

# No more retro for iconic Hyatt Regency

By Leon Stafford  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
Monday, August 30, 2010

The iconic Hyatt Regency in downtown Atlanta is ditching its '60s origins to catch up to the 2010s.



Winter construction workers disassembled the 18,000 pound iron structure that used to cover the parasol bar and bird cage into separate 700-pound sections for removal. The Hyatt Regency downtown, once one of Atlanta's tallest building, launched a 3-day renovation Monday, Aug. 30, 2010 that closed its main lobby and operated the lodger out of only one of its twin towers. Its part of a yearlong renovation that will also see the reopening of the Polaris, the blue spaceship-like bubble atop the building, although the hotel's general manager is keeping its new purpose close to the vest.

That fan-shaped floor tile dating back to the hotel's 1967 opening, gone.  
The giant front desk preferred when cash payments ruled, out of here.

And that original 18,000-pound canopy over the elevators, history.

To match competitors that have spent fortunes on renovations over the past few years, the Hyatt, known for the blue dome that used to house the Polaris restaurant atop the building, is spending more than \$60 million to update its look between now and 2013, said general manager Joe Hindsley.

"We were beginning to get feedback that we were dated," said Hindsley, who noted that the hotel generally spends \$8 to \$10 million annually to keep things fresh. "At this point we weren't losing business, but we assume it was only a matter of time before we would."

Officials with the John Portman-designed hotel closed its main lobby Monday to remove the tile, giant planters and the canopy, a project expected to take three days. The remaining work will be done in stages.

Future improvements include moving a glass wall in the lobby to make the area more open, upgrading restaurants and snack stands, installing modern tiling and setting up a kiosk-like front desk.

The Polaris stays, but it also is getting a new purpose.

"We are actually going to keep that project under wraps to maintain excitement about the renovation," Hindsley said.

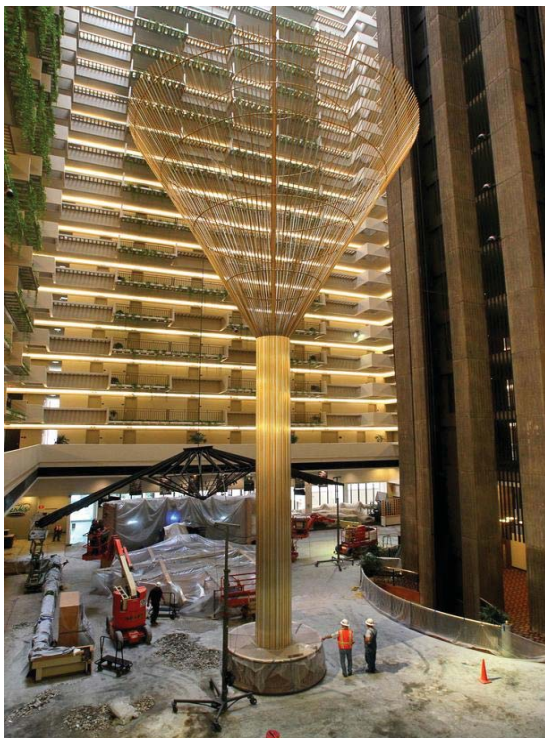
Metro hotels have undergone extensive renovations over the past few years, including \$140 million at the Marriott Marquis, \$65 million at the Hilton Atlanta and \$23 million to replace 6,350 windows at the Westin Peachtree Plaza.

Smith Travel Research spokesman Jeff Higley said hotels generally set aside 4 percent of annual revenue for major renovations, which they do every seven to eight years.

The updates are as much about bank requirements as they are about competition, he said. Lenders require renovations as part of the contract, though some owners have asked for leniency lately because of economy-related industry woes.

One upside: cheaper construction costs, he said. One hotelier recently received eight times the normal number of bids for work, he said.

"There is a hunger in the U.S. construction industry," Higley said.



The Flora Raris a 14 KT gold and silver structure (center) will remain in the lobby.