

By Alia Akkam

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

Development in China's head city celebrates its past and embraces the future



One of the most populous cities in the world, Beijing is also a cultural and political epicenter teeming with architectural monuments. Since the city hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics, hotel companies have been focusing on China's capital, and it doesn't seem that the development is slowing down.

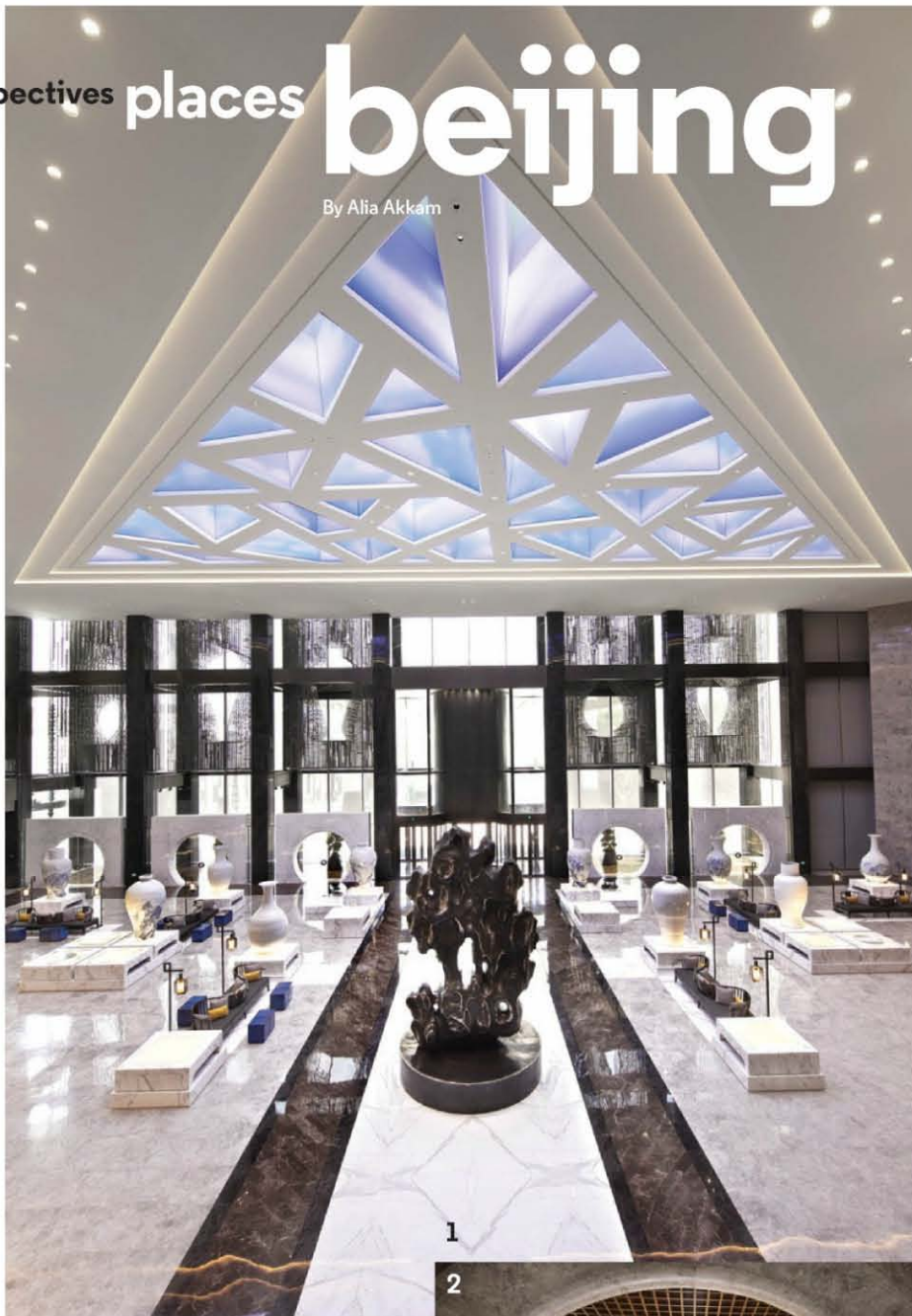
According to Lodging Econometrics, there are 88 projects in the construction pipeline slated to bring some 13,000 new rooms to Beijing. As the third biggest hotel development market in China (No. 8 in the world by project count), 15 new hotels have opened in the first quarter of 2015, and an additional 45 are forecasted to open by the end of the year alone. Some of the most anticipated properties are the Sheraton Beijing West Mountain Resort this fall; the InterContinental Beijing City Center in 2016; and the Hyatt Regency Beijing, Wangjing in 2017.

Development in China's capital city does not just cater to the upscale business traveler segment. For example, Hotel Jen, the casual spinoff brand from Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts, has transformed the Traders Hotel Upper East Beijing into the Hotel Jen Upper East Beijing, with plans for another property in the city in the works. In contrast, there's GOCO Hospitality's GOCO Retreat Niutuo, slated to open in 2016 and positioned as the first mineral hot spring wellness hideaway in northern China, which is set on 24 acres and features 94 guestrooms, one villa, a wellness center, MediSpa, four restaurants, a library, and a bathhouse.

At the same time, following the opening of the Yabu Pushelberg-designed Waldorf Astoria and with the recent announcement of an upcoming Bulgari Beijing, the city's recent standouts are a handful of luxury entrants.

### W Beijing Chang'an

"Beijing is the capital city of one of the most powerful nations in the world. No other cities compare to Beijing for its inspirational culture, history, and art scene," says Ed Ng, co-founder of Hong Kong-based AB Concept, which handled the design of the new W Beijing



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1. Seven-foot-tall handpainted Ming vases fill the soaring lobby of the NUO Hotel Beijing, which features a skylight-like lighting installation that spans the ceiling.

2. A quiet confidence defines the interiors of the NUO Beijing.

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Chang'an. For this property—the second W in Mainland China—Ng says the team was guided by the Chinese philosophy of *tian yuan di fang*, wherein heaven is considered round and the earth square. This is exemplified by design



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3. A lobby chandelier in the W Beijing Chang'an comprises 26,000 lights that change colors, while an installation made from Ming vases backs registration.

4. The outdoor herb garden doubles as an alfresco dining space at the W Beijing's Kitchen Table restaurant.

5. Sunrise Kempinski Hotel's exterior shape creates a figure eight reflection in Yanqui Lake.

6. Thousands of crystal spheres hang from the ceiling over Sunrise Kempinski's lobby staircase.

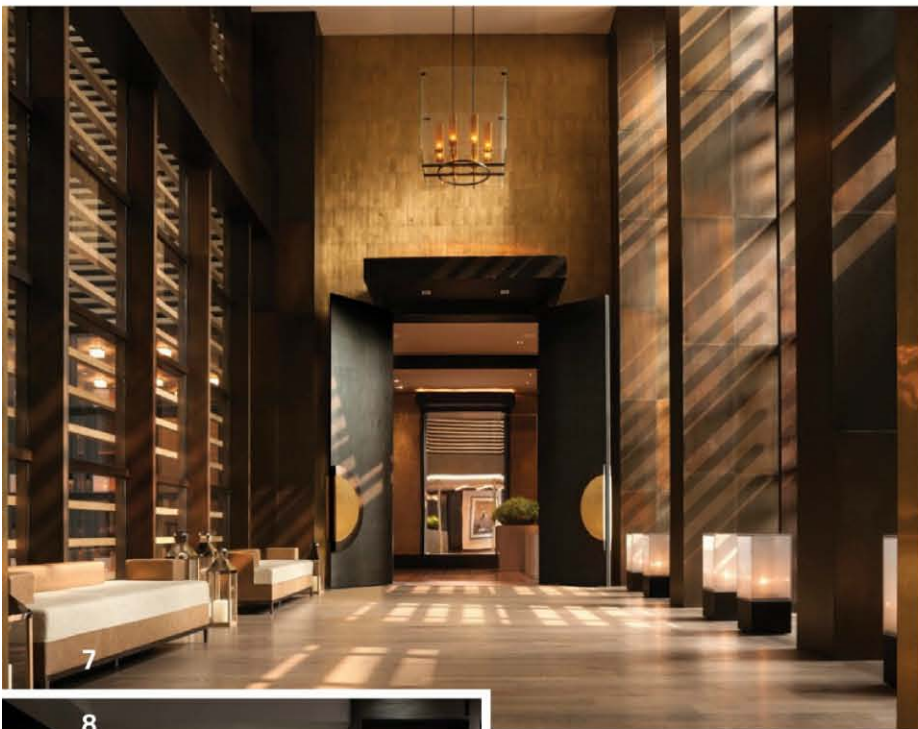
details like patterns depicted on the lobby walls and the round tubs in the baths. A chandelier comprising 26,000 lights of ever-shifting colors is a highlight of the lobby, as is an installation fashioned from Ming vases behind the reception desk. In the 349 guestrooms, leather and gold minibars complement headboards flaunting the silhouettes of Chinese female soldiers, while in the bar, a dramatic ball drops down during the evening, breaking into two halves to reveal a DJ booth. "The main focus of the design was the idea of Beijing as the capital of both politics and entertainment. Beijing is all about power, scale, and grandness," says Ng. "The hotel offers guests a combination that captures its dynastic history, along with its international flavors."

### NUO Hotel Beijing

China's distinctive 5,000-year history is of utmost importance to the recently opened 438-room, 28-story NUO Hotel Beijing, the

inaugural property from Kempinski Hotels' luxe new global brand, NUO. Ian Carr, co-CEO of HBA's Singapore office, says Kempinski identified a space in the market for high-end accommodations with a Chinese aesthetic and NUO was born. "It wasn't enough just to give it a Chinese name, it needed to be imbued with Chinese characteristics and personality." Embracing four tenets—Chinese, contemporary, luxury, and sustainability—the design narrative delves into the rich history of the Ming dynasty, a period of great artistic and intellectual development that set China apart from the rest of the world at that time, says Carr, which the design team spent six years researching and immersing themselves in. A quiet confidence defines the hotel's look as a result, uniting, for instance, the subtle library lounge with bold artwork from the country's leading artists lit as though in a gallery with locally sourced materials (stone, marble, and wood). Yet the

soaring entrance lobby makes a statement, dotted with 7-foot-tall handpainted blue and white Ming vases surrounding a contemporary sculpture. The space—which paves the way to seven restaurants and bars, a spa, meeting space, and hushed guestrooms that take cues from Chinese tea ceremonies—is flooded with



7. In the Rosewood Beijing's lofty five-story lobby, a series of connected pavilion-like spaces and courtyards are made from screens, columns, and beams.

8. Rosewood Beijing's guestrooms are reminiscent of contemporary private spaces and courtyards, complete with window seats looking out over the city.



light thanks to floor-to-ceiling windows and a skylight-esque light installation done in an ice ray pattern that spans the ceiling and can project multiple images.

### Sunrise Kempinski Hotel

Thoughtful design also pervades in the Sunrise Kempinski Hotel, set on Yanqi Lake at the foot of the Yanshan Mountains. The lantern-shaped hotel is eco-friendly, with each floor basking in 25 percent more daylight than the norm, and is "based on the idea of creating harmony between the heaven and human from Taoism. It uses a circle as the starting point, representing the concept of an Oriental sunrise, which also stands for uprising power, development, and

future," explains Zhang Hai'ao, chief architect of Shanghai Huadu Architect Design Co. "From the side, it can be interpreted into the shell shape that is the symbol of wealth in ancient China." There are other emblems: a podium that resembles a cloud, a five-story lobby reminiscent of a fish mouth, and the hotel's reflection in the lake, redolent of the lucky number eight. "We chose glass as the main material for the tower because of its transparency quality. The building could be dissolved into the surrounding landscape thanks to its glass spheroid shape. The upper part of the spheroid could reflect the sky, the middle the mountain, and the bottom the lake," says Zhang.

The interiors, by Providence, Rhode Island-based DiLeonardo, probe this design scheme further by framing views and intertwining geometric forms. The staircase in the lobby, for instance, is a center of activity. Thousands of crystal spheres hanging from ceiling to floor on stainless steel cables call to mind the mountainous environs. The hotel's backdrop is also apparent in the guestrooms, which partner Giana DiLeonardo describes as "minimal, contemporary, and relaxed. Hints of soft blue conjure a peaceful ambiance with wallpapered panels softening the overall space, while printed fabric selections for accent pillows suggest the

hotel's resort location." Honey golden wood in the flooring also brightens while providing a sense of warmth.

### Rosewood Beijing

Instilling a residential vibe was also essential to the recently unveiled Rosewood Beijing, designed by Melbourne-based BAR Studio. "We were struck by the idea of Beijing presenting an impervious exterior to visitors but concealing a series of inner sanctuaries like the traditional courtyard houses of the city," explains Stewart Robertson, director and principal designer. "The design explores the notion of moving beyond the hard exterior to find an interior world that is something else; something unique, rich, and unexpected to reflect the history, art, and vibrancy of Beijing. It is not a design that relies on effect after effect." For the exterior, Robertson's team opted for Mongolian-sourced bluestone, "embracing the idea of an impenetrable urban armor in architectural form." Inside, marble floors, a color palette informed by calligraphy, and natural timber veneer columns are offset by intricate metal screens with subtle Chinese patterns, bespoke furniture, and recycled bronze tiles molded by local craftsmen, along with a massive collection of artwork that combines traditional materials and techniques with contemporary appeal. "The placement of these pieces throughout the hotel invites guests to undertake their own journeys of discovery," Robertson says, "to uncover the layers of meaning and reference within the art and the city."

The 283 guestrooms, meanwhile, are imagined as private apartment sanctuaries with contemporary furniture, mood lighting, and window seats framing city views. Says Robertson: "The architecture and design is like a brilliant series of photographs, composing and framing views and experiences for each individual guest." **hd**