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## LAUREN ROTTET

revamps the st. regis aspen  
and why she was born to design

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# DESIGN

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## A Plan for All Seasons

*The St. Regis Aspen glows amid natural beauty*



# Aspen Glow

*A stylish redesign modernizes the St. Regis & sheds light on its historic roots*

By STEFANI C. O'CONNOR

The social atmosphere in Aspen, CO, is as rarefied as the air found at the top of the city's iconic mountains. So when it was time to reimagine and renovate the St. Regis Aspen Resort, it made perfect sense to meld the aesthetic proclivities of the late-19th-/early-20th-century *bon vivant* and social arbiter Col. John Jacob Astor IV, who conceived the original St. Regis Hotel, with the 21st-century outlook of design taste-maker Lauren Rottet, founder of Rottet Studio.

The five-story, 179-room property had retained Rottet Studio to conceptualize a quintessential mountain manor similar to what Astor, who perished when the luxury liner RMS Titanic sank, would have designed during the Gilded Age, according to Rottet, an award-winning interior architect and designer.

"The existing building is of the style of Frank Furness—Gothic Victorian," said Rottet, referencing one of the Victorian Era's most prolific architects. "This period was known

for the use of heavy, cleaved stone; dark, cast- and wrought-metal ornamentation; and beautiful, custom glass work and chandeliers. Skylights and ornamental lighting were often used to enhance the natural light by day and give an elegant glow by night. We wanted to build on this to create a more modern, usable and experiential hotel stay for guests and to take advantage of the Aspen environment and its transformation throughout the four seasons, not just winter."

She noted ownership also wanted to create a more dynamic, stylish hotel environment that would become the "go to" spot in Aspen. "They also wanted to open the interior lobby lounge more to the exterior so guests could more fully experience the amazing view of Aspen Mountain," said Rottet.

Given the task, Rottet said she and her team wanted to transform the hotel into an innovative, intriguing modern interpretation of the grand and lavish architecture of the original St. Regis building's era.

"This was partially achieved through a clever use of light, while ornamental steel

and glass reflect the styling of Furness," she said, noting the floor plan was restructured to improve operations, and guest accommodations mirror the elegance of an opulent, historic manor.

"We were inspired by the historical culture of Aspen, a physical and cultural paradise that is inspiring in itself," said Rottet, who characterized the city as "geographically beautiful. It is culturally diverse, attracting people from all over the world. We wanted to capture this spirit and bring it into the interior of the hotel by using tones and colors of the environment so the guest feels a part of the environment when they step into their room."

Rottet Studio was responsible for redesigning both the exterior and interior of the St. Regis Aspen.

The designer said the overall vision was to make the property "as magical as possible," focusing on an inviting, user-friendly environment, and to make all of the public spaces accessible, while "not skimping on the elements that make it a grand, iconic Aspen experience. We also wanted the entire property to feel less seasonal, less winter-focused, and more reflective of the different phases that Aspen goes through as the seasons progress."

The renovation included all the public spaces, the restaurant, guestrooms and the meeting/event spaces. Among the redesign's highlights are: a redesigned entry drive court; a grand solarium entry; a new front desk and concierge desk design allowing for greater guest interaction; a grand staircase connecting the lobby level to the lower-level ballrooms; a newly created library with fireplace, sofas and bookshelves; the Chefs Club by *Food & Wine* magazine; an embellished ballroom and meeting space that encompasses 25,000 sq. ft. and now reflects the feel of the Astor ballrooms with walls and millwork painted to emphasize traditional moldings; spaces with large antique mirrors, tufted sofas and elegant furnishings; a renovated pool area; and redesigned guestrooms featuring a separate shower and tub experience.

Additionally, Rottet Studio used small etchings of mountain villages, recreated to almost-life size on the walls of the pre-function spaces and in the corridors. "The result is a magical experience. We reused some of the lovely oil paintings and bronzes that have graced the property for many years, and we also featured the work of

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some contemporary and noted artists, both local and international,” said Rottet.

Among the key challenges confronting Rottet Studio was accomplishing a major revamp while the property remained open. The project was not just a cosmetic renovation, stressed the designer, noting a new four-pipe system was installed to allow better heating and air conditioning controls throughout the year. The design team also changed the four-fixture bathroom to five fixtures with a freestanding tub and operable full-height shutters, allowing views from the bathroom, all accomplished in the existing space. A cast, stainless-steel vanity with a ribbed, front-panel detail is also a strong design element of the bathroom, said Rottet.

Another challenge Rottet Studio addressed was devising a “far better system” for dealing with guest arrival and “the massive amounts” of luggage the summer and winter Aspen guests bring with them to the hotel. “The entire arrival experience had to be rethought,” said Rottet.

With a new flow of the space, luggage is now discreetly ushered through the back while the guest enjoys the arrival process, and improved lighting throughout the hotel allows guests to feel more welcome and comfortable, she said.

The lobby bar was also enlarged and a door now leads directly from the lobby bar to the outside court and fire pit, so guests may enjoy the outside experience by day or night.

In terms of the palette used, Rottet Studio chose to custom-color paints and fabrics to blend with the colorations of the Aspen sky.

Similarly, “almost every piece of furniture in the Shadow Mountain Room (the living room) is custom-designed for the hotel,” said Rottet. “Sofas fit perfectly into the bay windows so that the guest can sit as close to the window as possible. Custom-designed wall sconces hang from the columns and walls next to these sofas and directly light custom end tables, which are made of burl wood with a custom silver tray inset,” said Rottet. “The sconces reflect the inventive nature of John Jacob Astor with magnifying glass

shielding and enhancing the light. All of the rugs are custom-designed and hand-woven for the project, with patterns influenced by historic Aspen-area culture and contemporary pattern and attitude toward color. Patterned, cast glass is an element that occurs in the front reception desk, the fireplace and the bar, as it is reflective of the illuminating sky in Aspen.”

In describing the look that’s been achieved, Rottet referred to it as “transformed mountain manor,” offering “traditional roots with contemporary additions.” Overall, Rottet sees the redesign aligning well with the St. Regis brand message. “The designs are high-end and elegant but not predictable, and offer a unique approach for the guest. Something they would not necessarily find at home, but love to be in,” she said. “Our design includes a blend of historic luxury and tradition with the unpredictable addition of contemporary art, clever furnishings and accessories. And, the way the hotel allows you to engage with the outside summer and winter are all part and parcel of the St. Regis guest-centric, elegant persona.”



## *about the designer...*

So how does a little girl from Waco, TX, go from designing houses at age four for imaginary friends and the little toads that occupied her parents’ driveway to heading her own architecture and design firm with offices in major U.S. cities as well as overseas?

For Lauren Rottet, FAIA, FIDA, the founding principal and president of Rottet Studio, the journey has literally been a life-long endeavor.

“In first grade, I visited a friend who lived in a contemporary house that bridged over a stream. I thought this was the best thing I had ever seen, and I could tell you now exactly what the house looked like: the kitchen cabinets, the floors, the bridge, the glass walls, etc. I think you must somewhat be born with the inclination to design, as my home was modest and not necessarily ‘designed,’” said Rottet.

Such “inclination” has proved a passion for Rottet. Her design and architecture accolades and awards for corporate and hospitality projects over almost a quarter-century career are numerous. She has offices in New York, Houston, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Shanghai and, to date, she is the only woman to be named a Fellow by both the American Institute of Architects and International Interior Design Association.

“My philosophy is that design should inspire and improve your quality of life. For me, it is like medicine: an essential and a cure,” she said.

In approaching a hotel project with her team, Rottet takes a hands-on approach. “I usually like to visit the property and stay a couple nights to get the feel of the environment; not just the neighborhood, but how the property makes me feel, what it smells like and what you see as far as the guests, culture, vibe and general appearance of the surroundings. Then, I like to create a storyline, or a plot in my head and produce a movie where I become the director and producer to develop a movie that captures the image in my head from the sights, feelings and emotions I experience during my stay. Because each hotel and [its] environment is unique, it triggers different emotions during my stay, which translates into different movies; therefore, our team approaches the design of each hotel differently. We study the details that make each property unique and develop a way to apply them to their particular environments.”

Rottet says finding the right balance with hotel design is intuitive, as is understanding “when to stop” in terms of design.

When it comes to projects, however, stopping is not in Rottet’s vocabulary. Her studio currently has a half-dozen hospitality projects in the pipeline. For The Valencia Group, Rottet will be working on: the Valencia Lone Star Court, in Austin, TX, a chain of new, upscale hotels inspired by the state’s roadside motor courts frequented by American travelers during the 1940s and 1950s; Valencia Santana Row in San Jose, CA, which will feature redesigned public areas including: a restaurant, meetings space, elevator cabs, courtyards, reception, rooftop bar, guestrooms and corridors; and Hotel Valencia Riverwalk, San Antonio, TX, which will feature redesigned restaurants, bars, meetings and events space, guestrooms and corridors.

Another trio of projects—all in New York City—includes a renovation to public areas, such as the lobby and meeting areas, of the Affinia Manhattan; renovation to public areas, restaurant and bar at the Hudson Hotel; and renovation of guestrooms, public areas, lobby, restaurant and bar at the Loews Regency Hotel.

—Stefani C. O’Connor

# Lauren Rottet

*Rottet Studio*

