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TUSCAN SUN RISES IN ORLANDO

Palazzo del Lago brings neoclassical Renaissance architecture to 21st century Orlando

BY ZACHARY JORDANIA

Renaissance means rebirth. In Europe, it was also the transitional period between medieval and modern times. Originating in Florence, the Renaissance marked the beginning of a new way of thinking, an era of enlightenment, reform, and social and artistic transformation. On the white, sandy shores of Orlando's Lake Bryan, in the shadow of Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom, the term Renaissance takes on quite another meaning. Here, it means the reincarnation of a classic Italian architectural style in a new world where European explorers first set foot more than five centuries ago.

Blending the inherent beauty of the old world into the new one is the challenge facing Daniel Adache of Adache Group Architects, Inc. The renowned architect has been appointed designer-in-chief of the \$800 million InterContinental Resort & Residences Orlando at Palazzo del Lago. When complete in 2009, the newest multi-phase, multi-layer resort will house the largest InterContinental hotel in the world. It is being developed by Hospitality Development Group (HDG) of Fort Lauderdale. The resort hotel and hotel-condominium residences will be managed by IHG Management (Maryland) LLC, an affiliate of InterContinental Hotels Group companies.

The name Palazzo del Lago, meaning "palace on the lake," is Italian-inspired. Its palatial title reflects the grand scale nature of the project. When completed in 2009, the resort will include the InterContinental Resort & Residences Orlando, with 1,260 luxury hotel rooms and suites, 585 of which are being sold as hotel-condominium residences. In addition, there will also be close to 1,000 resort condominiums housed in five 18-story towers. And, as the first official convention hotel for Orange County, it will add 114,000 square feet of convention, meeting and banquet space to the mix.

"Palazzo del Lago is a marriage of old-world traditions and neo-modern technology," explained George Fletcher, president of Adache Group Architects, Inc. "Its design pays homage to the art, music, and literature of the 14th century Renaissance through its classic design. Simultaneously, it is also defined by its high-tech composition."

In the Palazzo del Lago context, high-tech composition does not necessarily translate to contemporary and edgy designs. Instead, the architecture follows a more transitional and timeless motif. It is a style with longevity that transcends culture but at the same time appeals to a savvy and sophisticated audience who can appreciate Italian architecture.



As a great piazza and impressive pools of water were both inspiring Renaissance themes, Palazzo del Lago will feature a lobby that is inspired by the grand architecture of Ancient Rome. Imagine a six-story entrance, with 13,178 square feet of magnificent space, and clustered Corinthian columns, with coffered vaulted ceilings recalling the engineering beauty of the Pantheon. The piece de resistance is the grand fountain, a massive and impactful architectural statement that stands four stories tall inside the lobby, with descending grand staircases to complete its frame.

Expansive views of the lake, pool and beach are enjoyed by visitors at many vantage points throughout the lobby and building. Just beyond the glass walls, the elaborate pool deck measures a modest 95,988 square feet, and will include a multitude of different symmetrical pools, each intimately clustered by landscaping, fountains and cabanas for semi-private lounging.

As the building wraps around the pool in a protective U-shape, the entire pool area will have the feel of an Italian piazza; a gathering place where residents and visitors would naturally gravitate.

Among the many restaurants on site, the high-end lakeside steakhouse stands out. Located in front of a three-acre lake, the restaurant is destined to be a main draw for Palazzo guests as well as other gourmet diners in the area.

Adding to Palazzo del Lago's old-world charm are ornate wall moldings, large tapestries, heavy profiled stained bases and crown moldings, oversized furniture and Venetian plaster walls. Above are gold-laced scones and chandeliers, and below are hand-stitched rugs over marble floors.

Orlando, with its myriad make-believe theme parks, provides the perfect backdrop for the creation of fantasies and the recreation of historical settings by employing modern techniques. Classical designs can be mimicked with great ease in this computer age. In addition, 21st century high-tech gadgets such as flatscreen TV, voice data communication, WiFi access, high-speed Internet, sound transmission and space-age building materials can all be seamlessly woven into the construction process.

"People tend to seek qualities that give the project a sense of uniqueness, a sense of home, and a sense of its special character," explained Fletcher. "Today's homeowners do not want to live in a faux environment. They prefer authentic and user-friendly, aesthetically pleasing and comfortable residences that are technologically-advanced."

Fletcher goes on to explain that the latest developments in the marketplace enable the firm to incorporate the latest trends, designs, materials and technological devices into the project. "When applied properly, the infrastructure is entirely inconspicuous," he says.

In the case of Palazzo del Lago, the designing stage posed few formidable challenges. There is the issue with the view corridors. In addition, the residences will need ample height in order to maximize the views from each of the buildings. Yet the scale of the buildings must be manageable and not overwhelming or overly imposing to guests and visitors.

As the beach is the focal point of the project, the Adache design team drew plans to build up the relatively flat topography of the site. Furthermore, the rooms do not begin until level five, above the treetops. This way, the views from each room to the pool deck, the lake and the gardens are unobstructed.

Another significant design element was the downplaying of the enormity of the property's scale. To that end, the design team is keeping the project far back from streetscape, allowing the buildings to build up as visitors venture further into the site. Initially the retail buildings are two stories, with plenty of open space for circulation. Building height increases progressively, reaching a dramatic sense of crescendo.

Thinking outside the box exemplifies Renaissance thinking at its best. Instead of relying on the same designs favored by most other resorts, Palazzo del Lago will leave its own individual creative footprint on the sandy shores of Lake Bryan. **VI**

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