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Independent  
Insights



## Boutique 907 Main draws demand from locals, students

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The new 907 Main boutique hotel is centrally located in Boston's Central Square neighborhood near local shops and universities, allowing it to gear packages toward students and couples in a time of low demand.



The 67-room 907 Main hotel opened in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 9 September near Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (Photo: Kevin Hardman)

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CAMBRIDGE, Massachusetts—Set in the backyard of prominent Boston universities, new boutique hotel 907 Main has had to get creative with its offerings to best cater to the town's multi-generational demographic.

The 67-room hotel, managed by New Hampshire-based independent hotel management company Hay Creek Hotels, opened in the Central Square neighborhood of East Boston on 9 September, adding to the town's vibrant and eclectic culture as well as the area's ongoing revitalization, said GM Kathryn Vallier.

Originally, the hotel was slated to open spring 2020 but was pushed back because of a construction moratorium due to the pandemic. That presented several challenges, and full construction resumed in mid-May, Vallier said. However, she felt there were some positives to the situation.

"The hotel itself never opened in a normal setting, if you will, so if you take away the mindset of what you know and you insert that this is a new job, a new hotel, a new everything, we're able to train associates with what is and not what was," she said. "I really try to lean on the positive side of things."

Vallier said the pre-opening was a precise and thoughtful onboarding process for associates and included a rehearsal of where every item, from sanitizers to throw pillows, in the hotel should be placed.

Because other hotels under [Hay Creek](#)'s portfolio were already open during the pandemic, she said that allowed [907 Main](#) to see firsthand how other hotels and restaurants were operating and gain knowledge from their successes and challenges.

For example, with guest packages Vallier's team was able to rewind and say, "Let's think about this again in this new normal that we're in and how can we be appealing."

### **Shifting strategies**

Pre-COVID-19, the hotel team was expecting to generate a lot of demand from business travelers during the week and the leisure traveler, including families of students at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology as well as couples, on the weekend.

"That's really changed," Vallier said. "We've actually driven more towards the leisure market now ... as we advance in 2020."

- [Click here to read: "Creativity tapped to stretch leisure season past summer"](#)

Packages introduced at the hotel include working from the guestroom, geared toward students or professionals looking for a quiet, no-distractions space for day-use. Vallier said most universities in the area are having seniors come in or have students who need in-person teaching.

The work-from-room package attracts a lot of Harvard Extension Students doing Zoom classes.

"We've even had people inquire about test taking, when they do definitely need to have all the distractions removed. I'm seeing an uptick there. There's no library, we're hoping to step into the place of that library atmosphere," she said.

Other packages targeting leisure guests include a stay and movie package; a city and sea escape package, where guests can stay at 907 Main and then head up to its sister property Breakwater Inn & Spa in Kennebunkport, Maine; and a mom- or dad-cation package, which encourages parents to book the penthouse.

The hotel has also seen an uptick in inquires for micro-weddings.

"We have several weddings already on the books," she said.

It's important to be forward-thinking, by keeping every traveler and type of concern in mind to ensure 907 Main is as welcoming and competitive as possible, Vallier said.

### **About the building**

The building, which is registered with the National Register of Historic Places, was originally built in 1869. A fifth floor was added to it, and it will become a rooftop restaurant, Blue Owl, set to open this spring, and the 1,000 square-foot penthouse guestroom.



Shown here is the dining area of the 1,000-square-foot penthouse suite in 907 Main, which is also included in one of its guest packages geared toward parents. (Photo: Kevin Hardman)

On the first floor, Vallier said guests will see The Dial restaurant, opening on 23 September, as well as an outdoor patio.

The building has always been mixed-used, where the ground level has always held different types of businesses. When it was renovated, the full interior was removed and was structurally reinforced before contractors “laid a hotel into the footprint of the existing building” and had an addition added to the rear, she said.

Design firm Gensler and Hay Creek Hotels worked together to conceptualize the hotel. The team wanted to embrace the culture of Central Square and the neighborhood, with “subtle but creative hints of whimsy throughout the property to really delight our guests and be surprising,” she said.

The design elements and 907 Main brand identity was also inspired by journalist Margaret Fuller and the Transcendentalism movement, she said.

The Business Improvement District in Boston has been a huge component for keeping Central Square well maintained, she added.



### **Benefits and challenges of being independent**

Vallier said the benefits of being independent outweigh any of the challenges. Being small and hands-on is a differentiation, as the employee to guest ratio is very high.

Another advantage is the hotel team doesn't need to wait until a brand formulates a plan.

"We're able to initiate a plan to be able to be safeguarded from COVID-19 for both our guests and associates, but also to continue to evolve that plan," she said, adding that brands have so many hands a plan must pass through.

Not having a brand.com search engine to bring guest directly to them is a bit of an obstacle, but her team has a committed set of followers that are looking for an elevated experience. It's a known nuance for independents, she said.

Tapping into social media channels and working with third parties has been beneficial, she said.

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