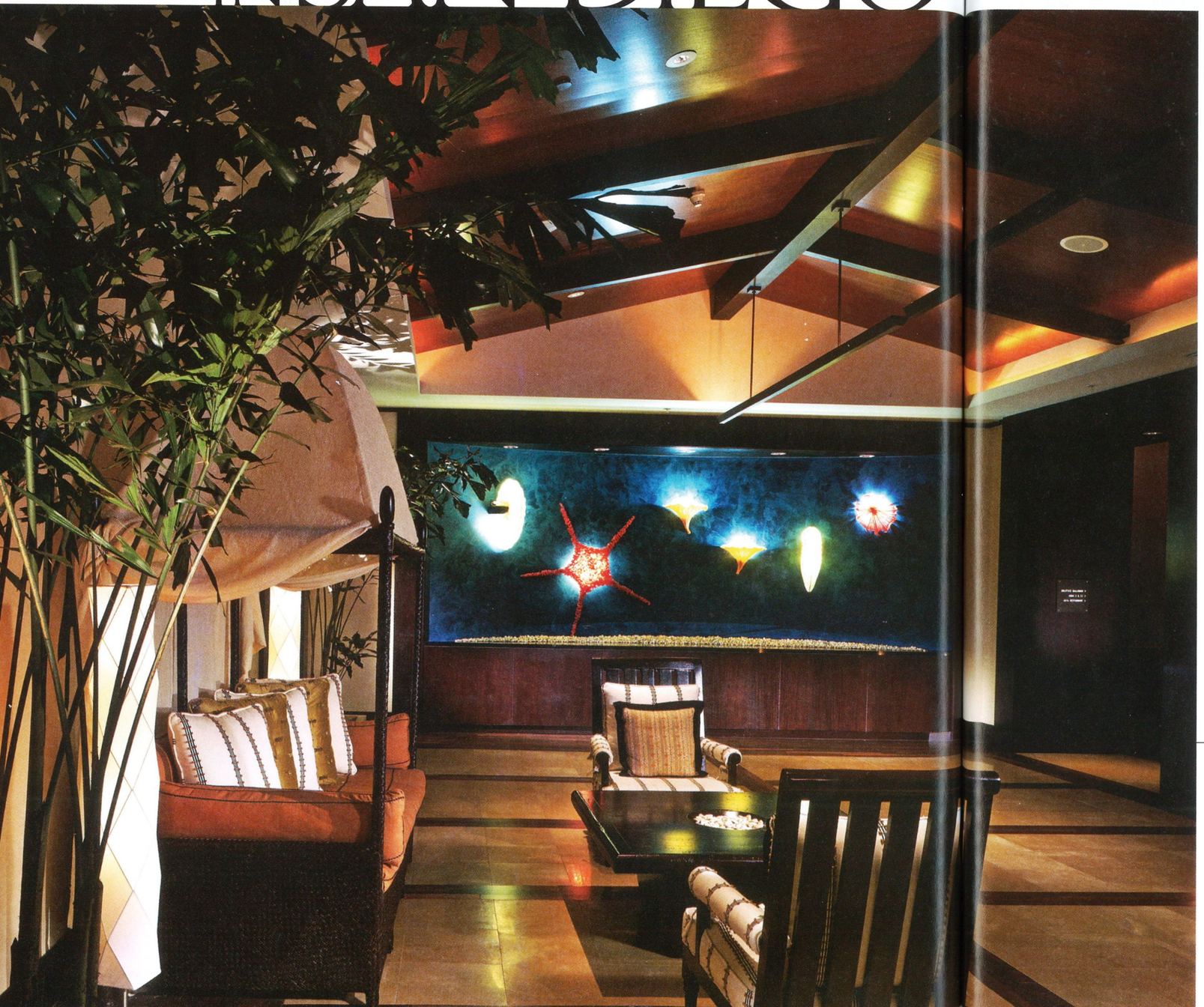
 By Janet Wiens

A New Gateway IN SAN DIEGO

The Hotel Solamar serves as a new gateway between San Diego's Gaslamp and Sports and Entertainment districts.



ABOVE The three-story brick component of the Hotel Solamar ties the property with the nearby historic Gaslamp District, while the seven-story hotel tower references buildings found in the adjacent Sports and Entertainment District.

ABOVE The Aqua Creations wall in the lobby brings the ocean into the space and provides a nice tie with the hotel's name and marketing plan. The timbers in the ceiling provide visual interest.

Creating a gateway or transition between two distinct urban areas can be challenging. In San Diego, the task was successfully completed with the new 235,000 sq. ft. Hotel Solamar. This striking property is located between the city's historic Gaslamp District and the Sports and Entertainment District developed around Petco Park—the new baseball stadium for the San Diego Padres.

"The hotel's design had to be sensitive to two areas with very distinct characteristics," says Frank Ternasky, AIA, principal-in-charge for Architects Delawie Wilkes Rodrigues Barker—the San Diego-based architectural firm that helped to create the hotel's image. "There are many three-story brick buildings, including shops, restaurants, small offices and warehouses in the Gaslamp District. The Sports and Entertainment District on the other hand has many newer structures that are seven stories tall and above. Our work had to respect both areas while also having its own signature."

Ternasky says that the design solution engages the street on three sides of the property. The main restaurant entry and retail are on J Street, which features a bold corner entrance. The hotel entry and restaurant bar is on Sixth Avenue, and the ballroom opens onto Seventh Avenue. The ample connections to the street encourage pedestrian interaction with the property.

"The three-story brick building that is part of the project features materials and details found in the Gaslamp District," Ternasky says. "We placed the pool, outdoor areas and Jbar on top of the structure to

provide a place to look out onto the surrounding area. In contrast, the 10-story hotel tower has a smooth plaster finish and is more in keeping with the height of buildings found in the Sports and Entertainment District."

Hotel Solamar, which means sea and sun, is vibrant, engaging and fun. "Our theme started with the name," says Susan Caruso, president of Intra-Spec, Inc., Marina del Rey, (CA)—the hotel's interior designer. "The sun and sea are integral to the hotel's marketing plan, and elements related to these subjects are used throughout the public areas and guest rooms. The interior design also has an urban flavor that incorporates many distinct and playful touches."

Major features carried throughout the public areas include colors of chocolate and aqua blue, which begin in the lobby and appear in all areas of the hotel. Seashell touches in the lobby were also used in artwork found in the guest rooms.

The sun behind the registration desk in the lobby provides a vivid image for hotel guests. The French limestone floor, which is bordered and inset with palm wood, provides a nice "mirror" to the wood inset in the ceiling. An aqua creations wall at one end of the lobby further brings the sea into the space.

A living room off the lobby provides an intimate gathering space for guests and features a fireplace, multiple seating options and leather-covered walls. The area rugs have images of turtles, which appear to float on the floor. A library, which is also located off the lobby, has shelves full of books and a game table.

The placement of the 3,000 sq. ft. ballroom with its entrance on Seventh Avenue offers easy access during events. The ballroom can be divided into three sections to facilitate the hosting of simultaneous events for smaller groups.

LEFT The living room provides an intimate place for guests to gather and features a fireplace, multiple seating options and leather-covered walls.

BELOW The hospitality suite overlooks the Jbar and is used for special events.

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Right: Blue mosaic tiles are the boldest beach reference in the hotel. *Above:* A guestroom. *Opposite page, top:* Luxury cabanas line the pool at rooftop Jbar. *Opposite page, bottom:* The main dining room of Jsix restaurant.

in bright blue glass mosaic tile, perhaps the boldest beach reference in the hotel. The rooms themselves are urban and sophisticated: Dark masculine colors mix with coastal touches like wall-mounted shadow boxes depicting puffy clouds and blue skies to create a cozy feel.

Meanwhile, the hotel's Jsix restaurant has an energetic, yet comfortable feel, according to designer Bob Puccini of San Francisco-based Puccini Group. Since Puccini himself grew up in San Diego, he had a sense of the market and the financial potential behind Solamar's gateway location. As such, "The motif is exotic, sensual, and dramatic, but not fussy," he says. "We wanted people to think 'wow, something's really happening here.'"

That something is a trip to the Pacific Rim. "We looked at the close proximity to Hawaii, and the mix of cultures in San Diego, but still wanted to add a touch of whimsy since restaurants can take people away from the humdrum of everyday life," he says. So flower shapes are carved into plaster walls, fezzes and abalone shells were chosen over traditional art, and the color palette is dramatic and lively. These themes continue onto the fourth-level rooftop Jbar, where hotel guests and locals mingle amidst luxury cabanas surrounding the lap pool on the bar's deck. "The design is sexy, like an urban resort," he says. **hd**