

Upon entering the hotel, guests find a grand and impressive butterfly staircase that affirms they have truly arrived (left). With sweeping views (right) and access to Yalong Bay, the resort boasts 401 guestrooms and suites and 28 beachfront villas.



St. Regis Sanya Yalong Bay Resort

DiLeonardo merges design of both East and West in a new resort hotel off the coast of China

By Jean Nayar
Photography by
Ralf Tooten

From its founding in 1904, the St. Regis hotel brand has exuded the luxury and comfort one might experience in a grand private home. Today the hotelier continues this tradition not only in its original New York hotel, but also in its expanded portfolio of properties around the world, most recently on the island of Hainan just off the coast of southern China. With interiors designed by Providence, Rhode Island-based DiLeonardo, the St. Regis Sanya Yalong Bay Resort was “designed to introduce the region—and cosmopolitan travellers from around the world—to a new level of luxury, sophistication, and top-level service,” says Anny Tan, director of sales and marketing for this St. Regis resort.

Location, location, location

The designers didn’t have to look far for inspiration: Located on a wetland sanctuary that is situated between Yalong Bay’s coveted beachfront and a lush mangrove, the 925,000-square-foot resort hotel is neighbor to the prestigious Yalong Bay Yacht Club. “In addition to the remarkable setting, the overall aesthetic was informed by the refined heritage of the St. Regis brand,” says George Cucitrone, Jr., an associate and project director at DiLeonardo. “We approached the project by

forming a story about how this particular resort might have come to be, thinking of it as a ‘paradise found.’”

Thus, the materials palette, fabrics, and artwork were derived from the site and local culture, without being kitschy. The designers sourced a triptych made with crushed eggshells and lacquered paint, for example, to mount behind the reception desk. Millwork throughout the hotel incorporates subtle details such as mother of pearl inlay. Stone was specified in neutral tones to mimic the local beach sand, and in rough and polished finishes to reflect the multifaceted landscape of the region.

In the guestrooms, headboards are tufted with hand-woven silk and floors are covered with hand-tufted shell-inspired carpets. Playing on the neighboring yacht club, nautical touches were also incorporated, such as creamy colors and rich, raw silks, as well as polished metal accents. Cucitrone elaborates, “The idea is to recall materials one might find aboard trans-ocean ships of the past.”

Overall the palettes are refined and elegant, but quiet and restrained for the most part to highlight the resort’s greatest asset: the setting itself. The building architect, BBG-BBGM, was mindful of maximizing views of the bay, marina, and mountains. DiLeonardo was “careful to be in harmony with the architecture and let its defined volumes and views speak for themselves,” says Cucitrone.

Island luxury

Given the tropical climate of Hainan, the Chinese government pushed for the development of the island as an international tourist destination, so an abundance of resorts were already on the island. But the western perspective of the American firm and cultural familiarity possessed by its Hong Kong office gave DiLeonardo an edge in creating five-plus-star luxury that could stand out from the crowd. One solution, which also addressed a client mandate, was to carefully craft a range of spaces for privacy and solitude, places where groups can congregate



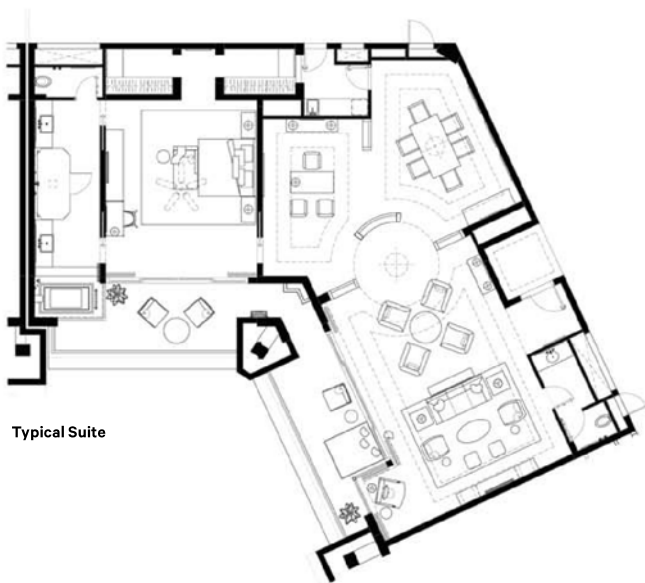


With visual connections to the bay, DiLeonardo designed the interiors to evoke the aesthetic of a finely appointed ocean liner and the spirit of an elegant past. Yacht-like wood finishes and detailing are combined with a color palette of creamy neutrals. A dramatic serpentine wall of stone, wood, and glass encloses the reception area (opposite).



Polished metal finishes and stone floors are softened with hand-tufted carpet and silk upholstery (above). At one-third of each suite's footprint, the guestroom baths (right) were designed to pamper like a spa; deep soaking bathtubs in glass alcoves afford guests unique views of the landscape. Hand-woven silk tufted into a diamond pattern on a headboard and organic shapes in a carpet (opposite) subtly reference the region.





Typical Suite

to converse, eat, or simply enjoy the views, and ample dining options that include fine restaurants to casual food and beverage outlets.

The team devised a way to combine sustained luxury with a sense of place in the guestrooms. They focused on the baths, taking a spa design approach, and incorporated the resort's exceptional sweeping views. Each bath footprint is about one-third of the guestroom's floor plan—large by most standards—and finishes include upscale materials such as honey onyx for the sink vanities. A large glass enclosed shower—fitted with a rain shower and body spray—and a deep soaking tub set in a glass alcove allow guests to take in the spectacular landscape.

"We learned a lot from our Chinese colleagues to make sure that we were being sensitive and not corrupting cultural ideals with a western bias," says Cucitrone. "At the same time, the client was expecting us to inject western sensibility and refinement into the design." In addition to the logistical hurdles of the ever-present language barrier and time difference, one thing DiLeonardo was mindful of was not getting trapped into cultural clichés. With an overwhelmingly positive response from both local and foreign government figures and news of other hoteliers touring the property, the result of their efforts speaks for itself. **c**