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los cabos

By Alia Akkam

MOTHER NATURE

The Mexican beach destination redevelops after a devastating hurricane

1. The natural and the modern meld in the lobby of the Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort.

2. Traditional Mexican materials such as patterned cement flooring, Mexican embroidery, stone, and wood greet guests at the Casa del Mar.

Last September, Category 4 Hurricane Odile slammed into Mexico's Baja California Peninsula, wreaking havoc upon Los Cabos. The tony, infinity-pool-filled resorts of the area—which also encompasses tourist-friendly Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo—were destroyed. "The situation was quite devastating," says Shai Zelering, managing director of operations and asset management for Thayer Lodging, the owner of the Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort. "About 50 percent of the resorts in the destination were significantly damaged." Electricity was out in the area for weeks, telecommunication towers were destroyed, and roads and the airport were significantly compromised, complicating rebuilding efforts. "It was difficult to source materials and labor to move quickly because of the limited access to Los Cabos and the spike in demand," Zelering explains.

A year later, iconic properties have reopened, flaunting even grander designs. There is also a spate of new hotels—from the Hard Rock to the Park Hyatt to Nobu—in the pipeline. According to the Los Cabos Tourism Board, the 14,000 rooms already in existence will be bolstered over the course of the next three years with an additional 3,900.

For some damaged properties, being forced to renovate also meant an opportunity to introduce striking new features. Consider the Resort at Pedregal, which debuted a swank Champagne Terrace when it reopened in January, where guests drink bubbly on a cliffside perch overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Likewise, the circa-1997 fixture, Las Ventanas al Paraíso, a Rosewood Resort, opened its doors once more with new Signature Villas. Others have reopened with more complete overhauls.

Hotel El Ganzo and Casa del Mar Golf Resort & Spa

Developer Grupo Questro will welcome back the Hotel El Ganzo and Casa del Mar Golf Resort & Spa this October with new looks courtesy of Dallas-based HKS Architects and Cancun's InterArq, respectively. For El Ganzo, the team took the renovation opportunity to add more dining furniture and firepit lounges on the terrace, and relocate the bar to not only create a larger lounge area that could be used as flex space for concerts (the hotel boasts a music studio and artist-in-residence program), but also forge a better connection with it and the exterior. As for the design, they used "a simple language of white plaster, black trim, and sun-bleached woodwork with black and white tile, and furnished the spaces with a bohemian amalgamation of rustic objects, both designed and found," says HKS vice president of hospitality interiors Natalie Smith.

As for the Casa del Mar, the major challenge, according to Rebeca Perez Medina of InterArq, "was to build up the hotel charm and character again." With that in mind, traditional elements—Mexican embroidery, leather, rustic

3. At Suviche at the One&Only Palmilla, Moroccan-style cast-glass pendants hang under a pitched roof recalling a Spanish church.

4. The JW Marriott Los Cabos' lobby, with its high ceilings and firepits, calls to mind Egypt's Luxor Temple.

wood, patterned cement floors, and iron—were stylized in a modern way. Inspiration came from "the wonderful site of Los Cabos—the desert and ocean colors and rough textures from the landscape," she says. "It is a little eclectic."

One&Only Palmilla

Los Cabos is perhaps synonymous with the One&Only Palmilla, an elegant holdover from the 1950s when it was a 15-room retreat for celebrity jetsetters. For its second coming, the property turned to New York-based Jeffrey Beers International, which worked hand in hand with Jean-Georges Vongerichten on the chef's restaurants Suviche and Seared. "It was hard seeing the devastation from the hurricane. The hotel and grounds were left battered. There was very little that could be salvaged from the property for the F&B spaces," explains founder and CEO Jeffrey Beers. "The inspiring part of visiting after the hurricane was how determined everyone was to bring Cabo back to not only what it was but better than what it was before the storm."

For the open-air restaurants—connected by a screening element—Beers says he and his team embraced "inherently beautiful materials" that infused the spaces with a contemporary feel, while adding "the right amount of patina." They are marked by pitched plaster ceilings outfitted with wood joists that conjure southern Spain's gabled churches, walls clad with slabs of striated marble, geometric honed marble floors inspired by Aztec patterns and basket weaves, and Moroccan-style cast-glass pendants. The showpieces: a glass-walled meat cellar and a sushi bar carved out of local parota wood with an illuminated onyx fascia.

Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort

In partnership with MetLife and Thayer Lodging Group, the 372-room Hilton Los Cabos Beach & Golf Resort has also unveiled its revamp, complete with 65 new club-level suites and a 7,000-square-foot spa and salon. Honoring the original iteration was a priority for Los Angeles-based HBA. "We created a feature wall in the lobby bar lounge that is made with salvaged cabinet doors," says Kathleen Dauber, a partner at HBA. Melding the natural with the modern led to custom paint stencils that incorporate indigenous textile patterns in the guestrooms, locally sourced natural wood, custom made furniture, Mexican tile, warm earthy tones mixed with natural vibrant accents (such as ocean blue and sunny orange), and patterns that also call to mind such native elements as ocean waves, rocks, shells, turtles, and butterflies.

Not only did the hotel's team stay at the resort to help guests during the storm, but they also helped rebuild the hotel—after they constructed homes for those who lost them. "Cooks, housekeepers, and front-desk agents became overnight painters, landscapers, and dispatchers. Everyone replaced their aprons, keyboards, service carts with hardhats and paint brushes," explains Zelering, adding that some of the staff even handpainted wall murals found throughout the property. The hotel gave back too. Says Zelering: "After the storm, the resort literally became a resort to escape the destruction, becoming the only source of food and shelter for our employees' [families]."

Esperanza

In June, another fabled property, Esperanza, an Auberge Resort, reopened with a complete renovation by Dallas' HKS. Following the storm, the resort committed to keep all of its staff on full time (who helped with the resort recovery and clean up), while also collecting food, water, clothing, and even money to distribute to employees in need. When the HKS team arrived two weeks after the storm, "it was a disaster—deserted and without electricity. Water had come into the entire resort and taken all of the palapa roofs," explains Mary Alice Palmer, associate principal and design director of

Photo by ERHARD PFEIFFER

5. An exterior view of the overhauled Esperanza resort, which blends in with its picturesque surroundings.

6. Leather, dark wood, and cement floor tiles play in a guestroom—complete with a freestanding tub and above-bed artwork—at the Cape, a Thompson Hotel.

hospitality interiors at HKS. There was so little to work with, the team had a full remodel on its hands—"not only to restore, but reinvent for the future," Palmer points out. First, designers drew a color palette spawned by the natural setting of the deep blue sea and the sandy beaches. This led to weaving in materials like textured natural linens, hand-embroidered textiles, graphic black-stained timbers, and handwoven carpets over driftwood plank tiles. "The 14-foot modern, metallic bonfire at the entry plaza overlook acts as a beacon to all on land and sea, and handmade ceramic bells add a soft soundtrack to the resort experience as they sway gently in the sea breeze," Palmer adds.

VieVage Los Cabos

Auberge will further extend its presence in the area with the forthcoming VieVage Los Cabos in Chileno Bay, the second property under the company's lifestyle brand. "We love the destination as it offers the best climate, sophisticated dining, and authentic spa and wellness experiences—all in a stunning natural setting where the desert meets the sea," says Mark Harmon, founder and managing partner of the Auberge Resorts Collection. "VieVage will have a contemporary baja design aesthetic that embodies the [area's] relaxed, effortless lifestyle."

The development, a partnership between SV Capital Partners and Red Group, will feature architecture from Burlingame, California-based Glazier Le Architects and interiors by San Francisco's BAMO, whose principal Michael Booth says the objective was something more refined than the area's typical hacienda-style offerings. Full-height windows and wood accents will contrast with the white stucco and sand-colored stone for a result that is "clean and comfortable; rustic modernism with tons of natural light," he says. "A celebration of the sun and sea is expressed with a long, linear swimming pool that meanders from the heart of the resort to the ocean's edge and promises to be the area's most dramatic pool experience."

Gulla Jonsdottir, of her namesake West Hollywood-based firm, has been tasked with the F&B spaces, including a bamboo beach bar steps from the ocean with firepits and hanging sling chairs, and a more luxe restaurant atop a cliff with black clay tables, lanterns, and flooring inlaid with Mexican tiles. "It's relaxed and casual, but everything you touch and feel is luxurious," she says of the organic design, inspired by a walk on the beach. "When my feet touched the sand, it made a branch pattern, so I carved an abstract tree into a beautiful white stone wall."

Cape, a Thompson Hotel

A posh, subdued feel is also on display at recently opened the Cape, a Thompson Hotel. When Javier Sanchez, founding partner of Mexico City-based JSa Arquitectura, first visited the site he was struck by the horizontal view. "Surfers riding waves, a beautiful rock formation at the end of the bay, and a couple natural creeks with tropical vegetation carrying down rainwater to the ocean from the contrasting desert landscape of the mountains behind us. It was very powerful. We immediately thought of building a freestanding structure that could embrace the experience for the hotel guests, something like a giant umbrella, allowing the breeze to run through, creating shadow, lowering the temperature—something similar to the experience of a beach tent," he explains. This idea translated to a black concrete building resembling a camera obscura crowned by guestrooms and a rooftop bar.

The beach is located underneath the ground floor; tucked behind and below it, the spa. The interiors, handled by Marisabel Gómez Vázquez, president of Guadalajara-based Arquitectura de Interiores, amplified this narrative through elements like bespoke cement floor tiles and a handcarved entry door at the restaurant. "We came upon a concept expressing the many unknown, yet somehow familiar faces of Mexico," she says. "It was a play of hues made to fit within the richness of the handmade pieces; it's all around a showcase of Mexican craftsmanship, a collection of art."

JW Marriott Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa

One of the area's most anticipated newcomers is the fall arrival of JW Marriott Los Cabos Beach Resort & Spa, designed by Jim Olson of Seattle's Olson Kundig in collaboration with Mexico City-based IDEA Asociados. For the building, which surrounds an ocean-fronted courtyard, Olson desired something that blends with nature and doubles "as a backdrop for the garden and pools on the exterior and for art on the interior." Subtly reinterpreting the notion of a hacienda, the hotel's dark brown trims and trellises call to mind traditional Mexican architecture, while the stucco and stone extend the surrounding sand and mountains. "The lobby recalls the Luxor Temple in ancient Egypt," says Olson, noting how views of the ocean across several reflective pools are heightened when walking through the entry, yet almost anywhere in the U-shaped building guarantees a water view. "Visitors can almost always see the ocean," he adds, "which becomes a beautiful yet practical orientation device." hd