its recent transformation?

The hotel first opened in 1926 and, at the time, it was one of the first developments that was financed, developed, built, and run by women for women. The driving force behind the hotel was the YWCA. The hotel was basically a women's business hotel; the top nine floors were women only and the bottom three floors were for women traveling with families. The first general manager was also a woman. The hotel was a safe haven for traveling businesswomen. They did many gallery showings and supported the arts.

When the current owners first saw the property, it was much different. It had Moroccan decor, but it had initially been built in beautiful

Spanish Colonial architecture and the decor complemented that. Our owners decided to restore the building back to its Spanish Colonial roots. It's more of a rebirth, but our design firm has done an amazing job.

It's really a hotel for creatives, for artists. The hotel is going to be surrounded by art. The owners are amassing an impressive art collection, and they are focusing on local artists, although it won't be exclusively that.

Art will be the centerpiece here, and we'll have an artist-in-residence program as well where we take young artists from around the world, put them up in the hotel, and give them studio space to create, and we can hopefully feature some of that work.

Is it hard to get that unique messaging out, and how can you get the loyal guests engaged in this?

We have been teasing it through social media. Many of our former guests and fans of the hotel have embraced it. Others loved the Moroccan decor, but that decor wasn't honest for downtown LA.

We're part of Leading Hotels of the World, so the owners have invested quite a bit in making this a beautiful hotel.

We're not going to try to be a flashy brand. We want people to discover us organically. There will be PR but people will need to experience it. Just by virtue of being where we are located right next to the convention center, which is the new epicenter for downtown LA, it will be a busy hotel. We will have a lot of people coming through the door.

In terms of accommodation, how important was it to invest in the suite offering?

It's important. The luxury hotel sector has grown the most coming out of the recession, so we saw an opportunity there.

Previously, the hotels had six suites and we now have 63, seven of which are signature suites with a unique feature. A few of them lead out onto terraces that are sectioned off to be private. We can also do events on the terraces when the suites aren't being used. Two of our signature suites overlook Figueroa Street.

We have one suite that is alone on the mezzanine level. It's beautifully appointed. There is also a speakeasy private room that connects to the suite where one can entertain.

Many hoteliers in major cities talk about the challenges in food and beverage. What are your views on how to be successful in that area?

It requires the right partnership. We have two restaurants and four bars. I have worked for branded and independent hotels, and the independent hotels understand F&B better. As an independent hotel located in downtown LA where the food scene is blossoming, we found an F&B partner in Apicii. They brought in Casey Lane, who is our chef partner – he also has a restaurant in Venice, California called The Tasting Kitchen. He just opened another restaurant in New York City called Casa Apicii. He is going to do a Basque cuisine for our signature restaurant Brevia, as well as handling the cuisine for the restaurant by the pool, which will be more Mediterranean.

For our bar offering, we were able to get Dushan Zaric, who is the founder of Employees Only and Macao Trading Company. We will have a bar in the lobby and two bars by the pool, but his pride and joy is our Bar Alta, on the mezzanine level, which will be exclusive for hotel guests and reservations only. It's only 28 seats, and we're building a cocktail lounge. There will be no menus, and they will make bespoke cocktails.

How far have you gone with guest technology and how important is it to offer while not losing the personal touch?

We have invested a lot in training. We have the Leading Hotel standards that we have to adhere to, and we're also working with Freeman Hospitality, who works with our managers to shape our job descriptions and standards. Our managers are really strong. We have taken the best of the best from around LA.

Every day, we talk about how service and technology plays a part in that. We've invested heavily in it, including in our energy management systems, to make sure we're green – we're going to be LEED and Green Seal certified, which is very hard to do with a 91-year-old building. We're investing in in-room guest technology just to make things more efficient and make communication easier for our guests; there is also a phone and an iPad in every room for guests' communications. We are making sure we're covered in each area. ●