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### Two flagship Hiltons open in Frankfurt's futuristic new transport hub

Two new **Hilton** hotels, both designed by JOI-Design, have just opened in Frankfurt's long-anticipated The SQUAIRE, an astonishing oblong-shaped horizontal skyscraper that sweeps over the ICE high-speed train station, sits alongside the airport against the backdrop of the Taunus mountains and is flanked by two autobahns. The **Hilton Frankfurt Airport** and the **Hilton Garden Inn Frankfurt** each reflect the decision by the operating group to introduce a bolder, sleeker design into their flagship hotels combining luxury details and leisure oriented elements, still with a strong offering for business travellers.

The sheer scale of the building - 660 metres long and 65 metres wide with 145,000 sq metres of facade that is three-dimensionally curved - ensured its iconic status in Germany even before the doors were open. For the hotel interior designers, the size and shape were both a huge challenge and a great opportunity. JOI-Design's original brief was to address "mobility" in its proposed concepts, yet, in equal measure, to create places of escape and relaxation for guests, celebrating the building's form but also translating the interior spaces into a human scale. Two innovative responses meant that JOI-Design was awarded the project: the large "golden wings" that extend protectively over the reception, dining and retail areas, reducing the volume while allowing natural light to flow through from the atrium, and the silver mirrored globe, a building-within-the-building that accommodates the ballroom and function spaces.

Entering at fifth floor level, hotel guests are immediately introduced to the main narrative of the design: hi-tech vibrancy balanced by low-tech organic forms. While the white granite flooring inset with occasional jade-toned flashes may hint at the movement and urgency of the world outside The SQUAIRE, the hotel environment is a space where guests can decelerate. The two "golden wings" are in fact curved perforated metal sheets. Sculpturally impressive, they serve to cushion the acoustics and to dramatically set the scene for the flowing forms seen throughout the Hilton Frankfurt Airport - for instance, in the carpet and ceiling designs, the 30 metre long glass wall alongside the fitness centre with its never repeating streamer of colour coursing the length and in the choice of furniture. In the hard-edged voluminous envelope of the reception area, the tall silk floor lamps are a graceful counterpoint which, together with the fluid forms of the sofas and the luxuriant leather armchairs, humanise the space.

The silver globe construction is at the east end of the building, a highlight both within and outside The SQUAIRE. From the autobahn, the irregular mirrored mosaics twinkle and the building-within-the-building could be a gigantic nightclub light. Inside, the main space, which can seat 570 people theatrestyle, is theatrically illuminated with light flowing through curving ceiling recesses and captured in the Swarovski crystal strips inset into the timber wall panelling - a handsome and practical solution to the issue of acoustics and the need to hide ventilations ducts in this entirely contained space.

The lounge, bar and restaurant areas are announced from reception by a series of illuminated columns. Within, lighting, various floor finishes and a mix of different seating options help to make the area suited to all needs and moods during day and night. Oak timber flooring gives way to carpeting in the lounge, the bar adds pace as the lighting changes pulse a little in the glass pendants above and in the corian that flows around it like whipped cream, while the design of the restaurant connects with the "golden wings" in its gold leafed ceiling panels. Here, once again, the designers were dealing with a large area which could easily look empty at certain times of day. To reduce this, JOI-Design introduced highbacked banquettes, sculptured timber features and a buffet area that could be screened by an acrylic and glass door that becomes a piece of art as it sparkles under nighttime lighting.

The 10th floor executive lounge rejoices in many striking "firsts", not least the six enormous doublesided chairs, their rounded shape and timber slatted form once again suggesting movement and calm and echoing shapes and finishes in other parts of the hotel. As elsewhere, the man-made is artfully combined with the natural and all finishes are of the highest quality.

There are almost 600 bedrooms between the two hotels, and with a curved facade that means the footprint is different on each level, the design project involved some 200 room types. In a building with so many hard surfaces, JOI-Design placed particular emphasis on bringing a tactile and comfortable experience into the bedrooms through such means as leather-clad wardrobes and stylised wingback chairs which curve gently around the guest. The Presidential Suite afforded particular design freedom and the result is a sophisticated and theatrical confluence of noble materials, a rich colour palette and exclusive elements. Lounge details are in 18 carat gold leaf, furniture is in glossy ebony and all the artwork is original. The bathroom is clad in natural stone with black granite fixtures and a round whirlpool lit from above by a rotunda of Swarovski lights.

*"It has been a great honour to work on such a high-profile project. The project was complex due to the building form, challenging because of the logistics on-site and exciting since we were being asked to set a new benchmark for Hilton," says Peter Joehnk, Joint Managing Director of JOI-Design. "I am proud that we have managed to keep our original design through such a long programme and feel that the result is an experience that will touch guests at an emotional level. Design is an important factor in brand communication and The SQUAIRE is an international milestone for Hilton."* Tatiana Rokou - Friday, January 13, 2012