

## **Royce leads rebirth of R.I.'s historic Ocean House** ***Greenwich man leads rebirth of R.I. inn***

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By Michael C. Juliano  
STAFF WRITER  
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Greenwich resident Charles Royce formed an investment team to save the Ocean House, an historic inn in Watch Hill, R.I. (contributed photo)

As a part-time resident of Watch Hill, R.I., for the past 30 years, Greenwich resident Charles Royce developed an affinity for Ocean House, a dilapidated Victorian inn overlooking the Atlantic Ocean since the Civil War.

In 2005, Royce formed an investment team to buy the 155,000-square-foot edifice on 13 acres for \$13.2 million to prevent it from being replaced with a collection of large cottages.

"The idea of more McMansions in Watch Hill was disturbing," said Royce, president of New York City-based investment firm Royce & Associates.

About four years later, Royce and 12 other investors are in the final phase of fully replicating the historic building at 1 Bluff Ave. at a cost of \$140 million.



"We were working with all of the local historic organizations, but we came to a point where we could not restore it because it was too complex, so we replaced it," he said, adding that more than 5,000 artifacts, including two fireplaces, chairs and moldings, were saved from the original inn. "In our replication efforts, we knew we wanted a five-star, first-class hotel."

To that end, the new Ocean House's exterior features the same yellow cedar siding, sweeping balconies and spacious porch as its roughly 100,000-square-foot predecessor, which had 154 guest rooms and was owned by the Brankert family. The interior boasts the same 8,000-square-foot lobby above a level of conference areas and event rooms, Royce said.

"We have a triple-sized, old Victorian lobby that you'd never do in a lobby today," he said. "The ambiance in the lobby, including the historic fireplace, will read very similar to what it was."

The new inn's interior has 49 guest rooms with modern amenities, such as LCD flat-panel televisions and cell-phone boosters, and 23 condominiums, including a \$7 million penthouse, with access to the hotel's full range of amenities and services, Royce said. Room rates are not available yet.

"It will be both a perfect replication in my judgment, combining an historic experience with a five-star hotel experience," he said of the establishment, which will begin operating in May and open officially June 1. "It's a wonderful way of living."

The inn will offer a 12,000-square-foot spa with lap pool, fitness center and nail salon and have an employee dedicated to procuring the area's fresh fish, meats and produce for its four restaurants' seasonal menus, Royce said.

"We're going to go that extra mile and use products that are grown locally," he said, adding that the inn, which was designed by Centerbrook Architects, will have a boat on hand for trips to Mystic and other nearby ports.

The new inn's goal is to keep it as historically accurate as possible while giving its guests and residents modern-day benefits, said Daniel Hostettler, the property's managing director.

"This is an iconic property and a phenomenal opportunity to take the best of both worlds," he said.

In addition to preserving its history, the new Ocean House was designed to be environmentally friendly with energy-efficient mechanical systems and considerate of the neighbors' views by being built into the hillside, said Jefferson Riley, a partner with inn's architect, Centerbrook Architects and Planners of Centerbrook.

"The enlargement is imperceptible to the general public," he said, adding that the restaurants, pool and entertainment areas face toward the ocean, not the neighbors. "In fact, it looks smaller."