

Top Construction Projects: 10. Jung Hotel Redevelopment

Editor's note: This is one of a series of stories featured in CityBusiness' upcoming Top Construction Projects guide.

By: Robin Shannon, Managing Editor © January 29, 2016 0

Occupying an entire city block along Canal Street, the historic Jung Hotel has languished in vacancy after suffering serious damage from the floods that followed Hurricane Katrina, but a reinvestment in the building is set to bring it back to its former prominence.

Developer and hotelier Joseph Jaeger is spearheading a full renovation of the 17-story hotel at 1500 Canal St. to the tune of \$130 million. Plans include 145 hotel suites, 175 apartments and 50,000 square feet of retail space, along with two restaurants and bars, three rooftop spaces, a spacious ballroom and a refurbished rooftop pool.

The McDonnel Group of Metairie is the primary contractor for the development, which was designed by Trahan Architects and John C. Williams Architects. Contractors recently hit a major milestone in the project, as work wrapped up on the hotel's new seven-story parking garage.



A redevelopment of the historic Jung Hotel will change the face of an entire square block of Canal Street. Rendering courtesy Trahan Architects

Jason Zuckerman, McDonnel Group vice president and a project manager for the Jung, said it has come with its fair share of challenges in meshing old with new.

"Everything has to be approved by the State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service to ensure we achieve the requirements of securing the historic tax credits that make the project work," Zuckerman said. "Injecting new construction into a building that wasn't built under modern codes and tolerances is always a challenge."

Adding to that is the varying ages of each section of the building. The hotel first opened in 1907, and additions were completed in 1927 and 1955. Zuckerman said each section has its own quirks that contractors have to work around.

"Each portion was built in its own way," Zuckerman said. "The interior plaster is in better shape in certain parts of the building than it is in others. We have also had to find ways to bring all the existing windows up to code and suitable for a modern hotel. There are a lot of little things that add up."

Part of the credit requirements includes preservation of the building's exterior skin. Zuckerman said that required a roughly month-long survey of every inch of the outside of the building.

"We had men on scaffolding checking each section," he said. "Much of it was in good shape."

Despite the historic challenges, Zuckerman said every now and then the project gets a shot in the arm that makes everything worthwhile.

"One good example is the elevator system in the older part of the building," he said. "All the original mechanical equipment is on the roof and still in working order and we plan to refurbish it. The historic preservation people love it and we now have a mechanism that isn't proprietary, meaning anyone can work on it."

Zuckerman said an additional hurdle for the project has been a pre-existing issue with storm drainage system that causes water leakage in the building's basement area, which was flooded after Katrina. He said the city's recent settlement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency should help fix the problem, which not only affects the Jung but also impacts nearby Tulane Hospital.

The Jung had once been known as the largest convention hotel in the South. The building played host to Carnival balls, high school proms and a 1964 appearance by President Lyndon Johnson. In its prime, the hotel amassed 759 rooms.

Jung Hotel redevelopment

Cost: \$130 million

Project description: A renovation and redevelopment of the historic Canal Street building into a new 145-room hotel with 175 apartments and 50,000 square feet of retail.

Start date: Spring 2015

Expected completion date: Fall 2016

Peak construction employment: 400

Owner/developer: Joe Jaeger

General contractor: The McDonnel Group

Designers: Trahan Architects and John C. Williams Architects

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