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## InterContinental returns to San Diego's skyline



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a return of the luxury hotel brand following a more than 30-year absence. (Eduardo Contreras / San Diego Union-Tribune)



By **Lori Weisberg**

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**T**here was a time a few decades ago when the global hospitality brand, InterContinental, was a prominent fixture on San Diego's waterfront, a forerunner to upscale lodging on the bay. Yet as quickly as the hotel chain arrived, it was gone within three years, replaced by the Marriott moniker.

Now, 31 years later, InterContinental has returned to the bayfront, albeit in a different location, assuming its place in a much more crowded downtown skyline.

At 18 stories high, the new 400-room InterContinental San Diego opened late last month for business and will celebrate a formal grand opening Thursday with local dignitaries, including Mayor Kevin Faulconer.

The \$217 million project represents the final phase of a long-planned complex of two hotels that occupy the site of the former Lane Field baseball stadium, the long-ago home of the Pacific Coast League Padres.

The first phase, which opened in 2016, was the 400-room, dual-branded Marriott SpringHill Suites-Residence Inn hotel. Together, with the InterContinental, they make up what is known as BRIC — a play on its location at the intersection of Broadway and Pacific Highway.

At the time the InterContinental made its debut in San Diego in 1984, it was touted as the first major high-rise hotel since the Westgate had opened 20 years earlier. Contrast that to today, when San Diego is experiencing something of a building boom, with 3,000 hotel rooms under construction through the first six months of this year and 17,000 more in various stages of planning.

Just across the street from the InterContinental, the Manchester Financial Group has started construction in the last few months on Pacific Gateway, its long-stalled \$1.5 billion plan to redevelop the Navy's waterfront property with offices, restaurants and more than 1,300 hotel rooms.

Although completion of the hotel rooms are still more than three years away, the developers of the InterContinental are keenly aware of the heightened competition that awaits. They also have the advantage, though, of a considerable head start on the Manchester project.

"We view waterfront property in San Diego as one of the most stable hospitality markets in the country," said John Portman IV, a vice president with Atlanta-based Portman Holdings, which partnered with local developer Lankford and Associates and contractor Hensel Phelps on the project. Portman is no stranger to San Diego's waterfront, having developed the 1,190-room Hilton San Diego Bayfront, not far from the first InterContinental, which later morphed into the now

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ould start but San Diego is a growing market and while clearly there are questions around supply

and what the impact will be on our assets, at the end of the day we think there's room for both of us.”

## It's all about the views

Not surprisingly, the new hotel takes full advantage of nearby water views, which span not only San Diego Bay, Coronado and the ocean beyond, but also the [USS Midway](#), Embarcadero and the Broadway cruise ship terminal.

Floor-to-ceiling windows dominate throughout, especially so on the lower floors where the hotel's 35,000 square feet of interior ballroom and meeting space is housed. Outdoor terraces, which in some locations have full-length sliding windows, extend the event space outside. The hotel's signature restaurant, Vistal, also has a set of sliding windows that lead out onto an expansive terrace for dining and drinking.

Even the 3,300-square-foot health and wellness center on the fourth floor, outfitted with workout equipment, spin bikes and video on-demand exercise classes, offers panoramic views from a wall of windows.

“No matter what you're doing in the hotel — checking in, eating, working out, attending a meeting or staying in your guest room — you have water views,” said Dana Flower, the hotel's marketing director.

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### InterContinental: The basics

- 400 guestrooms, including 24 bay-view suites
- 35,000 square feet of indoor meeting space, plus 60,000 more square feet of outdoor event space, including Lane Field park.
- Four dining venues, including signature restaurant, Vistal; Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse; pool bar; and 19th floor rooftop bar.
- 3,300-square-foot health & wellness center with yoga terrace and video wall featuring on-demand exercise classes.
- Club InterContinental lounge, with full bar, complimentary breakfast, evening appetizers (\$125 daily fee)
- 8,500-square-foot rooftop garden

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Given the hotel's proximity to the Manchester project, south-facing views will eventually include a 28-story hotel and office building where a low-rise Navy office building once was and an adjacent two-acre public plaza that will take the place of the Navy's existing eight-story headquarters building.

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er view, Flower said, with nightly rates rising as the vistas improve, especially on the higher levels  
› to \$450 for executive suites.

The water and nearby bay were also the inspiration for the hotel's decor, from the artwork and color palette — soft blues, beige and gold tones — to the ceilings and lighting that reflects what seems like ripples of water. Concentric circles meant to mimic the pattern made by a drop of water are seen throughout — in the design of the carpeting, coffered ceilings and hanging light fixtures.

“The concept began with a water drop, how when it hits a puddle, it creates circular rings of vibration, so that was the initial heart of the story,” explained Linda Snyder, whose Los Angeles-area firm, Linda Snyder Associates, was hired to oversee the interior design.

“But also being adjacent to the cruise dock and international guests staying in the hotel who are well-traveled, we came up with the concept of the dream state, the sense of floating and retreat. Inside the elevators, for example, the entire back wall is a high resolution image taken by a photographer who shot swimmers under water who are swirling a filmy cloth that, with the color and light on the cloth, feels very dreamy.”

## No mega pool parties

General Manager David Hall, a veteran hotelier who at one time managed the Paradise Point Resort on Mission Bay and opened the InterContinental Chicago O'Hare a decade ago, said he expects the San Diego hotel to cater to a slightly larger share of business travelers than those coming to San Diego for leisure, although the mix will likely change during the summer months.

Recognizing that the InterContinental is not likely to attract a lot of families with children, the hotel has a much more modest-sized pool than many larger hotels, measuring 36 feet long and just 3 feet 3 inches deep. It's located on a fourth floor rooftop sundeck that also has a large garden area where herbs will be grown.

“Our guests are not interested in the giant swimming pool with the Sunday pool party, they're much more interested in the quiet place to relax, read a book and have a glass of champagne,” Hall said. “We designed it more with hardscape, so you won't see it filled with raging 20-year-olds and children.”

What Hall believes will really differentiate the hotel, beyond the prestige of the InterContinental brand, are the culinary offerings helmed by highly regarded San Diego chefs Paul McCabe and Amy DiBiase. Vistal, which they oversee, showcases the two chefs' take on Southern California coastal cuisine, with influences from Baja California, the Mediterranean and Pacific Islands.

Vistal, which is serving breakfast, lunch and dinner, is located on the third floor and features a 29-seat bar angled toward the USS Midway, plenty of outdoor seating and a 14-seat chef's table fronting an exhibition kitchen. A school of colorful flying fish, fashioned from skateboard material and hanging on one of the walls, adds a touch of whimsy to the decor.

“Hoteliers tend to do a mediocre job with food and beverage, which is why I hired restaurateurs to run my restaurants,” boasts Hall. “Bringing them in is about

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including the ground-floor Del Frisco's Double Eagle Steakhouse, which is not expected to open

until later this year, a fourth floor pool bar, and a still undisclosed concept for the 19th floor rooftop. A prominent San Diego restaurant group will be designing and operating the space but the hotel and operator will not reveal their identity. It's not expected to open until the first quarter of next year.

Also opening early next year is a Starbucks that the hotel will operate. The InterContinental will also be leasing out ground floor retail spaces that Dana Flower hopes will be more service- and food-and-beverage-oriented that would appeal to both hotel guests and locals.

Hall expects that it will not be long before the immediate area around the InterContinental will become much more of a dining destination.

“Kitty-corner to us, (restaurateur and chef) Brian Malarkey is planning something in a residential highrise, so having that, Del Frisco's and Vistal, there will be a heightened culinary corner at Broadway and Pacific Highway.”

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