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How America's crumbling transportation infrastructure  
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## Historic Hotels



The new Hilton Istanbul Bomonti offers cutting-edge amenities, and sits adjacent to a 125-year-old brewery *cum* event space



# Rich History

NEW PROPERTIES ARE CAPITALIZING ON HOW OLD THEY ARE — AND THE VALUE THIS HISTORY OFFERS FOR MEETINGS

By Alex Palmer

In January, the Hilton Istanbul Bomonti Hotel & Conference Center opened its doors. A glittering 34-story, 829-room, 85-suite tower atop a hill in the once-sleepy district of Sisli, it is now the Turkish city's largest hotel and conference center.

It is also arguably its most cutting edge, with in-room amenities like a surround-sound system that connects directly to guests'

mp3 players, a rain shower in every room, and "Do Not Disturb" alerts that can be activated with the push of a bedside button. The temperature, lighting, and sophisticated A/V in many of its 25 individual meeting rooms can be controlled with an iTouch control system, activated via touchscreen tablet. Its ballrooms — the over 25,500-square-foot Grand Ballroom and over 9,500-square-foot Crystal

Ballroom — provide a number of drop-down screens and projectors in a soundproof space where every detail, from chandelier to carpet, looks sleek, appealing, and brand new.

But the Hilton Bomonti's newness is not what makes it special. What sets it apart, and provides the source of its name, is the 125-year-old complex of brick and mortar buildings that once housed the country's famous Bomonti

## READER ROI

- Interest in sustainability and growing creativity with adaptive reuse has led to a rise in properties showcasing their rich pasts
- This history creates a unique and enriching meeting experience



Beer Factory. Consisting of five blocks of buildings around a central courtyard, with a total of almost 130,000 square feet of space, the former brewery is undergoing a massive renovation, and by August 2014, it is expected to open as a retail, entertainment, and event space.

“When building the hotel, [the] vision was always to have food-and-beverage facilities, art galleries, and social entertainments take place in the brewery,” says Remco Norden, general manager of Hilton Istanbul Bomonti. “The chance to offer the historical Bomonti Beer Factory to our groups and bookers as an optional events space, to be able to organize an event on such an historic part of town, is priceless.”

This is a sentiment shared by a growing number of meeting planners and participants. While dazzling technology and luxurious accommodations can make for a pleasurable group travel experience, what now really differentiates a property or meeting space is a sense of history. As adaptive reuse programs such as LEED have matured, designers have become more ambitious and creative in using the original structure of a property to create a unique meeting experience.

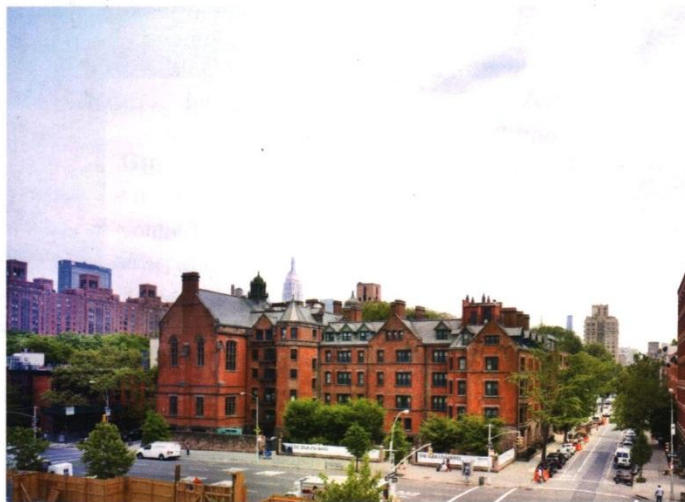
### Seeking Authenticity

“More and more, you’re getting more informed travelers who want not only a place to stay, but want a story to tell,” explains Heather Taylor, manager of marketing communications for Historic Hotels of America, which counts more than 250 hotels in 46 states among its members. “Travelers are not looking for the cookie-cutter bed and bathroom, but a place that has a unique sense of history and a sense of place.”

While all of the organization’s hotels have some type of meeting space, when asked about an example that offers strong meeting

components, Taylor points to the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa in Ojai, CA. Built in 1934, the hotel’s country club was used as a military training center for 1,000 Army troops during the Second World War and the property served as the setting of the 1952 Katherine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy film *Pat and Mike*. It now boasts a wealth of meeting space, including the 6,000-square-foot Hacienda Ballroom and 4,800-square-foot Anacapa Ballroom.

To take advantage of a historic property, Taylor suggests incorporating the hotel’s story



A portion of Manhattan’s General Theological Seminary has been converted into the High Line Hotel

into meetings and events when possible. This could be by creating a themed teambuilding activity, a historical scavenger hunt, or simply holding an event in a remarkable room.

That last suggestion is just what New York City-based fashion label Veronica Beard did recently when seeking a space to present its Fall 2014 line. The label’s leaders knew a standard event space would not frame their presentation in the creative light they sought, so in September 2013 they reached out to the High Line Hotel, the new 60-room property that opened the same month in Manhattan’s Chelsea neighborhood (across from another monument of

adaptive reuse, the High Line elevated park, set on an abandoned rail track).

To call the hotel “new” is of course not really accurate. While it boasts such modern amenities as an iPad check-in process, and the first New York outlet of the hip Intelligentsia coffee brand, the property itself dates back to the early 19th century. The complex of red brick buildings and cloistered garden was once the apple orchard of Clement Clarke Moore, best known as the author of the poem “A Visit from St. Nicholas” (better known today as “’Twas the Night Before Christmas”), before becoming the General Theological Seminary.

For meeting groups, the highlight is the 3,500-square-foot Refectory. A gothic paneled hall with stunning windows that rise four stories to the gilt-encrusted ceiling, it is in this space that Veronica Beard opted to hold its Fall 2014 fashion event.

“There is nothing like a ‘find’ in NYC — something you can’t get anywhere else — and that is what the High Line Hotel provided for our presentation,” says Allison

Aston, vice president of communications for the brand. “The Refectory room is all hand-carved wood and the fireplace is gigantic and reminds us of the story that it helped birth: Father Christmas coming down this chimney. It is big and beautiful and could not have been a more perfect [venue] for our collection.”

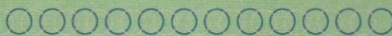
### Engaging With the Past

While the space itself can offer a sense of historical importance, properties are also finding creative ways to let attendees personally engage with that history. The Hilton Istanbul Bomonti’s Eforea spa, in addition to a full menu of treatments drawing on health research, provides a traditional *hamam*, in



## Innovative Reuse

## Historic Hotels



As the adaptive reuse of existing buildings has become a more widespread practice, designers and architects have gotten more inventive in what buildings they repurpose into hotels or event spaces and the accommodations offered. Here are three memorable and meetings-ready options:

### 1 UNION STATION HOTEL Nashville, TN

Once a 19th Century railroad station, this venue (now a member of the Autograph Collection by Marriott) has been converted into an elegant boutique hotel with 12,000 square feet of meeting space. "It's not a cookie-cutter hotel," says Erica Moats, executive sales coordinator for Naxos of America, Inc., a music distribution company that has held its annual conference at the Union Station Hotel for the past several years. "We're going back this year — we just signed the contract."

### 2 THE LIBERTY, A LUXURY COLLECTION HOTEL Boston, MA

Previously the Charles Street Jail, housing the city's criminals and gangsters, The Liberty is now one of Boston's hottest destinations. Its original granite edifice has been preserved, and the property includes a 90-foot central rotunda (complete with catwalks once strolled by guards, now by the neighborhood's scenesters, pictured above) and cupola built in 1851.

### 3 QUINTA MAZATLAN McAllen, TX

This adobe estate served as the home of an affluent, nature-loving couple from the 1930s to the 1960s. It has since been preserved and converted into a unique event venue offering a number of spaces with a Spanish-style backdrop. "Guests can wander the trails and historic home during break sessions and enjoy lunch in the courtyard during the day," explains Colleen Curran Hook, the property's manager.

which the guest lies on a marble slab while being soaped and rinsed by an attendant. The Globe restaurant downstairs provides high-end dining in the evenings and traditional Turkish fare throughout the day.

In the old factory complex, a microbrewery will be among the new offerings — an homage to the original purpose the buildings served — and throughout the structure, a variety of pieces from the original brewery will be displayed.

"Han Tümertekin, one of the leading architects in Turkey, directs the restoration and architectural transformation of the historical Bomonti Brewery project," says Kerem Şahin, operation and audit manager for IC Bomonti, the holding company that is overseeing the factory's restoration. "[Through] the Old Bomonti Brewery restoration, the building will regain importance as a cultural, arts, and entertainment center."

Selecting a venue that evokes a personal connection for attendees is also a potent way to ensure a property offers greater value to an event. Manchester, UK-based firm Luxfer Group, which designs and manufactures gas cylinders used for SCUBA tanks, fire extinguishers, and carbonated beverages, was seeking a property for an event in California, and wanted something a bit out of the ordinary.

After reviewing a number of potential properties, Luxfer learned about the Historic Mission Inn Hotel & Spa in Riverside, CA. The 238-room inn, originally built in 1903, has hosted the likes of William Howard Taft, Bette Davis, and Barbara Streisand, and has been named a National Historic Landmark. While it offers plenty of modern amenities, its Mission Revival architecture was of particular interest to the Luxfer team.

"Most of our employees are from the United Kingdom and the Mission Inn Hotel & Spa reminds them of home," says Karlene Ledbetter, administrative assistant for the company. "The property makes our staff feel like they are entering a castle in Europe and gives them the comfort and peace of mind of being home,

across the pond."

The Edgewater, in downtown Madison, WI, has taken a more high-tech approach to helping visitors connect with its property history. The 202-room hotel, first built in 1948, has been undergoing a top-to-bottom, \$100-million renovation slated for completion in August 2014. Once finished, the hotel will boast 45,000 square feet of revitalized meeting space (including the 880-capacity Grand Ballroom, pre-function Gallery, and 1,600-square-foot Mendota Ballroom), and a



The Hilton Istanbul Bomonti's chic, modern lobby balances the historical appeal of the renovated Bomonti Brewery next door

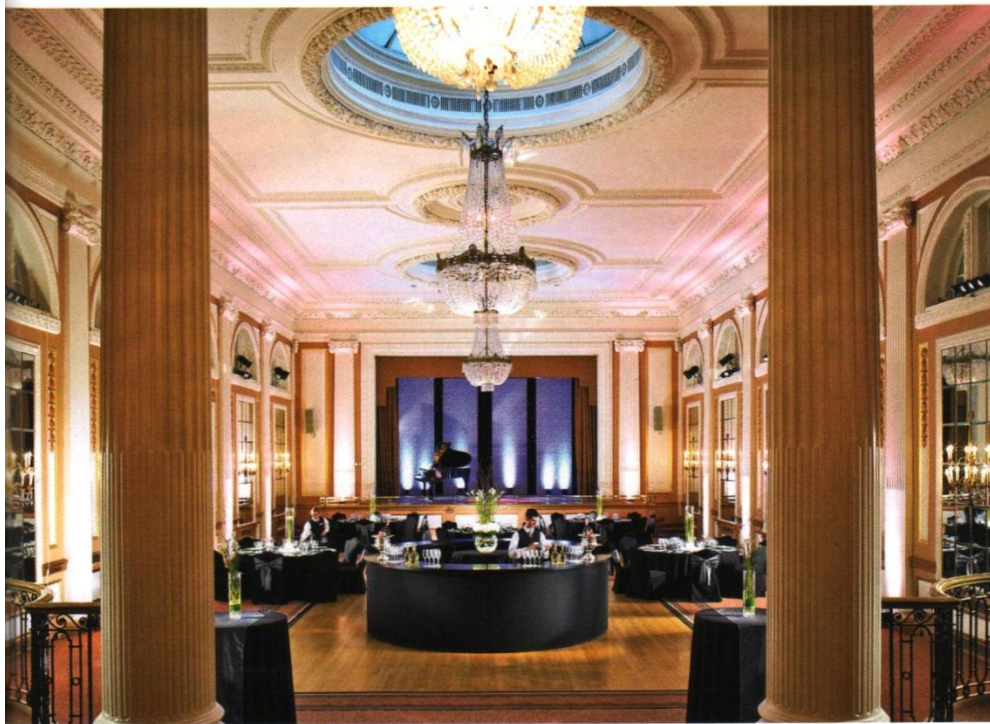
modified structure (adding a new tower and removing additions that were made in the 1970s) that will allow for a large public plaza with a view of the city capital, at the same time returning the property to its original art deco design.

"We see this less as a 'renovation' and more as a 'restoration,'" explains Ronald Morin, the hotel's newly appointed general manager.

To this new role, Morin brings not only his 30 years of experience at The Grove Park Inn in Asheville, NC, but also his service as immediate past chairman of Historic Hotels of America. This background makes him highly sensitive to protecting the heritage of the property, but also of the value that can be generated for meetings groups by properly showcasing it.

"[Hotel] brands are moving away from being mostly concerned with consistency between





Scotland's Gleneagles Hotel provides many opportunities for attendees to connect to its 90-year history

their properties, where you forget what city you are in — we want people to know they are in Madison — and the very specific history of this hotel,” he says. “If you are holding an association meeting and want to see strong attendance, you need a compelling, memorable place.”

The Edgewater has hosted generations of University of Madison-Wisconsin guests, and celebrities such as Sammy Davis Jr., Bob Marley, and Elvis Presley, as well as musical performances from the likes of Glenn Miller and Jimmy Dorsey. To engage guests in this story of the property, the designers have taken an eye-catching, high-tech approach: installing a 40-foot interactive video screen. Not only does the massive display tell the history of the hotel and the city itself, but visitors are able to add their own history to the display through touchscreen monitors available in the hotel's new coffee bar.

“There might be a picture of your grandparents' wedding in there, but if you just got engaged, you can take a selfie of your own celebration and it becomes part of the archives,” says Morin. “We want it to evoke some poignance but be high-tech enough to interest a 13-year-old with his iPad.”

### Group Activities

Of course, that motivation to help attendees connect with an historical property is an especially keen concern for meeting planners and companies holding events there. Whether a group is staying at an adaptive-reuse property or simply a hotel that has been carefully preserved to showcase its history, taking a cue from the venue can make for some memorable events.

For example, the Gleneagles Hotel in Scotland, which could easily be mistaken for a castle, will be celebrating its 90th birthday on June 6. The property's 850 acres house the two-Michelin-star restaurant Andrew Fairlie at Gleneagles, as well as three championship golf courses, and outdoor activities including shooting, fishing, falconry, and horse riding. Over its nine decades, the property has changed hands several times, serving as a military hospital during the Second World War and then a miners' rehabilitation center. The 232-room property has been carefully maintained to capture its Roaring '20s origins.

“When the hotel opened up, it was during that Great Gatsby era. On opening night, they had their own band playing there and broadcast them over the telephone line and

distributed the music throughout the country,” says Stuart Smith, director of events and leisure for Gleneagles. “It was one of the first live broadcasts of its kind. But that original ballroom is still very much in use.”

Groups can book that 2,475-square-foot Edwardian ballroom, as well as a number of other similarly well-preserved spaces, such as the atmospheric Cellars or intimate Orchil.

But the outdoors offer plenty of opportunities for groups to connect with history as well. Smith describes a recent group of executives from the U.S. who visited with their families. The folks at Gleneagles worked to help create a series of events that touched on a range of Scottish and European history. Capitalizing on the hotel's role as a military hospital, actors dressed as nurses and soldiers and described the medical practices of the era and incorporated a big band performance at dinner.

“The next day we did a full Highland Games, and at one point these ‘nasty English people’ rode up in full armor and kidnapped the president of the organization's wife — at which point the president rode up on horseback in armor,” says Smith. “The kids loved it. We then went over to the equestrian center and had a joust competition, followed by a medieval feast.”

While learning about the history of the hotel and the wider region can be fun, Smith emphasizes that it also provides practical lessons to attendees about understanding an organization's heritage and creating a business that's built to last.

“It's a chance to look at their own business, and their points of differentiation,” adds Smith. “What's your own company story, and what will it be 100 years from now?” **SM Questions or comments? Email [alex@alexpalmerwrites.com](mailto:alex@alexpalmerwrites.com)**

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