

# Lucien Lagrange Creates a Multitude of Luxury Condo-Hotel Projects in Chicago

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As the architect/designer behind a slew of recent and upcoming hotel and mixed-use hotel/condominium projects in Chicago, Lucien Lagrange is as much an authority as anyone on the demographic and economic trends shaping the current luxury lodging market in the Windy City. Starting with his work on the 198-room Park Hyatt on upper Michigan Avenue, Lagrange's project list reads like a Top 10 of both new construction and adaptive reuse development.

Lagrange's new builds include the 188-suite Elysian Hotel & Private Residences, scheduled to open in early-2008 and the 330-room Blackstone Renaissance, which is a renovation and conversion of an existing Beaux Arts hotel that dates back to 1907. In the realm of adaptive reuse, Lagrange was the design force behind the conversion of the historic Carbide & Carbon office building on Michigan Avenue into the 379-room Hard Rock Hotel Chicago. Upcoming adaptive reuse projects include two very-different-profile office buildings on South LaSalle St.

Yet another Lagrange project is a curious hybrid. The 86-unit Ritz-Carlton Residences Chicago, opening in 2008, isn't a hotel, though it carries the name of a leading luxury hotel brand. Apartment owners, however, get access to a full-floor private club that offers many hotel services.

"As in other major cities, the demographic trend most responsible for this present wave of development is the aging of the Baby Boom generation," said Lagrange, whose 30-year practice has spanned both Chicago and Montreal. Before establishing his own firm, he was associated with the mega firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

"Baby Boomers started turning 60 this year. Many are empty nesters and they're prime purchasers

of condominiums, whether as a primary residence, or secondary, third, or fourth residence. They have the disposable wealth and want to be able to enjoy a certain kind of lifestyle and the freedom that comes with it."

A key part of the appeal is the availability of those hotel services. "Whether it's housekeeping or room service or preferential bookings for spa appointments or dinner reservations at the on-site full-service spa/gourmet restaurant, it's all part of the lifestyle they're after," said Lagrange, 66, who was born in France and educated in Canada.

The hotel component attached to these projects, however, can't just be any hotel. "Rather, buyers are attracted to luxury brands they know like Park Hyatt or projects that have taken on an aura of prestige in some way like the Elysian. The Ritz-Carlton project is interesting because it's not attached to an actual hotel, yet the Ritz-Carlton name in itself is one of the great luxury brands. Developers tell me they can command a premium of 20% or more in price per square foot for these high visibility projects," he noted.

The hotel component is invariably at the base of the tower with the best views at the top saved for condominium buyers who are paying top dollar. "Elevator banks serving the hotel guests have to be coordinated with those serving the condominium residents as well as the service elevators connecting to the restaurant/room service kitchens," Lagrange noted.

Another issue impacting architectural design is whether residents need a separate building entrance. Lagrange recalled discussions when these projects first became popular about having one entrance serve both hotel guests and residents. But starting with the Park Hyatt, the final design called for two distinct entrances,

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### **Lagrange Creates a Multitude...**



preferably on different sides of the building, with doormen stationed at each. A hotel is a 24-hour-a-day environment in ways a residential tower isn't. "Residents have needs for privacy that hotel guests don't necessarily have," he said.

In more subtle ways, the presence of the condominiums also impacts the design, finishes and furniture choices of the hotel guestrooms. Rooms and bathrooms tend to be larger and there tend to be more suites. "Overall, the feeling is much more residential and the use and scale of the space is more classic in feel. In the same way bathrooms in people's homes have grown more elaborate, the same is true in these luxury hotels," Lagrange explained.



When developers are considering a site, they increasingly will call in Lagrange in a consulting capacity. That was the case with both of the LaSalle Street adaptive reuse projects. Both were eventually green lighted and the Lagrange firm was awarded the assignment. "Not all office spaces will work well as a hotel. There might be problems with the footprint or structural columns can be a hindrance," Lagrange noted.

In the case of the larger of the two projects, 208 South LaSalle, an existing structural element that could have been a potential impediment is being turned into an advantage. "There's a huge banking hall at the base of the building that will make a wonderful public space," added Lagrange. Developers of neither LaSalle street project have yet to determine if the hotels are to be branded or operated as independent properties.