



# Taking Flight

MCR TAKES INSPIRATION FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF AVIATION AT JFK AIRPORT. BY TIM O'CONNOR

When the TWA Flight Center at JFK Airport in New York opened in 1962 it was a modern and forward-thinking design. With its Jetsons-style Google architecture and sunken lounge, the Eero Saarinen-designed building became an icon of mid-century aviation and was eventually granted landmark designation by the city in 1994 and was added to the National Register of Historic Places 11 years later. So there was a sense of loss when the terminal closed in 2001 following the end of Trans World Airlines.

A portion of the flight center was used to expand JetBlue's terminal at the airport, but the signature gull-wing building remained unoccupied for years as local officials tried to find a new use that would honor the

structure's history. In 2015, MCR Development announced it would convert the TWA Flight Center into a lobby and retail space for a new hotel that would rise between the historic building and JetBlue terminal.

The TWA Hotel will embrace the flight center's style to invoke the golden days of aviation, when flying was still an event and passengers had a sense of wonder about the whole experience. "When people talk about this building and reference this building you can see people's eyes light up," says Jason Garone, vice president of construction for MCR. "It's an architectural marvel."

## Authentic Experience

Foundation work for the hotel began in February 2017 and the project is on pace for completion in first-quarter 2019. Although

## MCR Development – TWA Hotel

[www.mcrdevelopment.com](http://www.mcrdevelopment.com)

- Location: New York City
- Employees: 500

"There's just so many different elements for this project which makes it interesting for us construction folk. It's one of a kind."

– Jason Garone, vice president of construction

its been vacant for 15 years, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has maintained the structure and interior in anticipation of future redevelopment, helping it to avoid deterioration issues that can sometimes arise during restoration projects.



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Once it opens, the TWA Hotel will have 512 guest rooms spread out over two buildings. A 50,000-square-foot conference center with 40 meeting rooms and a 10,000-square-foot ballroom will give the hotel the ability to host small and large events. “There’s a lot of people around here we think will come out to have their wedding or bar mitzvah,” Garone says. “We think there’s a huge market for that out there.”

## ‘People are still passionate about a company that hasn’t existed for 17 years.’

The hotel will not only fill a need for venues at the airport, but it will also have a significant economic impact on the area. MCR projects the hotel will deliver more than 3,700 construction and permanent jobs. Agreements are in place with the Hotel Trades Council and the Building and Construction Trades Council to ensure the hotel will be union built and operated.

The project is designed to appeal to aviation enthusiasts. There will be a 10,000-square-foot public observation deck and a lounge



where guests can enjoy a cocktail. Aviation enthusiasts will surely appreciate the TWA Museum that will be a part of the new hotel. MCR already has experience curating the history of the airliner. The company built a lounge on the 86th floor of One World Trade Center that replicates the TWA Flight Center’s sunken lounge and flight board. The lounge exhibits several TWA artifacts donated by former TWA employees and fans of the airline, and even more of those items will be included in the hotel’s museum. “It’s just shocking how people are still passionate about a company that hasn’t existed for 17 years,” Garone says.

MCR plans to build a tarmac for a 1956 Lockheed Constellation, a propeller-driven passenger transport plane. Kids can explore the cockpit to learn about aviation history while parents can have a cocktail in the lounge.

At 200,000 square feet, the hotel’s lobby will be the largest in the world, Garone claims, filled with restaurants, bars and shops. The hotel itself will have seven floors for each building and its façade will follow the contours of the adjacent road for JetBlue arrivals and departures. A triple-glazed IGU curtain wall will block noise from nearby takeoffs and landings, allowing guests to sleep in peace. The two hotel buildings will rise behind the TWA Flight Center like wings reflecting the former terminal’s symmetry.

The project will be the first hotel on airport property. Garone believes it will appeal to travelers from New York and New Jersey who have early morning flights and would prefer to stay in a room rather than driving into the city during the middle of the night. “I think this will be very successful in the surrounding tri-state area,” he says.

The hotel will also be a welcome addition for international travelers. According to Airports Council International, JFK was the fifth busiest airport in North America in 2016, with 59.1 million passengers – a 3.9 percent increase from the previous year. However, the airport has the most international passenger traffic in North America, making it an important gateway for the United States.

Until now, international travelers have had to find an off-site hotel to stay at while they wait for the next leg of their journey. The TWA Hotel will provide comfort, convenience and appealing amenities to

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MCR believes the new hotel will generate more than 3,700 construction and permanent jobs.

improve the overall travel experience for those guests. Access to the entire airport will be a breeze. The hotel is located near JFK's AirTrain, an 8.1-mile-long people mover that connects all six terminals, ensuring that guest can easily reach their flights on time.

Those guests will be treated to a traveling experience unlike any other. Hotel employees dressed in TWA uniforms with pillbox hats will greet guests as soon as they arrive, and direct them to either baggage storage or usher them toward the check-in counter, which will feature the original Solari board passengers used to find flight information. "The experience of checking in will be very similar, as if you

were flying there back in the day," Garone says. "We're recreating the airport feel that you are checking into a flight but you're actually checking into a hotel."

From there, guests will access the hotel through the two flight tubes that used to guide passengers to their airplanes. The entire experience will be authentic to what it was like to fly during the middle of the 20th century, before lengthy security checks and massive crowds became the norm. "Flying used to be exciting; now it doesn't seem as glamorous," Garone says. "It will bring back that romantic time of flying."

The TWA theming creates a unique experience but MCR is being careful to avoid making guests feel as if they are wandering through an amusement park. "We want to keep that authenticity, not to be corny," Garone explains.

The classic aviation theme and quality finishes will give the hotel a high-end feel, but Garone says it will appeal to travelers from a wide range backgrounds, not just those looking for luxury with no concern about costs. Regular working people and families will be able to afford a room for the night as well. "We think this is a really classy, well thought-out hotel," he states.

### Blending New and Old

The blending of a classic aviation experience with modern amenities is not limited

## LUBRANOCIAVARRA



LUBRANOCIAVARRA, a women-owned, Brooklyn-based architecture firm, is pleased to be a part of the collaboration with MCR and Morse Development on the **TWA Hotel** at JFK International Airport!



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to the guest experience. Although the flight center will retain its class style, MCR is integrating new systems and materials into the project.

The roof of the north hotel building will house a combined heat and power plant that will supply electricity and regulate temperature for the entire hotel. The CHP plant will connect to a natural gas source, allowing the building to operate on a separate power source from the airport and reduce its energy costs. "It just made sense for us to build our own power plant," Garone notes. As of early December, the CHP plant was being assembled into containers. Installation was set for March and it is expected to go into operation next fall.

The power plant plays into MCR's sustainability goals for the project. The hotel has been designed to achieve LEED certification once it opens.

Taken alone, the CHP plant, the large conference building, rehab of a historic building or ground-up construction of a new hotel is nothing new. However, Garone believes



» MCR is working with Turner Construction to build a new hotel at the TWA Flight Center.

the combination of those features make the TWA Hotel one of the most exciting projects going on in the entire industry. "There's just so many different elements for this project which makes it interesting for us construction folk," he says. "It's one of a kind."

The project is being built by Turner Con-

struction, which has extensive experience at JFK, including the building of the JetBlue terminal. "They were very familiar with the site, they were very familiar with the ins and outs of the Port Authority [of New York and New Jersey] team," Garone says. "So it just made sense to bring them on and use them



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ensure its changes would not harm the architectural integrity of the flight center. The architects on the project, Beyer Blinder Belle and Lubrano Ciavarra, have worked to ensure the new features of the hotel respect the original landmark building. “We had to go through a design process with them where you had to show them the design and get their input,” Garone says. “People are passionate about this building and you have to be sympathetic to it.”

Rehabbing a building – particularly a historic one – is different from the ground-up construction process Garone is more accustomed to. That’s given Garone an opportunity to learn from the other people working on the job and identify ways to become more efficient. “Every project is different,” he says. “Every project you learn and take those experience to the next project.”

A new building is a blank canvas, while working with an existing structure requires finding a balance between its architectural elements and the requirements of the new businesses that will operate inside. “You can’t just go full steam ahead,” he says. “You have to take a step back and look at everything.” ♦

as the construction manager for the project. We have a really fantastic team from Turner on this project. They’ve been great partners in pushing this forward with us.”

Turner’s familiarity with the airport and its stakeholders came in handy as MCR designed the project. Because the TWA Flight Center is a historic building, there are limitations in how its design can be altered and how new elements must blend with the existing structure. In designing the hotel structure, MCR was careful not to impose upon the historic terminal. For example, the glass in the flight center has a green tint, so the glass in the hotel will have a gray tint so that the original building would retain its identity.

MCR worked with the port authority’s redevelopment advisory committee to

**Unity Electric Co., Inc.** is honored to be a preferred business partner with MCR Development and Turner Construction in revitalizing the landmarked TWA Terminal at JFK Int’l. Airport. Adding two new Hotel Towers and a Conference Center to the Flight Center will lead the way to a bright future for JFK and the aviation industry.



JFK Airport and MCR are excited to convert the TWA Flight Center because of its landmark status.

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