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“Green” Hotels Association®



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North American Headquarters

701 North West Shore Blvd.

Tampa, FL 33609, USA

Tel. (813) 639-1900 • Fax (813) 639-4344



Chief Operating Officer

Lawrence Roberts

lawrence.roberts@faircount.com

**Vice President,
Business Development**

Robin Jobson

robin.jobson@faircount.com

Assistant to the Publisher

Alexis Vars

Project Manager

Steve Chidel

steve.chidel@faircount.com

Advertising Account Executives

Emily Freeborn, James McCann

Controller

Robert John Thorne

robert.thorne@faircount.com

Director of Information Systems

John Madden

john.madden@faircount.com

Webmaster

Clyde Sanchez

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of Solage Calistoga

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on 30% recycled material.

Contributing Writers

Heidi Bohi, David A. Brown

Michael A. Robinson, Judith A. Stock

Tara N. Wilfong

Editorial Director

Charles Oldham

chuck.oldham@faircount.com

Senior Editor

Ana E. Lopez

Project Editor

Iwalani Kahikina

Editor

Rhonda Carpenter

Assistant Editor

Steven Hoarn

Art Director

Robin K. McDowall

Design and Production

Rebecca Laborde

Daniel Mrgan

Lorena Noya

Kenia Y. Perez

Production Assistant

Lindsey Brooks

Editorial Intern

Stephanie Whitehall

Sales Support

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The Solage Calistoga in California



“GREEN” HOTELS MEMBER FOCUS

BY DAVID A. BROWN

The tapestry of sustainability woven by “Green” Hotels Association® (GHA) Members is one of diverse design. Many bold ideas form the pattern of this ever-growing fabric, but the common thread is innovation – the tireless pursuit for a better way. Better for the environment, better for the guest’s experience, and better for the bottom line; this objective trinity works in concert for a collective good.

To this end, GHA Members take the key components of green knowledge, apply these practices to their particular properties, and develop methods with a deep impact that affect both the day-to-day and the long term. Constantly perfecting their balance between guest comfort and environmental sustainability may seem like a daunting task, but most enjoy the challenge, along with the ensuing rewards of seeing their properties achieve sustainable success.

Here’s a look at what some of the leading green hotels have been up to lately:

SOLAGE CALISTOGA

Location: Calistoga, Calif.

Guest Rooms: 89

Description: A masterful blend of exquisite design and environmental sustainability, this indulgent resort sits nestled in the sun-drenched splendor of Northern California’s Napa Valley.

Awards & Achievements: Ranked 11th in *Travel + Leisure’s* World’s Best Awards for Resorts, 2009; *Hospitality Design* magazine award for Green Design, 2008

Greening Examples: Leveraging its natural surroundings for energy savings, Solage Calistoga harnesses the warm waters of an on-site geothermal spring and then pipes this invigorating flow into the soaking pools and full-plunge pools of its luxurious Spa Solage treatment building and bathhouse. Geothermal water also keeps the family pool warm for year-round swimming, while carbon-filtered drinking water from the resort’s

natural source serves guest rooms, Solbar restaurant, and Spa Solage.

Solage’s signature spa treatment – the “Mud Slide” – uses an organic mixture comprising California clay and volcanic ash mixed with geothermal water and blended with a selection of organic oils. Guest rooms, public areas, and Spa Solage use locally sourced, handmade bath amenities dispensed through bulk containers to minimize waste.

“Being part of an organization that is putting the green movement front and center helps us think about what we’re doing here and how we can improve.”

– Director of Membership and Local Markets Renee Risch, Solage Calistoga

The Solage Calistoga



Architecturally, Solage boasts eco-friendly features such as rooftop solar panels, tall windows, and open spaces that permit unrestricted air flow for a passive cooling effect that eliminates the need for air conditioning. Low volatile organic compound (VOC) paints, bamboo flooring, and natural materials, such as hemp, wool, jute, stone, and reclaimed timbers, used in guest rooms help minimize the environmental impact.

Management View: Renee Risch, director of membership and local markets, noted that while Solage Calistoga is modest in size, management and staff have the utmost concern for their environmental responsibility. “Many hotels have more rooms [than our 89], so that equals a lot of waste. But anything we can do, even on a small scale, makes a difference. We’ve tried to touch every part of the resort that can make a difference.”

Risch said that Solage guests typically harbor common green commitments. In many cases, individuals and groups arrive at the resort following careful scrutiny of various environmental policies.

“A lot of not only leisure guests, but also corporate guests, have green initiatives as part of their preferences,” Risch said. “In a time when everyone is looking closely at where they spend their dollars, these guests look more closely at [facilities] that fit their expectations.

“At Solage, since we were built eco-friendly from the ground up, we’re able to meet the requirement that many guests are looking for in their green philosophies.”

THE SEAPORT HOTEL BOSTON

Location: Boston, Mass.

Guest Rooms: 426

Description: Located within the dynamic Seaport District along Boston's scenic waterfront.

Awards & Achievements: Boston Green Business Award, 2007; Massachusetts Lodging Association Good Earth Keeping Award, 2007; Boston Green Business Award – Bike Friendly Business, 2008; Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection WasteWise Innovation Award, 2008

Greening Examples: Among Seaport's newest achievements is the use of green cleaning fluids produced by an electrolyzed water system that combines tap water and a saline mix with positive and negative electrical charges to create a powerful and natural cleaning agent. Also, the hotel has installed an ozone system, which uses high-voltage electricity to split oxygen atoms into highly unstable groupings of three oxygen atoms called “ozone gas.” Mimicking a natural chemical transformation that helps clean the atmosphere of pollutants, this man-made alteration works as a powerful oxidizing, cleaning, and bleaching agent for Seaport's laundry. Faster and more effective cleaning reduces the amount of detergent, water, and energy needed.

Energy conservation comes from smart thermostats and smart meters that control the building's HVAC and electricity use. Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) installed in all guest rooms, public-space fixtures, and the parking garage use less energy and last longer than incandescent bulbs. (Seaport recycles used bulbs to keep mercury out of the environment.) Also, flat-screen TVs in guest rooms are part of GHA Member Phillips' EcoVision initiative and use up to 50 percent less energy than other models.

“The GHA allows us access to products we might not have known about. Also, it allows us to share some of our best practices on what has worked for us and see what has worked with other hotels.” – Director of Rooms
Matt Moore, the Seaport Hotel Boston



The Seaport Hotel in Boston



Meanwhile, an EnergySmart Roof® system on all buildings on the Seaport World Trade Center (WTC) campus conserves energy by reducing atmospheric heat. A green roof, similar to that of the Golden Arrow Resort, covers the Seaport WTC’s East Podium building.

The hotel extends its mandatory staff recycling program to a voluntary guest room program that allows guests the option of separating their trash and recyclables. For its food services, Seaport uses a Bio-EZ commercial composter to transform its solid waste into liquid slurry that flows through sewer pipes. This reduces garbage collection/hauling expenses, along with the associated fuel use, and minimizes Seaport’s landfill burden.

Management Views: Along with his role as director of rooms, Moore also coordinates Seaport’s green initiatives, organizing staff and hotel managers and addressing questions and suggestions from guests. Moore said that since Seaport formally launched its greening initiative “Seaport Saves” in 2005, the central premise has been: Can we do it better?

“Seaport is committed to making our operation as sustainable as possible,” Moore said. “We firmly believe that you can operate a luxury hotel and still operate sustainably. Most of our initiatives are seamless to our guests. In the last decade or so, sustainability has always implied a compromise to your guest.

But I think the technology has evolved so you’re not compromising quality for environmentally sustainable initiatives.”

As Moore pointed out, guests take note of how hotels handle environmental issues and the consumer’s scorecard weighs heavily on bookings.

“Surveys indicate that people are making decisions on where to stay based on a company’s environmental position,” Moore said. “A lot of people are putting their money where their philosophy is. They’re making decisions based on who shares their

“[GHA] is an internationally recognized organization and by being a Member, we’re aligning ourselves with the same philosophy. I think every hotel in that organization is among the world’s most committed to environmental sustainability.” – Director of Rooms Matt Moore, the Seaport Hotel Boston

Photo courtesy of the Seaport Hotel Boston



beliefs on sustainability. Just like you wouldn't ignore the quality of food or the size of rooms, you also don't ignore the sustainability factor."

For example, Moore said that Seaport gets 50 to 70 percent of its business from large groups with green preferences. Whereas Request for Proposals (RFPs) once focused on such details as banquet facilities, room rates, and multimedia equipment, RFPs now include inquiries about energy conservation, solid-waste management, and poured water.

"That's not to say that these groups would not have stayed with us otherwise," Moore said, "but we've been able to satisfy the environmental language in their RFPs."

In Moore's opinion, the hotel industry should be pressing the developmental horizon of green practices. "What we do has a very large carbon footprint, so we have a tremendous responsibility to lead the way in sustainability. These initiatives may or [may] not be [immediately] appropriate for the residential sector, but with testing and development in the hotel industry, maybe some of these ideas will evolve into something that will be appropriate for the home."



The Seaport Hotel



Photo courtesy of the St. Regis Aspen Resort

HOT TIMES IN ASPEN

In other notable Member news, summer 2009 saw the St. Regis Aspen Resort debut its cutting-edge solar project. The resort expects to dramatically reduce its natural gas usage by harnessing the sun's energy for an environmentally friendly heating source.

A system of 3,000 solar e-tubes, called "heat pipes," was mounted on the St. Regis Aspen's roof. These vacuum tube arrays can heat water to temperatures above 400 degrees, after which the heated water is pumped to storage tanks and dispersion loops. Tied into the resort's main domestic water loop, this system provides heated water for sinks and showers, as well as the spa and heated pools.

"The St. Regis Aspen and our parent company, Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, made a large capital investment in this project as part of our green initiatives," said General Manager Senih Geray in a company release. "We are committed to significantly reducing the energy used by the hotel because we believe in working toward a more sustainable and ecologically sound future." With its pumps, valves, and water quantity digitally controlled for optimal temperature range, the solar-powered system takes the place of natural gas-heated water until tank temperatures fall below a set minimum. After sundown, or during cloudy conditions, the system reverts to natural gas operation until the sunlight returns.

Photo courtesy of the Seaport Hotel Boston