

HotelBusiness DESIGN®

meeting space design: Group Effort: The Westin Peachtree Plaza gets down to business with meeting rooms makeover

Saturday November 1st, 2014 - 1:05PM

As part of a \$70-million renovation, The Westin Peachtree Plaza in Atlanta redefined its meeting spaces in an attempt to inspire and engage attendees. The 1,073-room, 73-story property includes 53 renovated meeting rooms, totaling 200,000 gross sq. ft. Additionally, the hotel features the recently introduced Tangent at Westin, a new concept that strives to meet the needs of today's business traveler.

"In June 2013, we began transforming our meeting spaces and looked at the renovation from several perspectives," said Ron Tarson, general manager of The Westin Peachtree Plaza. "We wanted to first identify and upgrade specific areas that had not been recently renovated, and redesign these spaces to ensure that every detail creates a superior meeting experience throughout the attendees' stay."

The Westin Peachtree Plaza's meeting spaces occupy seven floors and are offset from the lobby. Atlanta-based interior design firm blackdog studio conceived the layout.

"Within each room, we customize the setup to support the meeting goals," said Tarson. "For example, we can incorporate pod seating instead of a classroom layout to increase collaboration and connectivity by grouping attendees together." The meeting spaces also feature Westin's clutter-free station, a separate table on the perimeter of the room, which provides attendees with supplies for the open workspace.

The hotel's meeting spaces, which includes the Savannah ballroom, contain small, medium and large rooms, which can be partitioned, decorated and arranged to best meet the needs of each group. These spaces can accommodate large group sessions and also segment areas for breakout meetings. The rooms can also be arranged to match an organization's regular workplace environment or give attendees a change of scenery.

During the redesign, blackdog studio changed the color scheme to neutral tones and incorporated nature-inspired design elements. "The hotel's meeting spaces hadn't been touched since the building was built in the 1970s," said Carolyn Auger Joiner, owner and principal, blackdog studio. "We wanted all of the spaces to have a lighter, brighter feel."

Blackdog studio carried the color scheme and design elements throughout the carpet, paint, window treatments and furniture. The firm also added easy-to-control temperature units in each meeting room, as well as new digital boards outside for directions and signage to show details of the meeting.

To support the hotel's environmental initiatives, blackdog studio replaced compact fluorescent lighting with LED lamps to brighten the space. "The lighting design in the ballrooms was antiquated," said Auger Joiner. "The Westin Peachtree Plaza and Starwood Hotels & Resorts invested heavily into this effort, including the hiring of a lighting consultant. It really made a huge difference. Not only is the hotel saving money with energy costs, the spaces have a brighter, cleaner feel. It's almost as if someone turned the lights on inside." The hotel also now offers a linen-less setup with tables made entirely of recycled, durable materials.

Located near attractions such as the new College Football Hall of Fame, National Center for Civil & Human Rights, Georgia Dome and Georgia Aquarium, The Westin Peachtree Plaza attracts several types of business travelers including meeting planners, travel professionals and meeting attendees for citywide events, according to the hotel. The property also draws individual and small groups of business travelers. "Atlanta is increasingly ranked as a top meeting destination because of its international airport, travel convenience and numerous venues," said Tarson. "The Westin Peachtree Plaza is centrally located downtown. Attendees want easy access to activities outside the meeting, and having that proximity to fun entertainment makes our hotel an even more attractive destination."

While some travelers may not need traditional meeting spaces, guests have continuously requested Tangent at Westin, a fully equipped, ad-hoc meeting space and workspace available by the hour for up to six people. Tangent at Westin features technology like videoconferencing, computers, printers and other supplies, as well as floor-to-ceiling whiteboards and wired and wireless Internet.

Knowing that the meetings can extend to other public areas, The Westin Peachtree Plaza provides seating zones in its recently redesigned lobby. They blend with the lobby's general flow, but are slightly partitioned and outfitted for different size groups. Each area is equipped with tables, couches and chairs. "The lobby was the final piece of the puzzle to the renovation," said Auger Joiner. "We took the same colors, fabrics and wood tones in the other meeting spaces and brought them into the lobby."

—Matthew Marin