

Iconic Westin Michigan Avenue Launches \$7M Renovation

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One of Chicago's premier hotels will undergo a sizable renovation this winter. Located on the north end of the Magnificent Mile, The Westin Michigan Avenue has embarked on a \$7 million renovation to its entire 37,000 square feet of banquet, ballroom, conference and meeting areas.

Slated for completion in early March, improvements will include state-of-the-art lighting and audio systems, faster internet connectivity, and increased flexibility in room configurations. It will also mark the unveiling of the "High Performance Meeting Chair by Starwood," which promises to be one of the smartest and most comfortable chairs in the corporate meeting industry.

"Along with the daffodils and warmer weather, this spring our conference and banquet areas will re-emerge in new colors, fabrics and textures," says General Manager Brent Menzel. "Among the many upgrades, our ballroom area rejuvenation will make our guests' Westin experience even more memorable."

The renovation reflects Starwood's continued commitment to improve its properties while the economy remains stuck in neutral. With Chicago business and tourism predicted to re-emerge in 2012, the renovation is well-timed for

the downtown conference and bridal season.

As part of its design process, Chicago-based architect VOA Associates took great care to extend what they call "the DNA of the Westin brand" throughout the renovated spaces.

"Our biggest challenge was to make this space feel glamorous enough for a wedding reception, but also serious enough for a business meeting," says VOA's Patricia Rotondo. "We also took great care in aligning the renovation with Westin's selected Chicago themes of 'lake,' 'park' and 'city'."

In a nod to the environment, the renovation will incorporate earth-friendly features from top-to-bottom. Brighter, energy-efficient lighting in the ceiling, for instance, will reduce energy needs, while the new, wool carpeting on the floors will last longer. "Wool has a natural fiber," explains the architect. "Because the fiber is thicker, there's less wear-and-tear," Rotondo adds. "Wool costs more, but the payoff is a longer life-span." It's this same dedication to the environment that last year earned the hotel the coveted designation as Green Seal™ Silver Certified. The hotel meets the Green Seal Environmental Standard for Lodging Properties for its best use practices in the areas of energy consumption and

efficiency, recycling, and waste minimization.

For business conference attendees, meanwhile, internet connectivity continues to be the lifeblood of communication with the outside world. That's why the renovation included the installation of Fatpipe, a bandwidth management network tool that will significantly boost the hotel's conference area IT connectivity.

"This feature alone will allow us to better manage high-speed data transfer through multiple lines and multiple ISPs," says Bob Thomas, the hotel's director of engineering. "It's pretty amazing stuff."

Other renovation improvements include new rigging points for staging equipment, and an electronic reader board system. Insulation upgrades in the walls, meanwhile, will help to make the rooms more soundproof.

To Chicago-based event planners, The Westin Michigan Avenue offers guests an unbeatable, one-two punch: a location at the hub of Chicago's vibrant downtown, and breathtaking views from its 752 guest rooms. That helps to explain the iconic hotel's popularity for business conferences, weddings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, Quinceañera parties and

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fundraising events.

“The Westin Michigan Avenue is a very cool place to stay downtown,” says Dave Betke, manager of meetings and corporate travel for Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. “It’s got that great location right along Michigan Avenue and has easy access to nearby world-class shopping and restaurants.”

The New Year will also bring news of the “High Performance Meeting Chair by Starwood,” a specially designed chair that will formally be introduced in Starwood Hotels next month. The Westin Michigan Avenue will be among the first to showcase the chair.

Finally, the renovation provides the hotel an opportunity to rename all of its meeting and event spaces. In a nod to the Windy City, the former Wellington Grand Ballroom has been renamed “The Great Lakes Grand Ballroom.” The names of the other meeting and event spaces will each reflect upon the Chicago theme of “lake,” “park,” or “city.”