

the LEGACY of KEYWEST

Hemingways, East London

Article by Jenny Hunter Blair

Photography by Rebecca Staniforth, Southern Sun and MDS Architecture

Ernest Hemingway's memory lingers on. Not only in the collection of novels he wrote. But in the Spanish Colonial style home he owned in Key West, Florida. His home was his last port of call and is now a museum. The legacy of the greatest American writer remains...

Conceptually the architectural theme of the exterior of the hotel was conceived by Creative Kingdom and realised by MDS Architecture. "The client decided on the Hemingway theme. The facade is more important than the functionality behind the facade. The rhythm of the facade and the way you want to modulate it is important.

"Themed architecture is different from conventional architecture, as you are creating an entertainment

environment. You are giving people a place to go and escape to," says architect Brent Buchanan from Creative Kingdom the concept architects.

The apricot butter yellow clapboarding effect of the new Southern Sun's Hemingways Hotel topped by an attoll green roof, stands out on the East London horizon enticing visitors to go and visit.

The design of the hotel was inspired by the designs of large plantation homes in the Southern States of America and homes in the Caribbean and Key West, Florida. The colours of the roof and the exterior are inspired by the Caribbean. The design of the building draws visitors into the hotel and the adjacent casino.



Architect Pierre Lahaye of MDS Architecture – the architects of record – says “ There is a mixture of images in the architectural design from the old American colonial homes and decorative trusses, reflected in the fillagree to the sash windows and the neo-classical décor.”

Although Hemingways is linked to a casino it is described as a ‘ serious ’ hotel by the designers – comfortable for the businessman, touring group or sportsman. The man tasked with putting Hemingways on the map is general manager Steve Chinama – a dedicated Southern Sun man he comes with an impeccable pedigree.



Passionate about his work and his clients he wants to establish a sound customer base. Since the hotel's inception a few months ago, Chinama has managed to increase the occupancy rate to 51%. Further plans include a family package for the December holidays and a cricket package for next year's World Cup.

The client wanted the interiors to reflect a colonial theme throughout the hotel including the meeting rooms and the gym, to project to visitors an up market hotel with a tranquil homely feel.

Being a traditional themed hotel most of the materials used in the interiors are natural. The floors in the public areas are covered in a variety of natural marbles. Creams with a contrasting black inlay marble cover the floors of the reception and entrance hall of the hotel.

The carpets were designed by BlackSmith Africa and manufactured by Ulster to reflect an old-world feel reminiscent of another era – subtle shades of olive green and cream in a Victorian leaf design.

The walls are predominantly covered in cream and beige striped wallpaper with a satin finish. The timber details in the architraves, doors, staircases, reception desk, skirting, dados create a comfortable relaxed ambience.

Two large wrought iron chandeliers hang in the entrance and reception area and four overhead ceiling fans, reflecting the Colonial theme, continually rotate in the dining area.

Developer: Southern Sun
Concept Architects: Creative Kingdom
Project Architects: MDS Architecture
Quantity Surveyor: Brian Heineberg and Associates in association with Dhlwayo Ravhura Pholafudi Soomar Inc.
Electrical Engineers: Chorn Kirkland Riccardi
Interior designers: BlackSmith Africa: Interiors of the hotel & casino
Concept designers: Dougall Design, Pasadena USA: Interiors of the casino



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The client wanted a small public area so the reception lobby is small and inviting with two brown leather sofas, a solid rectangular shaped wooden coffee table, two large cane chairs. There is a casual dining area where all meals are served from breakfast to a three-course dinner in the evenings.

The initial idea was that guests would eat in one of the fast food restaurants in the complex en route to the casino, but most guests prefer to eat in the hotel. Because the dining area is small and open plan the hotel cannot cater for large functions or for the full capacity of the hotel. There are plans to convert an area in the fast food complex, to an area that can be used for conferences or functions. But the hotel still needs a private dining room.

Behind each sofa stands a marble and wrought iron table with a tall gray coloured ceramic pot on top, with one or two interesting coffee table books. Standing on the right wall near the entrance is a large Victorian looking sideboard. There is also a Victorian style magazine holder near one of the sofas.

The corridor from the reception area houses two conference rooms – aimed at the business sector that is the hotel's main target market - on the right and a very small gym for hotel guests on the left. The colonial theme is carried through in the interiors of both these areas.

Hanging on the walls throughout the hotel and the bedrooms are beautiful sensitive mood shots, taken by renowned photographer Horst Klemm. Designer Nikki McCartney from BlackSmith chose African black and white shots - with a few images from Zanzibar and other tropical colonial places - for the interiors. The photographs were originals and were all hand printed and then hand framed.

East London has very unpredictable weather patterns, sunny one moment, raining the next and the hotel was designed with this in mind. Large windows and a large clerestory roof light in the reception area were used to allow for maximum natural light. Good artificial





lighting that creates a daylight effect backs this up. The use of decorative table lamps helps create a warm homely ambience.

It's a pity the final design of the hotel did not include a bar and a larger enclosed dining area.

BlackSmith's tried to incorporate some aspects of Hemingway's life into the interiors – hunting, fishing, writing, romance and his joie de vivre. This is reflected in

the tropical colonial and neo-Victorian design of the interiors.

Ernest Hemingway would be proud to have his name given to such a fine hotel. If he could visit it he would certainly have been inspired to pen another novel..

VERDICT: A charming colonial ambience created by the external architecture and the interior design. *ie*