

DESIGN

PLAYING the *local card*

CAMBRIA'S DESIGN, AIMED AT 'ENGAGERS,' WEAVES A SENSE OF PLACE INTO AN EFFICIENT PACKAGE.

Contributed by MEGAN ROWE

Standing out in the crowded field

of brands designed for business travelers is not the easiest proposition. The cookie-cutter strategy works for those who find comfort in consistency. But a growing number of so-called "woke" travelers prefer a hotel that won't let them forget where they are. For the latter, an upscale brand like Cambria Hotels beckons.

Cambria, a small but fast-rising member of Choice Hotels' portfolio, is betting that a design relying on efficiency and approachable indulgence — and seasoned with a dash of local flavor — will appeal to this type of guest.

"We call them 'engagers,'" says Janis Cannon, senior vice president of upscale brands at Choice. "They are always on, trying to squeeze everything out of the moment. They're looking for a hotel partner that gets them, helps them improve their efficiency and makes things easy, so they can get back some time and use it to do things that are important to them."

SETTING THE TONE

Cambria has three universal design features: the arrival experience, the spa-like guest bathroom and F&B.

The typical Cambria guest is in town for business, with little time to spare for exploring. When they arrive at the hotel, key features such as check-in, the elevator, F&B and a space for socializing are immediately clear. The public areas also are prime territory for creating a sense of place. So design touches — a neon "The Big Easy" sign

by the elevators in the New Orleans Cambria, or a wall of cowboy boots and a live music stage at the Nashville hotel — provide memorable cues. They also have inspired many a social media snapshot.

"We aren't intentionally building Instagram moments into hotels," Cannon says, "but that's happening organically because of the design sensibility."

The bathroom is arguably the star of the guest accommodations. Outfitted in stone and other natural materials in shades of white and gray, the sink is offset, leaving more counter space for toiletries. The bathroom also incorporates the brand's most buzzed-about amenity: a Bluetooth-enabled vanity mirror that allows guests to listen to their own music while bathing or getting ready — another way to maximize every moment.

"We thought about what the guest would want," says James Haggerty, Choice's project director, architecture and interior design. "And we didn't need to be like a Las Vegas casino hotel with a TV in the mirror. It's just a little unexpected delight."

In the guestroom, functional furnishings dominate. "We've forced the owners to push the envelope with upscale materials, making sure they put the money where the most impact is," Haggerty says. Instead of specifying dressers unlikely to serve much purpose, the budget goes into higher-end casegoods with built-in drawers, better TVs and upgraded carpeting. Beds sit on platforms with built-in power and lighting. Wallcoverings inject local character. And lighting

Cambria's design focuses on a sense of place — in this case, a lounge in Nashville that features live music and a boot-themed display.



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Nashville's lobby check-in

relies on natural sources as well as good task fixtures.

Rooms tend to be roomier than average — typically 350 square feet. In high-rent locations those standards are flexible, but that spa bathroom is a must, so a site like New York's Times Square requires some creative thinking. In that instance, bathrooms were bumped out 6 inches into the guestroom.

The lobby bar is front and center, supplying a buzz, a place to engage and a shot of local color. Each Cambria spotlights locally sourced craft beers along with cocktails and fresh, casual fare. Standard items include a margarita, a breakfast burrito and the Cambria American Angus Burger, but otherwise menus reflect local specialties and brands. So the Scottsdale, Arizona, Cambria spotlights Southwestern specialties, while in New Orleans it's packed with Cajun and Creole classics. Some serve free breakfast; others do not. M Culinary consulting chef Michael DeMaria weighs in on kitchen and menu decisions.

"If our guests don't have time to get out of the hotel, they can at least go to the bar and feel like they're having a local experience," Cannon says.

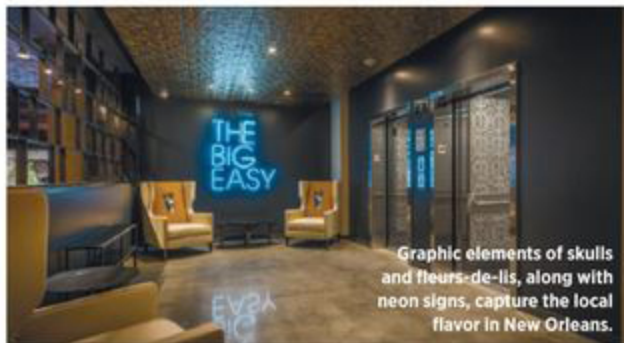
Depending on the location, Cambrias can support multiple F&B outlets. The Philadelphia property has spaces in the lobby, on the roof and on the lower level; others have a three-meal bar/restaurant space. "We work with the owners to determine whether it will be a shining star or an amenity for the guests," Haggerty explains.

SHARED DNA

Cambria Hotels got off to a sluggish start after its 2007 launch, quickly followed by the recession. But its trajectory steepened in recent years. As of June, 37 Cambrias were open — 10 debuted in 2017 — and some 80 projects were in development. Many current owners have committed to multiple projects. Most recently, Newport Beach, California-based Stratus Development Partners agreed to build five more on top of three it had committed to in California and Florida, and two were announced in South Carolina.



Lobby areas, like this one in Scottsdale, Arizona, aim for a sense of place.



Graphic elements of skulls and fleurs-de-lis, along with neon signs, capture the local flavor in New Orleans.

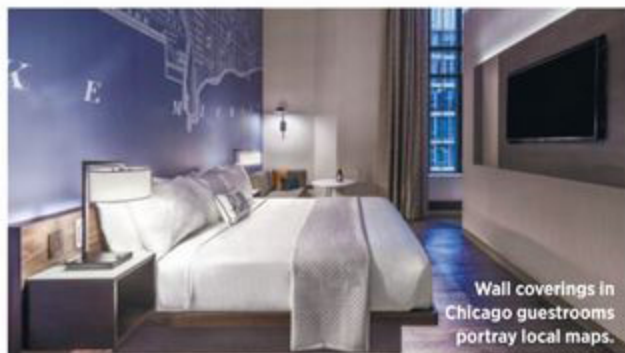


New Orleans' lobby area

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A guestroom in Nashville captures the local music vibe.



Wall coverings in Chicago guestrooms portray local maps.



A guestroom in Philadelphia

Choice's expansion approach has been to target the top 50 U.S. RevPAR markets, both to satisfy demand for product like this and to create tentpole sites that will drive brand awareness. While the majority of locations are new-builds, the push into major urban centers has raised the prospect of more conversions and adaptive reuse projects, which creates some challenges to a unified brand presence.

"We want to have DNA that's recognizable across properties," Cannon says. "We want them to look like brothers and sisters, not identical twins."

That philosophy resonates with developers like San Francisco-based Fillmore Capital Partners, which manages five Cambria hotels, a mix of new and conversions. In Nashville, vintage photos celebrating the city's musical heritage hang near the elevators, an accent of locally reclaimed wood shows up throughout the property, guestrooms have speaker-patterned wallpaper and guitar-shaped accent tables, and the hotel sports an intimate concert venue.

"We tried to embrace the country and western culture wherever we could," says Amanda Warnick, Fillmore's director of design.

The New Orleans Cambria was adapted to reflect its location in the historic warehouse district. A prominent wall features antique hardware, exposed concrete floors run throughout the public spaces, guestroom walls are covered with a fleur-de-lis or skull pattern, and furnishings are more traditional.

At Chicago's Magnificent Mile property, a conversion, lobby



Outfitted in stone and other natural materials, baths have buzzy, Bluetooth-enabled vanity mirrors.

installations are by local artists, and guestroom artwork features local landmarks. "We love the freedom to make each hotel unique from the inside out and to embrace the local culture," Warnick says.

Bringing these five hotels online was a collaborative effort with Cambria's design staff. After satisfying those three brand must-haves, she notes, Fillmore had ample room to create a memorable experience for guests.

Between achieving that sense of place, designing in approachable indulgent features and providing must-haves like free Wi-Fi, flexible meeting spaces and convenience stores, Cannon says Cambria "caters to travelers who believe that time and experience are the new luxury."