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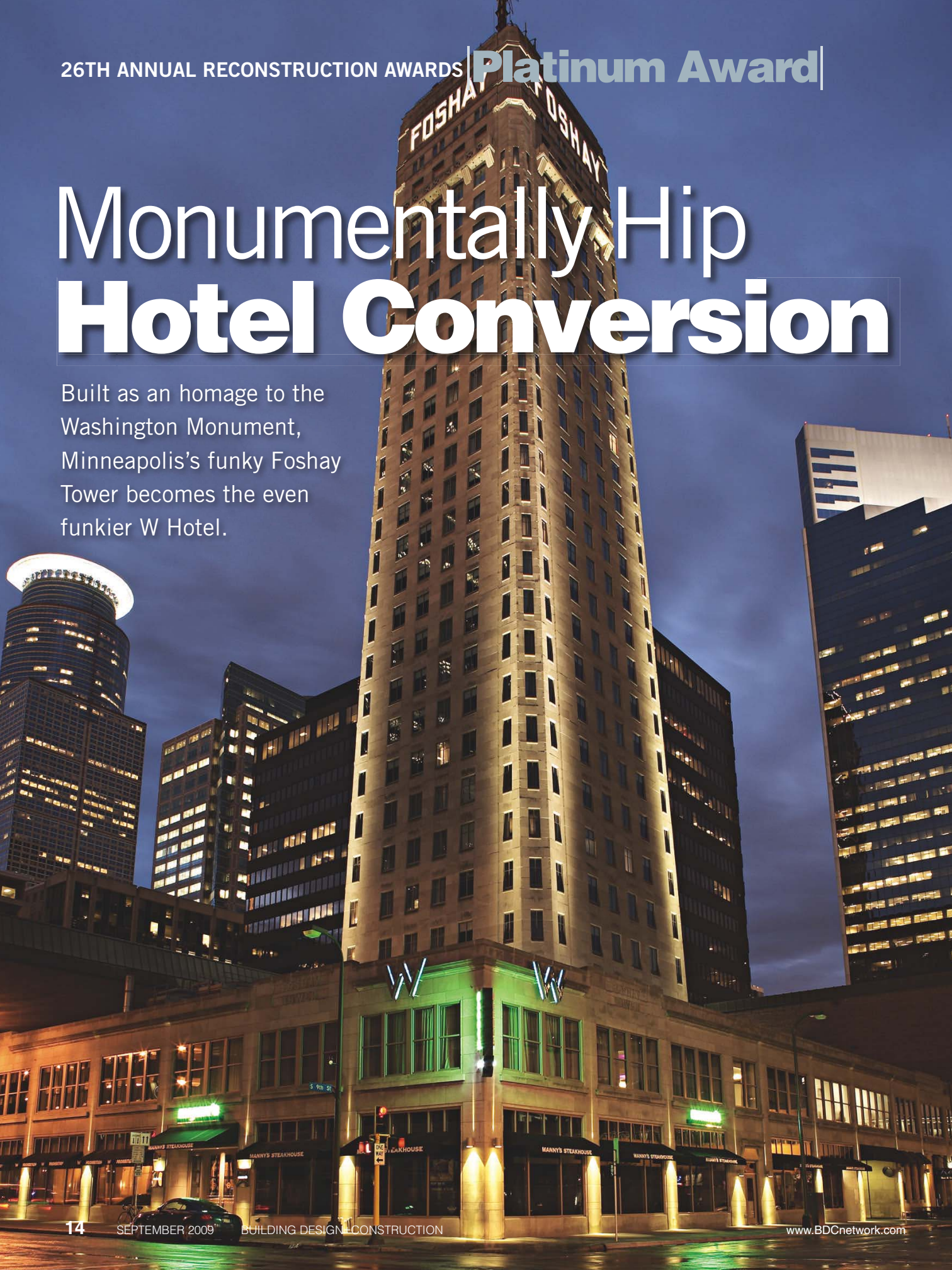
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Monumentally Hip Hotel Conversion

Built as an homage to the Washington Monument, Minneapolis's funky Foshay Tower becomes the even funkier W Hotel.



By Jay W. Schneider, Senior Editor

At one time the tallest building west of the Mississippi, the Foshay Tower has stood proudly on the Minneapolis skyline since 1929. Built by Wilbur Foshay as a tribute to the Washington Monument, the 30-story obelisk served as an office building—and cultural icon—for more than 70 years before the Ryan Companies and co-developer RWB Holdings partnered with Starwood Hotels & Resorts to convert the registered landmark into, of all things, a hip W Hotel.

Adaptive reuse projects are always tricky, but the building's distinctive obelisk shape complicated matters to the extent that when architects Elness Swenson Graham completed the design, there were 57 unique room configurations within the 230-room hotel. The tower loses half its floor area between the second floor and the 30th floor, dropping from 6,000 sf on the second floor to less than 3,000 sf at the top. The complex floor plates also threw MEP contractors Horwitz Inc. and Egan Companies a curve because there was no way to stack plumbing and mechanical systems. Their solution was to break the hotel into flooring groups and then make transitions between each floor set.

The Building Team also faced the high-stakes task of preserving and restoring the building's historic Art Deco lobby ceiling, marble walls, and terrazzo floors. These elements were integrated into the W's modern design aesthetic by interior design team Munge Leung Design Associates.

On top of everything else, there was no wiggle room on the opening date, August 2008, because the Republican National Convention was being hosted in the twin city of St. Paul the following month and Starwood needed the guest rooms.

Using design-build delivery, Ryan Companies redeveloped the 268,000-sf Foshay Tower at a construction cost of \$56 million. The project's final cost was \$61 million after the Building Team assumed responsibility for the hotel's restaurant and retail components from the tenants.

Working in the Building Team's favor was the fact that the landmark building was structurally sound and in good shape for its age—that is, unless you ignore the fact that it was packed with asbestos. A tight timeline required asbestos remediation to begin while some office tenants were still in the building. This dictated a more complicated than usual containment system: partition systems, dedicated elevators, night work, and coordinated adjacencies. Tenants were provided generous move-out packages to expedite their exit.

Complications also arose around the building's old windows.

The Building Team was challenged to maintain the Foshay Tower's historic significance while updating the 1929 building into a modern hotel.

PROJECT SUMMARY

W Minneapolis—The Foshay
Minneapolis, Minn.

Building Team

Submitting firm: Ryan Companies (GC)

Co-developer: RWB Holdings

Owner: Starwood Hotels & Resorts

Architect: Elness Swenson Graham

Interior architect: Munge Leung Design Associates

Historic consultant: Hess Roise and Company

Structural engineer: Meyer Borgmann & Johnson Inc.

Mechanical & plumbing engineer: Horwitz Inc.

Electrical engineer: Egan Companies

General Information

Size: 268,000 sf

Construction cost: \$61 million

Construction time: April 2007 to July 2008



PHOTO: GEORGE HEINRICH

The building's tapered shape required interior designers to commission adjustable furniture that fits the hotel's 57 different room configurations.

Almost 750 units needed to be replaced, which disappointed the National Park Service, since the Foshay Tower is on the National Register of Historic Places. After considerable negotiations, the two sides agreed that replacement could proceed using custom, historically accurate, high-efficiency aluminum units.

The project greatly impressed *BD+C*'s Reconstruction Awards judges, who appreciated the difficulties associated with adaptive reuse projects. "It is really challenging to convert an office building into a hotel," says Lucien Lagrange, principal of Lucien Lagrange Architects, Chicago. "The Foshay project says something about adaptive reuse and the importance of saving a beautiful existing building." **BD+C**