

SQUARE FEET

A Hollywood Pitch: Bring the Junkets Back

By Design, a Hotel Aims to Lure Film Promotions

By MORRIS NEWMAN

LOS ANGELES — The developers of a \$350 million luxury hotel and condominium project in this city's historic "filmland" district are making a pitch to the motion picture industry: bring the business of promoting movies back to Hollywood.

Marty Collins, chief executive of Gatehouse Capital, which is based in Dallas and is building the 305-room W Hotel & Residences in partnership with HEI Hotels & Resorts of Norwalk, Conn., says the hotel has been designed to host an elaborate ritual of movie promotion known as the press junket.

Typically, a junket is a weekend-long event involving reporters, publicists, cameramen and film stars. Currently, these promotional events take place almost entirely in the luxury hotels of Beverly Hills, several miles west of Hollywood.

One hotel, the Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills, by itself enjoys "about 90 percent" of the junket trade, according to Mr. Collins. Jorge Collazo, the Four Seasons' director of marketing, said he could not quantify

the market share, but confirmed that his hotel "definitely has the majority of the junketing business."

Mr. Collins says he wants to emulate the success of the Four Seasons by bringing movie marketing to the iconic corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, where the W Hotel is nearing completion. In his words, "I want to bring Hollywood back to Hollywood."

The success of the junket business in Beverly Hills, Mr. Collins added, is "largely a default position, because there are no five-star hotels in Hollywood."

The new hotel will "fill a vacuum in Hollywood in a big way," said Leslie Lambert, a regional administrator for the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency, which is overseeing the revitalization of the historic Hollywood district. Developer interest in Hollywood appears high, to judge from more than a dozen current proposals, including a 1.3-million-square-foot Millennium Hollywood residential, office and retail project. Directly across the street from the W Hotel is the proposed Boulevard 6200, with 1,042 rental units.

Designing a hotel that can accommodate junkets is not a casual undertaking, according to Edward Abeyta, principal of HKS Inc., an architecture firm based in Dallas that is responsible for the hotel-and-condominium complex.

Junkets are highly structured events and require a specific configuration of hospitality rooms and reception rooms, according to the architect. Some hotel rooms need at least three bathrooms, with two of them large enough for a hair stylist or makeup artist to work in.

Those same rooms need to be capable of being emptied of furniture at a moment's notice so they can be transformed into "taping suites," where actors can chat on camera with a succession of reporters and camera operators, who wait their turns in the adjoining hallway. In a single weekend under the lights, actors might grant up to 50 interviews.

The hotel floors used for junketing need extra electrical capacity, so that cameramen can plug in their equipment without special backup generators. Fiber optic cables are also helpful, so film crews can transmit interview video di-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHANIE DIANI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The new W Hotel on the corner of Hollywood and Vine will have 305 rooms, but also the layout and equipment needed for the stars of new movies to give taped interviews, which can total as many as 50 over a weekend.

Hosting press events requires special room layouts and heavy-duty electrical power.

rectly to stations.

Even without the choreography of the junketing floors, the W Hotel presented complex design demands.

Part of that complexity reflects on-site constraints. The redevelopment agency insisted that the developers work around two historic buildings: the Taft Building, a red brick 1920s office building on the corner of Hollywood and Vine, and a single-story retail building immediately south of the Taft on Vine.

Accordingly, the new building, which faces Hollywood Boulevard, rises no higher than 15 stories, the same height as the Taft, which figures prominently in the front facade of the hotel. Before construction of the new hotel and condos, the site was occupied by a group of aging commercial buildings and a parking lot.

The Taft, which like the second building is not owned by the developers, is an evocative fragment of old Hollywood, and might be seen as reinforcing the theme of preservation in the historic district. "On the four corners of Hollywood and Vine, three of them have integrated historical buildings into their new structures," said Mr. Abeyta, the architect.

Directly beneath the hotel is an underground station of the Metro Rail Red Line subway, a line between the San Fernando Valley and downtown Los Angeles. (The hotel site, in fact, is owned by the subway operator, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority of Los Angeles County, which leased the land to the developers for 99 years.)

The resulting design is a Chinese puzzle of a building, with many interlocking parts. The front of the W Hotel & Residences has a U-shaped footprint that leaves an open courtyard above the subway station. The hotel and a 143-unit condominium complex each occupies a separate tower, connected by a "bridge" building. The condo units range in price from \$800,000 to \$9 million.

The hotel tower's second story, which is part of the junket complex, has an open courtyard, for use if the hotel needs extra space for a large party. For a screening room, another attraction aimed at junketeers, the W is building an open-air movie theater in the same courtyard.

Like several recent buildings in Hollywood, the front facade of the W Hotel integrates billboards, one horizontal and one vertical, as architectural elements. "Signage is a key element of many historic buildings in Hollywood, and we thought it was important to identify ourselves with that," Mr. Abeyta said.

When the W Hollywood hotel opens in November, the junketing wars can commence.

Mr. Collazo of the Four Seasons, for his part, says he is not anxious. "It is easy to create a building and make it pretty and have all the proper equipment," the marketing manager said.

"The part you cannot produce so easily is the wealth of knowledge that comes from experience," he added. "The human resource is clearly an advantage over any new product."



Marty Collins of Gatehouse Capital is the developer of the W Hotel.