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New Hotels Bring Fresh Perspectives to Chicago

After a tumultuous few years and ongoing challenges, recent development proves the resilience of the Windy City

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Designed by KOO, Sable at Navy Pier weaves in subtle nautical elements like weathered brass

Whether repurposing old buildings into trendy hotels or planting a flag in emerging neighborhoods—like **Ace Hotel Chicago**'s debut in the West Loop (a collaboration between in-house Atelier Ace and Commune) in 2017 or **Hoxton**'s arrival in the Fulton Market District in 2019 (with public spaces by AvroKO)—Chicago is on the rebound from the economic and social hits wrought by the pandemic and last summer's Black Lives Matter protests. Hotel inventory has returned to 98 percent of its previous peak capacity of nearly 44,000 rooms, according to tourism website [Choose Chicago](#), which also reported that it has booked 72 large meetings for the latter half of 2022, representing 1.7 million room nights.

No wonder, then, that about 20 major hotel projects have recently opened or are in the pipeline, adding 4,000 more rooms to the city's inventory. Included among them is the 115-room **Nobu Hotel Chicago**, a collaboration between local firms Modif Architecture and Studio K; **21c Museum Hotel Chicago**, a 297-room transformation of the James Hotel by brand favorite Deborah Berke; and the **Study at the University of Chicago**, a 167-room new build by local architects Holabird & Root that was unveiled this fall.

The 223-room **Sable at Navy Pier** also arrived last year. Spearheaded by Chicago firm KOO, the Curio Collection by Hilton property celebrates the waterfront location by marrying nautical details with a palette culled from the colors of Lake Michigan. Looking ahead, the 280-room **citizenM Chicago**, part of a 47-story mixed-use tower designed by locally based bKL Architecture, is slated for a spring opening with interiors by Dutch design studio concrete, which helped develop the concept.



A rendering of the citizenM Chicago, which is slated to open in a downtown mixed-use development this spring

On the high-end front, one of the city's most anticipated entries is the 192-key **St. Regis Chicago**, located in a new-build 101-story skyscraper on Wacker Drive by Studio Jeanne Gang with interiors from Gensler. Pegged for opening later this year, the hotel will feature two restaurant offerings. Locally based KTG Y Simeone Deary is currently renovating the **Waldorf-Astoria Chicago**, with "inspiration from Coco Chanel, overlaying the brand's classic black and white palette with the edgier side of what it's doing today," says principal Lisa Simeone. "Think of an audacious model coming down the runway in a bouclé jacket while wearing a nose ring."



The revamped common areas of the Four Seasons Hotel Chicago, courtesy of Rottet Studio

Not to be outdone, two other posh stalwarts have completed major renovations. **The Ritz-Carlton Chicago's** \$100 million effort was led by San Francisco-based BAMO, which redesigned the hotel's public spaces and freshened the property's 434 guestrooms with tones of blue and gray "that reference the physical elements of the city, lake, and sky," says principal Billy Quimby. BAMO also upgraded suites at the 347-room **Four Seasons Hotel Chicago**, while Rottet Studio's re-do of the hotel's common areas was highlighted by lighting installations such as a Terzani chandelier on the grand staircase, which "moves slowly, like a sparkling evening gown" and ballroom fixtures that evoke "Tiffany diamond bangles," says founding principal Richard Riveire.

Rebranding and reuses are aplenty, too, bringing new life to Chicago's stock of classic buildings. Here's a look at three worthy efforts.

Pendry Chicago



Pendry Chicago's public spaces are threaded together by black and white tile

Hotels have been drawn to the high Deco splendor of the Carbide and Carbon Building for decades now. Once a Hard Rock and most recently the St. Jane, the property emerged from the pandemic last spring as the Pendry Chicago, a 364-key offering from Toronto firm Studio Munge. “In such an iconic heritage building, we wanted the public spaces to feel as if they had been established for years,” says founder and design director Alessandro Munge. Public areas feature “tactile materials, such as soft velvets and soulful leathers juxtaposed against dark oak and walnut.” With large windows opening to Michigan Avenue, lush botanical wallcoverings, and antiqued mirrors, the conservatory-like vibe of the café portion of Venteux restaurant is particularly Instagrammable. The guestrooms, meanwhile, offer a more autumnal palette of forest green and rust that plays off black and white accents.

The Selina



Panoramic views are a highlight in the Revive Interiors-designed suite at the Selina Chicago

In another conversion, the former Tremont Hotel is now the 600-bed Selina, marking the sixth U.S. location for the global brand. “Selina doesn’t build new hotels, it renovates existing properties to give them new life through art and upcycled materials,” says Catalina Botero, founder of Revive Interiors and former regional design lead for the brand. She cites the hotel’s funky mélange of rustic finishes, vintage pieces, and bold prints—like tropical wallpaper—as key to its rejuvenation. “The black panthers at the entrance, the white greyhound in the restaurant, and the old books and world maps are some of my favorite elements,” she adds. The property offers a range of room styles, including hostel-like accommodations—along with a variety of common areas, such as a communal kitchen, cinema, wellness center, coworking spaces, and the full-service restaurant HOWM.

LaSalle Hotel



The library at the soon-to-open LaSalle Hotel, with interiors by DiLeonardo, shown in a rendering

Scheduled to open this February, the LaSalle Hotel from Marriott’s Autograph Collection is an adaptive reuse of a block-long Daniel Burnham building in the Loop, which originally housed banking offices. Jumping off that heritage and tying into the building’s good bones—dark millwork, stone flooring—the teams at DiLeonardo and Chipman Design Architecture have gone for a masculine vibe. Evident throughout, it starts at the moody library, where the “intricate floor pattern, grand fireplace, and sophisticated palette create an exclusive experience,” says firm partner Giana DiLeonardo. Upstairs, the 232 charcoal-hued guestrooms are offset by Calacatta marble bathrooms to offer a “luxurious, residential feel,” she adds. Borrowing from Burnham’s maxim to “make no little plans,” the hotel has “no small moments” and everything from the clubby restaurant Grill on 21 to a solarium adjacent to the lobby will deliver on the promise.

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