



## HISTORIC MISSION

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themed



While historic renovations are quite common in the hospitality sector, it is quite rare to see new projects that attempt to seamlessly blend in with their historic surroundings, without appearing contrived or overly themed. This is the challenge that the architects at AO faced with Inn at the Mission, a Marriott Autograph Collection hotel, which recently opened in downtown San Juan Capistrano, CA. The hotel is right across from an iconic Orange County landmark, the 240-year-old Mission San Juan Capistrano which is world-famous for its annual return of the swallows. AO's Principal Bruce Greenfield shared with us some of his design insights and how he used history to fuel inspiration:

### **What served as the inspiration for the hotel's design?**

Inn at the Mission San Juan Capistrano overlooks Mission San Juan Capistrano, also labeled as

“the jewel” of the 21 Spanish missions that were established throughout California in the late 18th century. Our design team first visited the project site in 2015 and was immediately inspired by the vista overlooking the Mission and the ruins of the Great Stone Church, which crumbled in an earthquake in 1812. We set about planning a hotel that would feel like a natural extension of the Mission experience, expressing the spirituality and reverence for the land through carefully curated architecture, timeless design and storytelling.



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### **How did you honor the location’s history through the design?**

Various design challenges and opportunities were presented in creating a new, contemporary hotel in San Juan Capistrano’s historic district. The design team was challenged with delivering an elegant and modern inn that not only respected the cultural importance of the location, but also created an authentic experience. The hotel design elements and detailing draws from the historic setting and enhance the feel of the entire district. As a result, the hotel possesses an understated and timeless quality accomplished through historical accuracy, local artistry and architectural details. Examples of this include the use of adobe brick accents throughout the property as a nod to the hornos (ovens) that formerly operated on the site to make bricks to build the original Mission.

Additionally, the building façade showcases the same stone that was used in the renovations of the Mission, mined from a local rock quarry in San Juan Capistrano. Custom artistic touches are programmed throughout the property including a sculpture depicting the return of swallows, which is emblematic of the Mission, and a modern stained-glass chandelier reminiscent of the Mission bells. The hotel lobby also includes custom built-ins and recessed displays where artwork and artifacts, on loan from the Mission, can be prominently showcased in a gallery-like setting. These details and more create a strong sense of connection between Inn at the Mission and the beloved and iconic landmark that inspired its design.



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**How did local culture influence your design process?**

Local culture influenced the design process in several ways. First, the design team and developer worked closely with the local community, city and historical organizations to ensure that the property would integrate perfectly into San Juan Capistrano's historic district. The property provides key pedestrian connections to the Mission, historic downtown and nearby specialty restaurants. A public plaza on a prominent street corner invites the public into the property with boutique retail and shops, providing locals or Mission visitors a great place to enjoy a cup of coffee or gelato. The hotel design also draws from the Mission's outdoor lifestyle with its series of connected courtyards. Several paseos and gathering places throughout the hotel property create a sense of continuity with the Mission as well as other downtown buildings.



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In addition, the inn features California Mission and Monterey styles, which are directly inspired by San Juan Capistrano's charming patchwork of architectural design. The main hotel building features stucco detailing, adobe-inspired bricks and clay roof tiles in the Mission vernacular, while the spa and ballroom building showcases wood detailing, a double-sloped roof, balconies and exterior overhangs typical of the Monterey style. The juxtaposition of these two styles gives visitors a sense that the buildings grew organically over time.

On the interior design front, artwork was carefully selected by Kay Lang + Associates to highlight local artists and craftspeople and provide insight into the area's history and character. The property features more than 20 custom and commissioned art pieces, including a commissioned painting printed on Saltillo Tiles depicting the Rancho Days of San Juan

Capistrano, a custom acrylic mural and timeline painted on location, and a series of local historic photographs provided by the San Juan Capistrano Historic Society.



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