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Central Square gets its first boutique hotel

907 Main attempts to capture the area's loud spirit with a sprinkle of luxury

By [Christopher Muther](#) Globe Staff, Updated December 18, 2019, 10:00 a.m.



A rendering of 907 Main, a hotel that will open this spring in Central Square. HANDOUT

CAMBRIDGE — There was a time — let's say 25 years ago — when the idea of a boutique hotel in Central Square would have made as much sense as a beauty parlor for salamanders. A lot can change in 25 years.

The neighborhood is getting its first boutique hotel this spring, but the owners of [907 Main](#) hotel say they are not turning a blind eye to their surroundings. They want the hotel to have a rebellious streak, much like Central Square itself. That means the hotel will include Central Square's first rooftop bar and patio, which owners say will offer up a rowdy scene on the weekends, but at the same time feature sophisticated craft cocktails. If there is such a thing as rebellious sophistication, it's what 907 Main is aiming for.

“When people think boutique hotel they think unapproachable,” said Uzay Tumer, general manager of the hotel's restaurants. “That's not what we want to be.”

The building was the home of the beloved Toscanini's Ice Cream, which will be return when the 67-room hotel opens this spring. Their ice cream will also be on the dessert menu at the Dial, the name of the hotel's colorful restaurant. A French bakery called Praliné is also opening on the first floor. Although Toscanini's is returning, Cinderella's Restaurant and Patty Chen's Dumpling Room are not.

The inside of the 1871 building, which sits at the corner of Main and Columbia streets, was torn down to the studs in the renovation. Only the outer structure remains. In a hardhat tour of the hotel earlier this month, Patrick W. Barrett III, one of the hotel's three owners, said the interior was in such rough shape after decades of patchwork repairs and neglect that it was necessary to start over.

The renovation also included additional height on the fifth floor to accommodate the rooftop bar, plus a new wing and an outside courtyard.

Barrett lives down the street from the soon-to-open hotel and has a long history with the neighborhood. He was the drummer in a local band called Trucker Mouth in the 2000s. He played gigs in Central Square at the Middle East and the now-defunct TT the Bears. He knows the story of the neighborhood and emphasizes that he's not trying to make Central Square inaccessible with the addition of 907 Main.

“We're letting people know we're not closed off from the neighborhood,” Barrett said. “We're like a community center in terms of food and fun, and open to everyone. We want it to be accessible.”



A rendering of the dining room of the Dial restaurant in the 907 Main hotel in Cambridge. ARTSEMERSON

He also flinches at the use of the G word (that's gentrification) when it inevitably arises in conversation. He envisions 907 Main as something that can help the neighborhood. He said he's committed to hiring locals to staff the hotel. He's also prepared when the topic turns to housing. Barrett said if the site wasn't a hotel, it likely would have been razed by developers and rebuilt as an edifice full of \$3,000-a-month studio apartments.

The hotel's main restaurant will sell small, sharable plates between \$8 to \$16, and entrees starting around \$20 and up. The bar area of the Dial will offer these dishes at long, communal tables. Behind the bar area is a more traditional dining room. According to Tumer, the menu at the restaurant will weigh heavily on modern interpretations of comfort food.



A rendering of the bar area of the Dial restaurant inside the 907 Main hotel in Central Square. HANDOUT

“People might recognize favorite dishes from parts of Europe, Asia, or the Middle East,” he said. “It’s around-the-world comfort food, so everyone can get a bit of home.”



A rendering of a guest room at 907 Main hotel in Cambridge.

The public spaces of the hotel are riots of turquoise, pink, and green punctured by bolts of neon. The guest rooms are quite the opposite. Floors are white wood and walls are neutral, with most color coming from window coverings. While showing a room, the hotel's general manager, Kathryn Vallier, asked, "Do you hear that?" She went quiet, as did the room. Soundproof windows were installed to block the street noise from below.

The rooms aren't completely devoid of flash. The otherwise black and white bathrooms sport just enough gold tiles to remain on the tasteful side of flashy.

The splashiest attraction at 907 Main is the roof bar, called Blue Owl, which was named for the animated owl from the [1969 Tootsie Pop commercial](#). The bar features a roof deck five stories up with broad views of Cambridge. It's easy to imagine the space packed on a warm summer night with locals looking for alternatives to the Middle East, Sonia, or Middlesex. The bar's menu is inspired by street food, such as skewers.



The Blue Owl, the rooftop bar that will be located on top of the 907 Main hotel when it opens in spring 2020. ARTSEMERSON

“It’s really meant to be a loud, fun atmosphere up here,” Tumer said. “A place where you don’t really know what’s going to happen next. Again, we’re trying to capture that rowdy feel of the neighborhood. It’s the fun side of Central Square, but all grown up.”

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