Daltile's SlimLite™ Thin Tile Over Tile System Defeats Challenges of Hilton Times Square, NYC

Project Spotlight

LOCATION:
New York City, NY

OWNER:
Sunstone Hotel Investors
Aliso Viejo, CA

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:
Humphrey Rich Construction Group
Gaithersburg, MD

TILE CONTRACTOR:
Del Turco Brothers
Newark, NJ

INTERIOR DESIGNER:
Flick-Mars
Dallas, TX

TILE SUPPLIER:
Daltile
Alexandria, VA

LATICRETE DISTRIBUTOR:
Daltile
Lyndhurst, NJ
Times Square wasn’t always called Times Square. In early 1904, New York Times publisher, Adolph Ochs, moved the newspaper’s operations to a dynamic new skyscraper on 42nd Street in an area known as Longacre Square. From there, he persuaded Mayor George B. McClellan, Jr. to construct a subway station right at that location. Shortly thereafter, on April 8th, 1904, the area was renamed “Times Square.”

Exactly 109 years after the name “Times Square” came to be, Sunstone Hotel Investors, the owner of the Hilton Times Square, embarked upon a major renovation of its 540 guestrooms. According to George Hensen, Sunstone Vice President of Design and Construction, “We wanted to incorporate a timeless unique design that would have minimum impact on the occupancy of the property.” For that reason, Sunstone contracted with Flick-Mars, a Dallas based, award-winning firm specializing in Interior Design of hospitality projects worldwide. Since its inception, the company’s creative philosophy has centered on creating unique guest experiences by designing to a location’s indigenous surroundings. “We like to tell a story of the place,” stated Matt Mars, Architect/Partner. “In doing so, guests will experience some of the locality’s visuals and quite possibly, some of its history right in their rooms. At the same time, we want the rooms to be calming. Whereas there is so much energy and activity outside of the Hilton Times Square, the guestrooms should be a respite. For example, we want the room experience to be unique, similar to living in New York, rather than visiting New York. As a result, we specified Daltile products so that guests could see and feel a true palette of New York City.”

Kathy Moran, Senior Associate at Flick-Mars, was the lead designer on this project. “My first course of action was to check up on the history of Times Square,” she stated. “I found out how the New York Times influenced the area and thus, incorporated a printing theme into my designs. Guestroom headboards have been custom-built to emulate the look of old-fashioned printers’ blocks, for example. The ‘time’ theme became important, too, so we brought in artwork with clock motifs and actually used wall clocks in each room, as well. The carpet pattern, with its ‘tactile texture,’ was developed after looking down via a birds-eye view of the cityscape. For every design, there was a strong rationale of Times Square influence.

“We were all set on selecting a very cool porcelain floor tile made in Italy for the guest bathrooms,” continued Moran. “But, we were concerned about the high cost of tile installation in Manhattan, so we decided to look for a replacement material. This hotel always has at least 95% occupancy, so we needed a tile product to be installed with a dependable installation system that would ultimately save time and money for our client. Rooms at the Hilton Times Square simply have to be available; they cannot be ‘down’ during any renovation.”

John Hall, Daltile’s Hospitality National Account Manager stated, “I was at a mixer in Palm Springs with BITAC, and was able to sit face-to-face with Kathy Moran of Flick-Mars for exactly fifteen minutes. She was familiar with Daltile and our products, but we had not met previously. Kathy told me about the Hilton Times Square project and how it was progressing. I mentioned our brand new, cost-effective Daltile Florentine™ series, a beautiful glazed porcelain floor tile which emulates the look of polished Crema Marfil. While discussing the bathroom floors, I also inquired about the tub surrounds. Kathy and I talked about labor costs and the possibility of doing a ‘tile over tile installation;’ that’s when I brought up our Daltile SlimLite™ 1/8” thick Porcelain Panels,” continued Hall. “These panels can be cut to the designer’s specification from a 3’x10’ sheet. The advantages of this product are numerous, from ease of installation, minimum grout joints and endless design possibilities. Quite possibly, the greatest advantage, is the ability to avoid demolition. Coupled with the LATICRETE® System, Daltile’s SlimLite Porcelain Panels can be installed over existing tub surrounds by tiling over the original surface. Kathy was very interested, but also hesitant, due to the model room installation that was slated to start in two weeks. Needless to say, we had to move quickly.”
Larry Rich, Project Executive at Humphrey Rich Construction, the General Contractor for this project, was extremely instrumental relative to accelerating this process, as well. “We have a good working relationship with Daltile,” Rich stated. “Frankly, we’d much rather work with John Hall and our local Daltile manager, Jeff Phoenix and use their new products, which we liked very much, than move forward with what was initially specified by Flick-Mars. And I told Kathy Moran that.”

“We were asked if a room mock-up with our products could be produced,” said Hall. “We collaborated with Humphrey Rich, who quickly built it. With the help of Larry Rich and Kathy Moran, this mock-up subsequently was put into a model room at the hotel. It was quickly evident that our thin tile over tile system allowed the project to be completed within a very aggressive timeline and budget, while also maintaining a high occupancy rate for Hilton. Daltile SlimLite™ was the answer. What happened in just thirty days, sometimes takes as long as two years!”

“We really liked the Daltile SlimLite material because of the monolithic look we could achieve,” added Moran. “We also knew that this product would be easy to clean and maintain, which would keep hotel housekeeping prices down. So the next step was to choose our installation system. I’ll admit, the first thing I did was pull out my trusty LATICRETE samples to find the perfect grout color to go with the tiles selected. We knew, of course, that we had to specify a high-performance installation system that would meet the stringent demands of this project, while keeping in line with budget and timeline. So we met with our client, George Hensen of Sunstone Hotel Investors, to discuss this.”

“We know the LATICRETE® System quite well,” declared Hensen. “As a matter of fact, we had just used it very successfully at another one of our projects, the Renaissance DC. We knew that with an innovative product such as Daltile’s SlimLite, we’d want to work with, as Matt Mars calls it, ‘a tried and tested product.’ We knew the product line was good and that the company was professional. So LATICRETE got our collective thumbs up.”

The overall renovation started on floor 44 and moved downwards floor-by-floor to the lowest level, the 22nd floor. The Hilton Times Square’s timetable for project completion was clicking away. Whereas the goal of avoiding demolition to save time, money and maintain occupancy rates was achieved (with Daltile SlimLite thin tile over tile system and LATICRETE installation materials), the last piece of the puzzle was still to be addressed. “This was in no way an ordinary tile installation,” stated Tom McKeon, LATICRETE Technical Representative. “If the large format Daltile porcelain wall panels weren’t installed correctly and were to break off at the corners, for example, it would be much more difficult to replace them than just removing a 6” x 12” tub surround wall tile and replacing it. This installation had to be as close to perfect as possible.”

The tile installation firm chosen for the Hilton Times Square Renovation was Del Turco Bros., Inc. of nearby Newark, New Jersey. Led by Paul Del Turco, the firm’s craftsmen installed both the SlimLite and Florentine material using LATICRETE 254 Platinum thin-set. LATICRETE PERMACOLOR® Grout was used for the floors, while LATICRETE 1600 Unsanded Grout was called on for the tub surrounds. Both of these grouting materials have been successfully used in countless hospitality applications worldwide.

“We were working under strong deadlines,” stated Paul Del Turco. “We actually were asked to complete half of one floor per day. That was challenging. But the products were great to work with.”

Time marched on and by the end of April 2013, this major renovation at the Hilton Times Square was completed. “I’ve really enjoyed working on this project,” beamed Kathy Moran. “We believe it brings the hotel a level above its competition relative to overall design and installation professionalism. It’s a good feeling to know that very professional suppliers are there at all times to support our creative efforts. This is definitely a portfolio project for Flick-Mars!”

Perhaps the entire scope of this major renovation undertaking was best described by Kaizad Charna, General Manager of the Hilton Times Square. “Everything has been done so professionally. All the trades working on our hotel have been accommodating and deadline-oriented. I can’t recall any interruptions to our normal business flow. For the most part, during this renovation, we have been able to operate our business as usual.”