

Young local designer to fill Royal Connaught lobby with art deco glam

By Julia Chapman, [CBC News](#)

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The Royal Connaught might be shabby on the outside, but designer Lisa Boyer is planning to transform its lobby into a glamorous, art deco-inspired space. (Julia Chapman/CBC)

The first time Lisa Boyer set foot inside the Royal Connaught hotel, it was pitch black and she was guided through the lobby by a developer with a single flashlight. And there were pigeons, a lot of pigeons.

Even in the dark, with the building in very rough shape and birds flocking around her, the Burlington-based designer was impressed from the moment she walked in.

“There are beautiful columns that stretch from the floor to ceiling, a two-level mezzanine, beautiful moldings that wrap around all the ceilings,” the 29-year-old described with a big smile.

Boyer is tasked by developers Ted Valeri and Rudi Spallacci with one of the most significant projects inside their new condo, the Residences of the Royal Connaught. She's designing the iconic lobby inside the former hotel.

Her design will give Hamiltonians their first taste of what the revived Connaught will look like, since the lobby will serve as the sales centre expected to open in the fall.

Her concept — an art deco, Great Gatsby-esque theme — “just came” without hesitation when she reflected on the Connaught's grandeur.

Nostalgic feel

“It's perfecting timing because [that style] really just blew up now,” Boyer said. “You can see it everywhere in fashion, event design and even in interiors.”

Boyer scrolls through photos of items and patterns she drew inspiration from: furniture with reflective surfaces made from wood or brass, high-contrast colour palates using black, gold and white, chevron patterns, clean design lines.

She won't yet reveal her exact design, but spilled enough to give a good impression of how she's planned out the space.

“The iconic staircase that scissors up to the main floor is going to be refurbished,” she said. “The columns and molding will be a soft, warm white.”

Boyer said she'll use up lighting and down lighting to highlight architectural elements of the space. The old telephone booths at the back of the lobby will be transformed into a media lounge where residents and visitors can plug in laptops and iPads.

Glamorous coffee bar

And where they used to be a coffee shop on the main floor, there will be “a really glamorous coffee bar with a mini grand piano.”

Size-wise, designing the Connaught's lobby is not among one of Boyer's biggest projects — she's used to designing 6,000 to 7,000-square foot residential homes. But the Royal Connaught is significant. It's a place where many Hamiltonians have memories of all kinds — some sentimental, others quirky.

“One of my suppliers who knew I was working on the Connaught said her mom used to go there in her 20s and she was just a party animal and would steal the spoons, and has a collection of all these Royal Connaught spoons,” she said. “The old man I bought my home from, he's 94 and remembers going there in his heyday and all the mischief they got up to.”

Even her father, a former CP Rail employee, has memories of work Christmas parties at the Royal Connaught. Her grandparents would attend weekend dances in the ballroom.

“Somehow, [the Connaught] is intertwined with everyone's experiences,” she said.

Inspired by memories

But that's not intimidating Boyer. In fact, she's sourcing positive energy from the stories she hears.

“It's inspiring because I've been able to talk with people and hear their memories,” she said.

Boyer has been working on her design since the fall. As it stands, all the details have been finalized with one exception.

“There will be three large chandeliers hanging from the ceiling,” she said. “They're so predominant, we're not ready to bite the bullet yet... There are four [styles] in the running.”

Boyer hopes the lobby will be a place for people to hang out in, and not just pass through. In a later construction phase, she said shops will be incorporated at ground level and that will improve the street scape.

“It's a really good project for Hamilton,” she said. “It will do great things for downtown... there is an influx of young people moving back and hopefully this will encourage more to do the same.”