InterContinental Hotel Indianapolis

CATEGORY
Preservation/
Adaptive Reuse/
Renovation

PROJECT TYPE
Hospitality

ADDRESS
17 W Market Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

COMPLETE
03/05/2025





Project Overview

Located at the heart of downtown Indianapolis, the 1926 Illinois Building has long served as an architectural landmark overlooking Monument Circle. Designed by the celebrated Indianapolis firm Rubush & Hunter, the Neo-Classical office building contributed to the city's commercial growth and remains an important element of the Washington Street, Monument Circle Historic District. After decades of decline, vacancy, and piecemeal renovations, the building faced an uncertain future despite its architectural significance.

The adaptive reuse of the Illinois Building into the InterContinental Indianapolis Hotel demonstrates how thoughtful design can preserve history while creating new opportunities for the city. Rather than viewing preservation as an exercise in restoration alone, the project reimagines the building as a contemporary luxury destination, carefully balancing historic character with the expectations of a world-class hospitality experience. The transformation extends the life of one of Indianapolis' most recognizable historic buildings while reinforcing the vitality of its urban core.

Context with Downtown Indianapolis



Historic Photos



Rendering from 1925

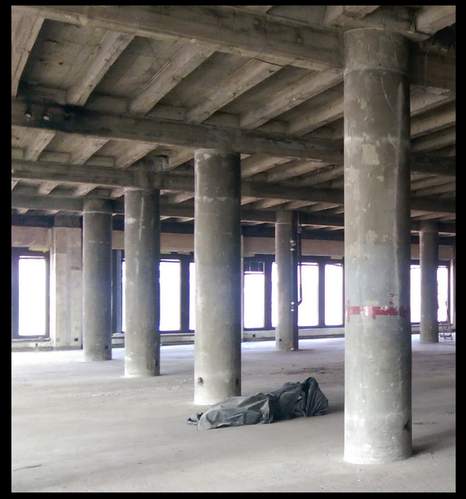


Photo from 1959

Existing Conditions (2014)



Entry Lobby



Typical Office Floor



View from Market & Illinois St.



Rooftop

The Opportunity

Nearly a century after its completion, the Illinois Building remained structurally sound but functionally obsolete. Previous renovations had altered much of the office interior, introduced a central atrium, and removed many original workspace configurations. While these interventions prolonged the building's commercial use, they also obscured portions of its historic character and ultimately failed to attract long-term occupancy. By the early 2000s, the building had become largely vacant and was designated one of Indiana Landmarks' "10 Most Endangered" historic properties.

Despite these challenges, the building retained many of its defining architectural elements, including its limestone façade, monumental proportions, richly detailed lobby, cast iron stair, and prominent location within the city's historic Mile Square. Rather than viewing these characteristics as constraints, the design team recognized them as opportunities to create a hospitality experience rooted in authenticity and place.

Adaptive reuse offered more than preservation. It provided a sustainable strategy for extending the life of the existing structure while reconnecting one of Indianapolis' most important historic buildings with the daily life of the city.



Design Challenge

Transforming a 1926 office building into Indiana's first InterContinental Hotel required balancing preservation, hospitality, and modern performance within a highly constrained historic structure.

The design team sought to preserve the building's defining architectural character while meeting contemporary expectations for luxury accommodations, accessibility, life safety, and operational efficiency. Existing structural grids, varying floor plates, historic window openings, and the building's C-shaped configuration required every decision to respond to the original architecture rather than impose a standardized hotel layout.

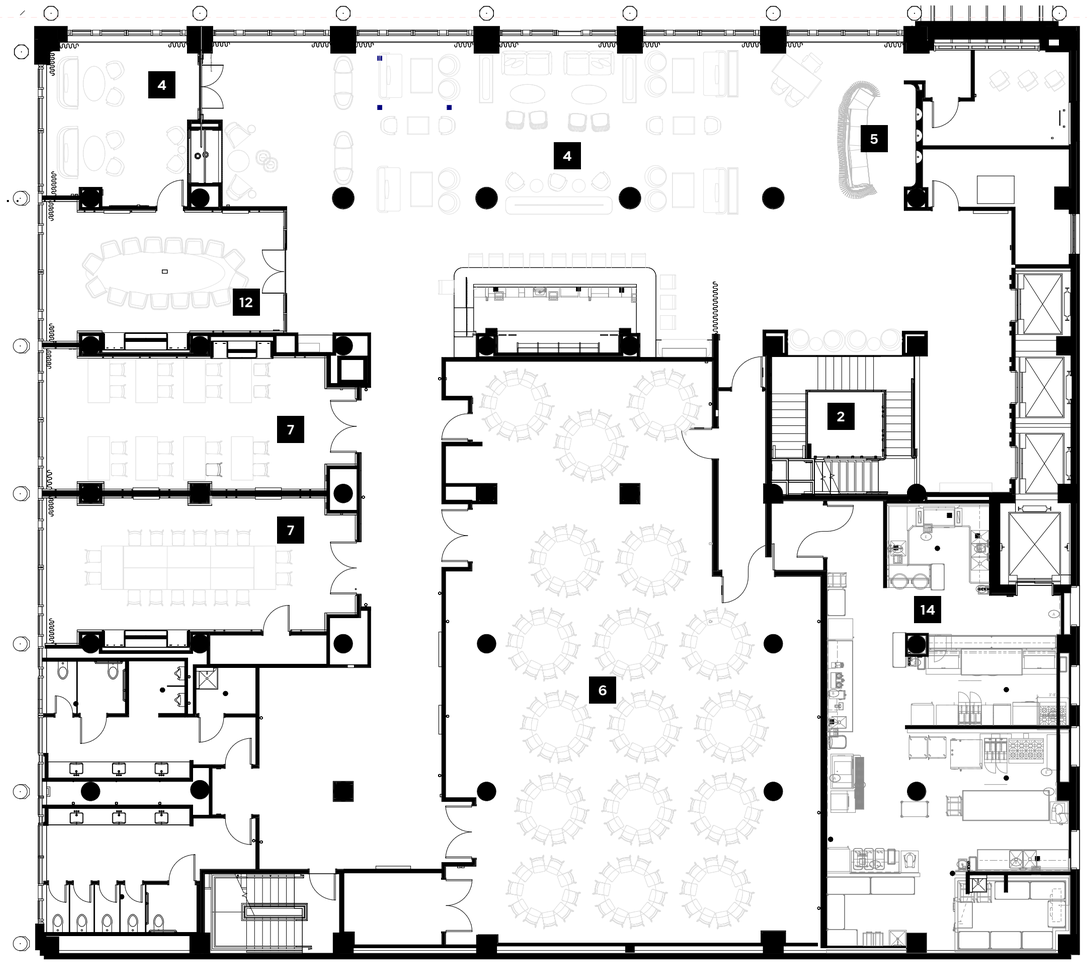
Rather than forcing the building to conform to a prototype, the design embraces the unique opportunities created by its historic fabric. Original proportions became expansive guestrooms, historic windows frame views of downtown Indianapolis, and restored architectural details establish a sense of permanence and craftsmanship that cannot be replicated through new construction. New interventions remain intentionally contemporary while complementing the building's Neo-Classical character, allowing historic and modern elements to exist in dialogue.

Floor Plans

First Floor - Entry



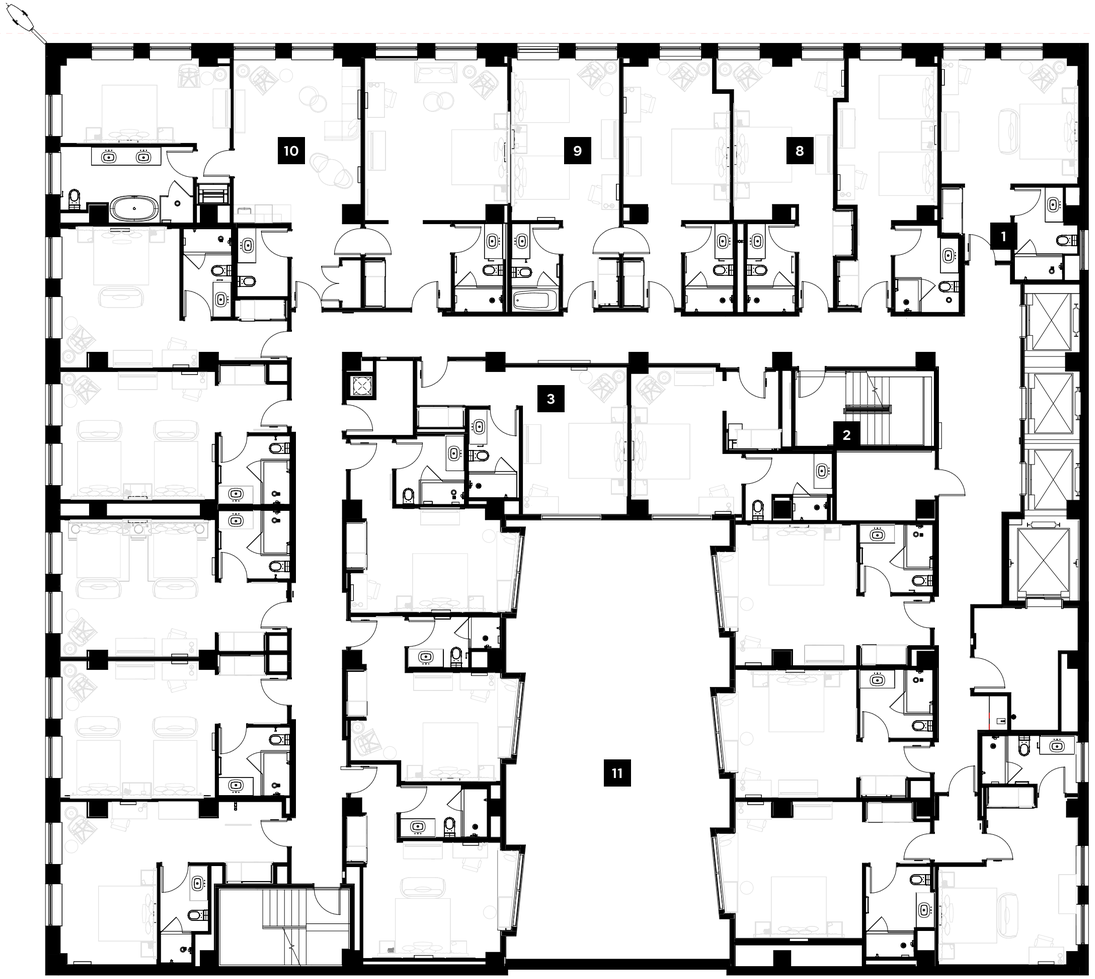
Second Floor - Lobby and Event Space



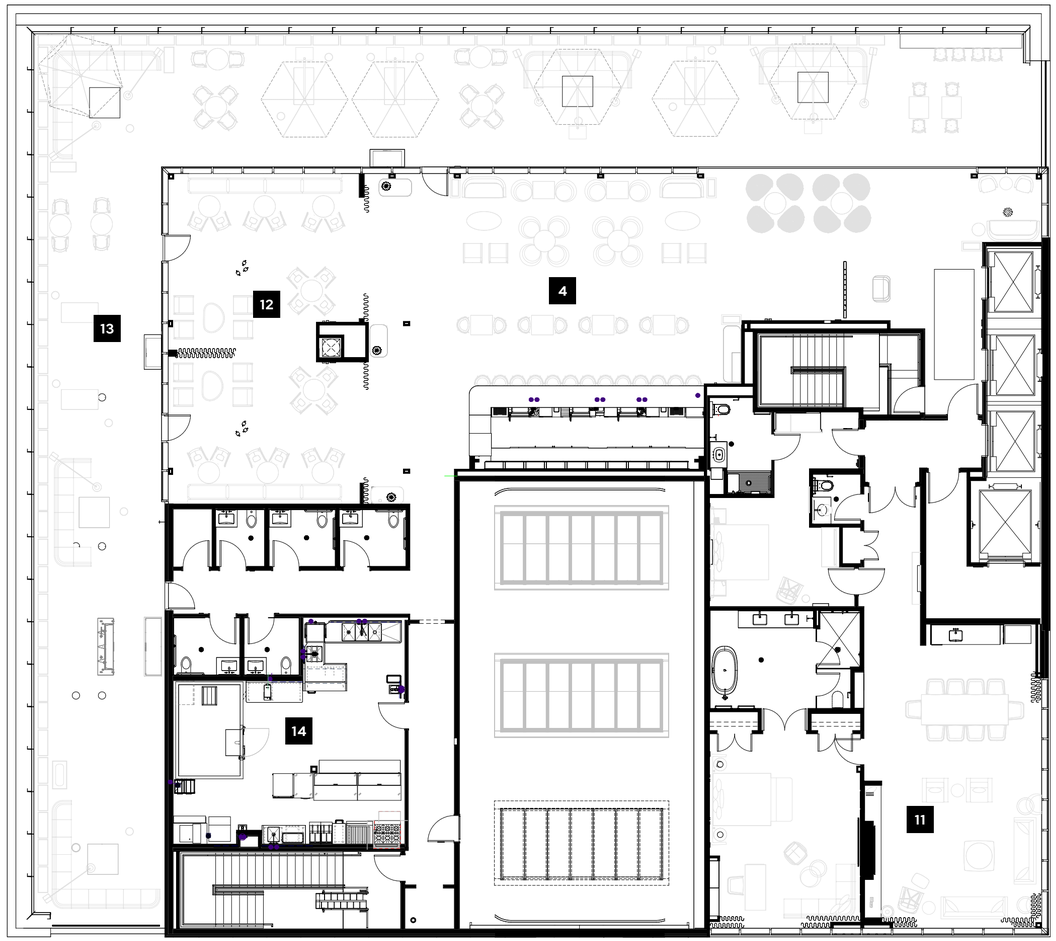
1 HISTORIC LOBBY
2 MONUMENTAL STAIR
3 EXISTING TENANT
4 LOUNGE
5 RECEPTION DESK
6 BANQUET HALL
7 MEETING ROOM
8 KING ROOM
9 DOUBLE QUEEN ROOM
10 EXECUTIVE SUITE
11 PENTHOUSE SUITE
12 PRIVATE DINING ROOM
13 ROOF TERRACE
14 KITCHEN
15 LIGHT WELL

Floor Plans

Typical Guest Room Floor



Eleventh Floor - Roof Deck



1 HISTORIC LOBBY
2 MONUMENTAL STAIR
3 EXISTING TENANT
4 LOUNGE
5 RECEPTION DESK
6 BANQUET HALL
7 MEETING ROOM
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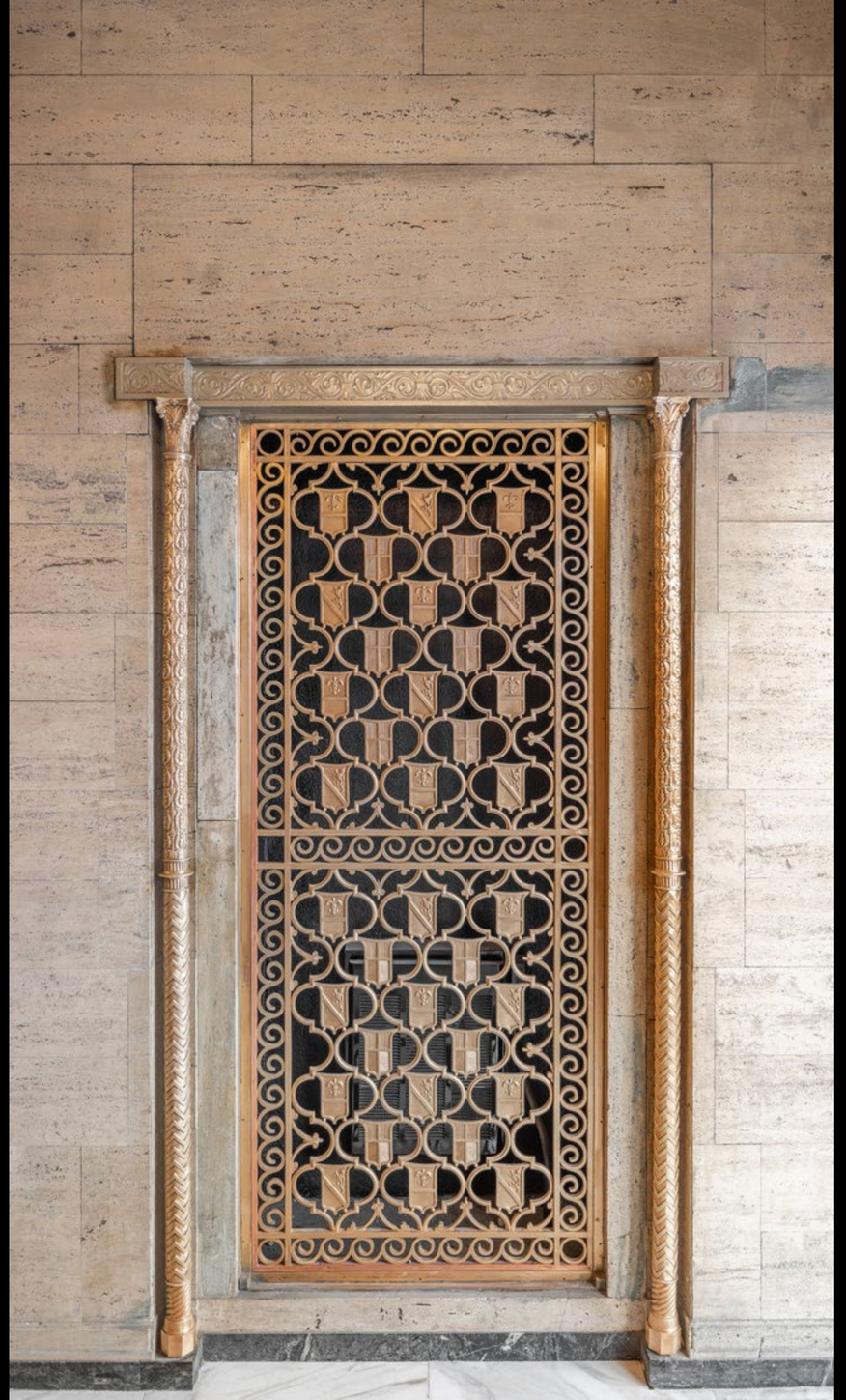




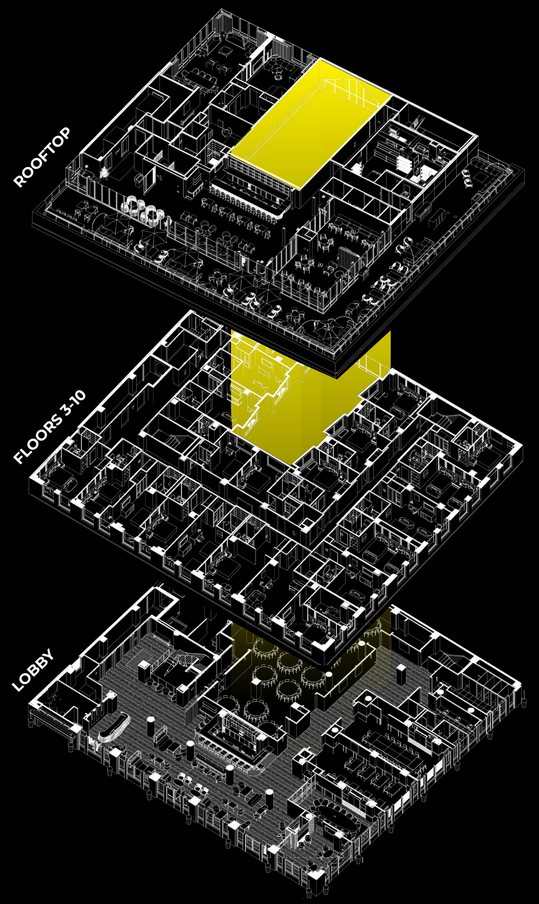
Design Response

Every design decision centered on revealing the character of the original building while carefully introducing new elements necessary to support its next chapter.

Visitors arrive through the restored historic lobby, where original marble flooring, travertine walls, brass detailing, and a restored gold leaf fresco ceiling celebrate the craftsmanship of the 1926 building. Rather than competing with these historic features, new architectural interventions establish a clear distinction between preservation and contemporary design. A sculptural marble stair encircling a three-story chandelier creates a dramatic vertical connection to the second-floor lobby, establishing a new sequence of arrival while respecting the historic structure.

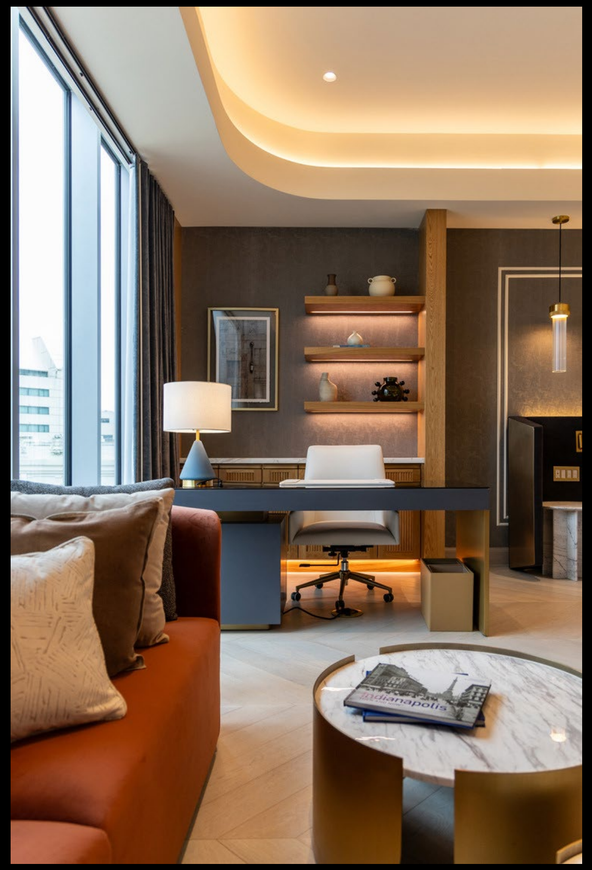





Throughout the hotel, the original C-shaped floor plan informed the organization of guestrooms and public spaces. Instead of standardizing room layouts, the design celebrates the variety created by the existing building, allowing guestrooms to capture generous ceiling heights, expansive windows, and unique relationships to the surrounding city. Custom millwork, refined materials, and locally curated artwork reinforce the connection between the hotel's contemporary identity and Indianapolis' architectural heritage.





The new eleventh-floor addition completes the adaptive reuse by introducing hospitality amenities that were impossible within the historic envelope alone. Positioned to respect the original building's proportions, the rooftop bar, terrace, and presidential suite expand the guest experience while framing panoramic views of Monument Circle and the Indiana State House. Together, these interventions demonstrate that adaptive reuse can honor history while confidently embracing contemporary design.



Framework for Design Excellence

DESIGN FOR CHANGE

Originally designed as a 1926 office building, the Illinois Building has been thoughtfully transformed into a modern luxury hotel while retaining the architectural qualities that define its historic character. The project demonstrates how adaptable design can extend the useful life of significant buildings and position them to serve future generations.

DESIGN FOR INTEGRATION

The adaptive reuse of the Illinois Building reinforces the architectural identity of downtown Indianapolis by preserving a significant landmark within the Washington Street, Monument Circle Historic District. Historic materials and spaces are paired with contemporary interventions that respect the building's character while creating a vibrant new destination connected to the city's culture and history.



Framework for Design Excellence



DESIGN FOR ECONOMY

Rather than replacing an obsolete office building, the project extends the life of an existing structure through adaptive reuse, preserving both its architectural significance and embodied carbon. As downtown Indianapolis has experienced significant growth in hospitality offerings, a true luxury hotel experience remained absent from the market. The InterContinental fills that void by reinventing a historic landmark rather than constructing a new building, strengthening the local economy while rooting a world-class hospitality experience in the authentic character of the Illinois Building and the surrounding historic context.

DESIGN FOR WELL-BEING

The design promotes well-being by encouraging movement, daylight, and meaningful connections to place. A north-facing operable glass wall transforms the rooftop bar into an open-air experience, blurring the boundary between indoors and outdoors while providing panoramic views of downtown Indianapolis. Its orientation minimizes solar heat gain, allowing guests to comfortably enjoy the space throughout much of the year.

In contrast, the lower-level fitness center was intentionally designed as a restorative environment. Dynamic circadian lighting responds to the time of day, creating a calming atmosphere within the windowless space, while its direct connection to the monumental stair reinforces it as an integrated part of the guest experience rather than a hidden amenity. Together, these spaces support both social engagement and personal wellness through thoughtful architectural design.



Framework for Design Excellence

DESIGN FOR RESOURCES

Preserving the building's structural frame and exterior envelope significantly reduced material consumption and construction waste compared to new construction. Existing architectural elements were restored and integrated into the new design, demonstrating how historic preservation can be an effective strategy for responsible resource management.

The Front Desk

Designed as the focal point of the lobby, the reception desk was conceived as a sculptural work of art that complements the soft, curvilinear forms found throughout the space while evoking the refinement of a high-end piece of jewelry. Developed through parametric design and digital fabrication, each CNC-cut metal fin was individually installed to create a seamless, flowing form with no visible welds or fasteners. Its warm metallic finish draws inspiration from the building's original brass ornamentation, creating a contemporary centerpiece that is both innovative in its construction and deeply connected to the historic character of the Illinois Building.




InterContinental


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InterContinental
ILLINOIS BUILDING
17W
17W



Technical Execution

Converting the Illinois Building into a modern luxury hotel required careful technical execution. Mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fire protection, and life safety systems were coordinated to minimize impacts on historic materials and detailing, allowing the building to meet current hospitality standards without compromising its architectural integrity. Accessibility improvements were seamlessly integrated throughout the property, demonstrating that universal access, historic preservation, and thoughtful design can coexist without sacrificing one for another.

One of the project's greatest technical challenges was the addition of the new 11th level within the constraints of federal historic preservation guidelines. Every square foot was carefully planned to accommodate a presidential suite, rooftop bar, commercial kitchen, and supporting back-of-house functions while respecting the proportions and visibility requirements established for the historic structure.



Lasting Impact

The InterContinental Indianapolis demonstrates that preservation is not simply about protecting historic buildings. It is about creating meaningful futures for them.

By transforming a long-vacant office building into an internationally recognized hospitality destination, the project preserves an important piece of Indianapolis' architectural heritage while contributing to the continued revitalization of downtown. From construction through ongoing hotel operations, the project has supported more than 400 jobs and introduced Indianapolis' first rooftop bar, creating a new destination for residents and visitors. Its growing cultural presence was highlighted during WNBA All-Star Weekend, when moments shared from inside the hotel gained widespread attention across social media.

The adaptive reuse celebrates nearly one hundred years of history without limiting the building to its past. The project stands as a model for how preservation and contemporary architecture can work together to strengthen communities, celebrate local identity, and create lasting value for generations to come.