

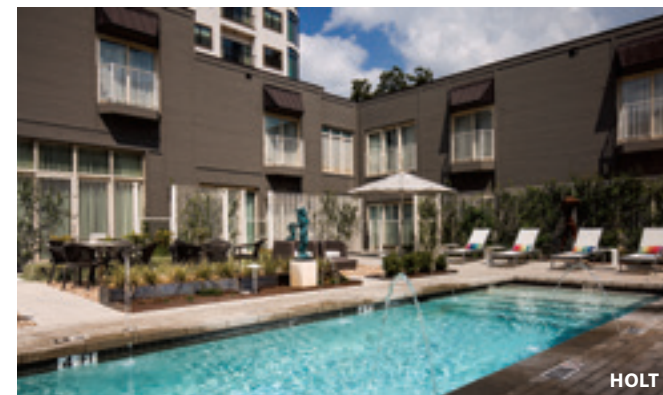


HOTEL WITH HISTORY

By MAURI ELBEL | Photography by JAKE HOLT AND LARS FRAZER

It's no secret Austin is home to an ever-expanding spread of diverse lodging options, but guests who choose to stay at Hotel Ella are resting their heads in a gracefully revamped chapter of history.

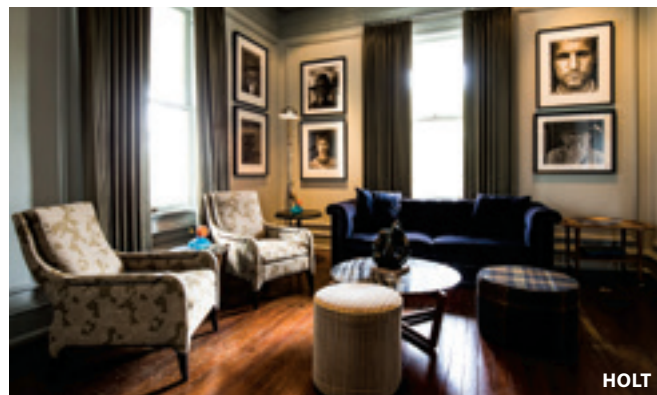
In the heart of Central Austin, Hotel Ella is housed in the historic Goodall Wooten House — one of Austin's original landmark estates. Formerly the Mansion at Judge's Hill, the stylish boutique hotel is now found on the National Register of Historic Places thanks to its rich history and ties to The University of Texas. But fast-forward more than a century through its storied past and you'll discover a time-



less property that swirls old world luxury with sophisticated modernism — the result of an extensive renovation in 2013 orchestrated by one of Austin's most influential architecture and interior design firms.

"We love projects like this one on so many levels, from appreciating the roots of a project and its many transformations over its history, to its importance within the neighborhood it exists today," says Michael Hsu, principal of Michael Hsu Office Of Architecture. "To develop a concept of what we wanted to accomplish for this project and a road map for design, we started with an extensive historical research of the project."

In 1878, Thomas Dudley Wooten, one of the university's founders purchased the land on which Hotel Ella now sits, explains Hsu. The Goodall Wooten House, designed by Architect Charles O'Connell, was originally built in 1898 and completed in 1900 when Wooten's son, Goodall, moved into the home with his new wife Ella Newsome who oversaw the home's transformation into the Greek Revival-style mansion that stands today. Known for her impeccable taste, Ella called upon Neiman Marcus to redecorate the entire home in 1925 for \$10,000, which today would equate to roughly one million dollars. For the Greek columns, she turned to the Vanderbilts for a recommendation, eventually choosing the same stone carver who constructed the famous Biltmore Mansion in Asheville.



But over the decades, as the house changed owners and functions, the property underwent numerous renovations, explains Hsu. O'Connell supervised an expansion 10 years after the home's completion, the house underwent notable renovations in the 1940's when it was sold to Mr. Adams of the Adams Extract Company who leased it to a sorority and again in 1953 when it was sold to The Christian Faith and Life Community. Hsu says the most dramatic changes occurred in 1979 when DeLois Faulkner purchased the house and converted it into a substance abuse treatment center which resulted in the construction of a north wing and a freestanding L-shaped building that borders the courtyard. Further additions came in 2005 when the property was converted into the Mansion at Judge's Hill.

As the architect and interior designer, Michael Hsu Office Of Architecture renovated and restored the original Goodall Wooten Mansion exterior and updated all of the interior spaces, transforming the historic property into a timeless escape in the form of 47 lavishly-appointed guest rooms featuring



custom-designed furniture, a cabana-lined lap pool, a wrap-around veranda ideal for sipping signature cocktails from Ella Parlor Bar, Goodall's Kitchen, a causal American bistro and stylish grounds speckled with a diverse collection of art.

Maintaining the historical integrity of the existing mansion while modernizing its look and feel, the firm's crisp, clean-lined updates blend in flawlessly with original details. Hotel Ella represents a respectful renovation that gave the historical Greek Revival mansion a new life without covering up its past.

"It is challenging to strike a good balance between what is old and what is new," says Jay Colombo, partner at Michael Hsu Office Of Architecture. "Yet what we attempt to do is create a harmony between those elements so neither is diminished or detracted from. So through combining more traditional materials and techniques like marble surfaces, brass elements, wood moldings and wainscots detailing, we bridge the design gap between old and new without simply just replicating what existed."

Walking into the expanded entry foyer, the eyes are immediately drawn to the custom cranberry-colored wallpaper featur-

ing an oversized traditional pattern with two framed black and white portraits of Goodall and Ella Wooten, forming a backdrop to a reception desk designed to fit within the newly renovated vestibule and grand stair. Inside Ella Parlor Bar, rich slate grays and a black marble bar countertop with an exaggerated waterfall edge and brass inlays give nod to existing historic detailing of original elements like the fireplace where Goodall's blunderbuss still hangs above. A custom built-in lounge banquette relies on traditional tufting techniques, but Colombo says they played up the shape of the piece to respond to the curves of the room while emphasizing the tactile feel with the fabric selection — mohair — to add a lightness and delicacy. Lighter colors and finishes brighten interior spaces and balance the natural light in the guest rooms to create a soothing feel.

Previously disjointed, the leveled courtyard now unifies the existing complex of buildings, creating a relaxing space with the addition of a cabana-lined lap pool, a lush living green wall and individual courtyards bordering ground-level suites. Grac-



ing the grounds is a diverse collection of artwork carefully curated by Will Meredith with the history of the property in mind but with a nod to the contemporary, says Colombo of the mixture of historic black and white photos, works from contemporary artists and an exclusive collection of iconic sculptures by Charles Umlauf and Barbara Segal.

While Hsu says his firm isn't technically known as preservationist architects, the well-known Austin architect says they truly enjoy projects like this one.

"They pose a unique challenge for us in thoughtfully removing the renovated/altered elements over time to reveal the dignity and grandeur of the original home — and then to strike a balance with the new design features that we want to add to the historic narrative of the project that help amplify the original details," Hsu says. "The original home was beautiful, and it is sometimes very hard as an architect to just selflessly expose what existed and just step back and not over design a project." ❖

MICHAEL HSU OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE

512.706.4303 | Hsuoffice.com