

The Whitehall Rebrands Back to Its Roots

HOUSTON—Sotherly Hotels Inc. recently announced the rebranding of the Crowne Plaza Houston Downtown hotel to The Whitehall, returning the hotel to its historic name. On April 14, 2016, following extensive \$5 million renovations, The Whitehall will become the second property in the Williamsburg, Va.-based Sotherly Hotels' portfolio of independent hotels, which the company launched in September 2015 with The Georgian Terrace in Atlanta.

"We are excited to wrap up the final renovations in the coming weeks and to rebrand the Crowne Plaza as The Whitehall, bringing it back to its former glory days," stated Andrew Sims, CEO and chairman of the board of Sotherly Hotels. "The Whitehall, with its distinctive architecture and storied history, is a perfect fit for the Sotherly collection."

Located at 1700 Smith Street in Houston's central business district, The Whitehall was built in 1963. Designed by Welton Becket and Associates, the hotel was the embodiment of the firm's "Total Design" concept, in which the firm assumed responsibility for all aspects of the hotel's identity, including engineering, interiors, furniture, fixtures, landscaping, signage, and even the silverware, menus, matchbooks, and napkins in the hotel's restaurant. Many of the original hallmarks of Becket's mid-century design remain today, including the iconic spiral "floating" staircase connecting the first and second floor public spaces and the white Italian marble flooring.

In 1989, the hotel closed. Ten years later the predecessor company to Sotherly Hotels purchased the property and implemented an extensive \$25 million renovation that brought the property up to contemporary standards, including new façade, windows, and roof on the exterior as well as new interior design, finishings, and furniture. Upon completion of the renovation, the hotel opened in 2001 as the Crowne Plaza Cullen Center (later renamed the Crowne Plaza Houston Downtown). Sotherly became majority owner of the hotel in 2013 and began an additional \$5 million renovation of the guestrooms, public spaces and food and beverage outlets. Included in the new round of renovations are a casual coffee bistro, Buffalo Bayou Coffee, the newly redesigned and named Edgar's Hermano, a restaurant featuring Southern-Mexican fusion cuisine, and Part & Parcel, The Whitehall's lively new outdoor bar and hot downtown meeting destination.

The majority of the renovation focused on upgrading the hotel's finishes and amenities to reflect Sotherly's mission of extending true Southern hospitality to all of its guests. The Whitehall of today marries modern amenities with postmodern and classic 1960s revival architecture style in its renovated accommodations and public spaces.

The hotel's 259 renovated guestrooms are designed to provide a luxurious, peaceful, and productive stay to business and leisure travelers alike. All-new luxury amenities include hardwood flooring in all rooms, complimentary Wi-Fi throughout all public and meeting spaces, and eco-friendly spa toiletries. Modern plush seating, a full-length dressing mirror, updated window treatments and wall coverings, and all-new bedding give the guestrooms a residential feel. Visitors can enjoy the outdoor rooftop pool and sundeck, the 24-hour fitness center, and local cuisine and coffee at the hotel's restaurants and bars.

Among the hotel's most significant upgrades is the addition of a permanent in-house art gallery on the second floor. A standard in all of Sotherly's independent hotels, the gallery will feature works by students and alumni of the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). The gallery is made possible through a partnership between Sotherly Hotels and SCAD.

As a member of the Sotherly collection of independent hotels, The Whitehall is affiliated with Preferred Hotels and Resorts, which represents a diverse portfolio of independent hotels.