

# Diva with a new dress

◆ DIVA from B-1

## Diva Hotel stays on the cutting edge

something completely different.

"Olle Lundberg and I have a mutual friend," Lembi-Detert says. "I talked to him about Olle and asked, 'Has he ever done a hotel before?' He said no. And I said, 'Well, that's good.'"

Lundberg Design has done buildings before — notably Silicon Valley tycoon Larry Ellison's Pacific Heights home. But a hotel was new and different, and Olle Lundberg liked that.

"We brought a nontraditional sensibility to it," Lundberg says of the Diva. "We approached it as an almost sculptural project."

Accordingly, the Diva has three-dimensional design elements and textured surfaces — beginning at the entrance, continuing in the small, stylish lobby and extending into guest rooms and suites. Lundberg has made primary use of modern materials such as stainless steel (for room mirrors and headboards) and aluminum (for sconces). Here and there, he also uses natural materials such as onyx gemstone, wood and glass.

All this artistic creativity is essential for remaining *au courant*, according to C. Jay Scott, the namesake and principal of San Francisco-based Scott Hospitality Consultants. "It's a moving target," says Scott, who emphasizes that being a style-setter is exciting

but challenging. "You take the chance of your product getting stale."

The Diva's redesign, he says, went beyond fine tuning.

"It's a very sleek, fresh, re-do, a modern European, contemporary look, for the individual leisure traveler and the individual business traveler. It's not universally appealing but it should appeal to the younger quadrant of that market."

Lembi-Detert says the re-launched hotel is proving popular — despite the fact that she raised room rates to \$159 per night, to cover the costs of renovation. Rooms were \$140 early this year, and \$120 early last year. Occupancy rates, which she says were 74 percent in January 1998, have also gone up, averaging in the high 80s the past several months.

Profit and loss information on the hotel and company were not available.

The Diva's core constituency, according to Lembi-Detert, is mainly "theater people, the film crowd, the fashion crowd," who are always in search of the newest and the coolest.

It's a tough crowd, and one that Lembi-Detert has to share with larger competitors such as New York boutique hotelier Ian Schrager, who recently bought San Francisco's Clift Hotel, and two San Francisco boutique hotel operators: Bill Kimpton's Kimpton Group, and Chip Conley's Joie de Vivre Hotels.

According to industry analyst

Anwar Elgonemy of PKF Consulting, Kimpton has 67 percent of the boutique hotel rooms in The City. Joie de Vivre has 20 percent. Personality has 12 percent in the boutique niche, which typically features small hotels under 200 rooms with limited meeting space but personalized service, themed design and high concepts.

Personality's Hotel Metropolis, for example, has a New Age theme, while Kimpton's Hotel Triton goes after the show biz and fashion trend-setters who favor the Diva.

The Diva is key to the success of Personality, which also operates the Union Square Hotel, Kensington Park Hotel and Steinhart Hotel. Lembi-Detert has hired New York designer Bill Sofield to remake the Steinhart. According to Lembi-Detert, he has already designed "the Soho Grand Hotel, and every Gucci store in the world."

In the meantime, Lembi-Detert — who co-owns Personality Hotels on Union Square with her brother and her father, Frank Lembi, owner of Skyline Realty — is showcasing the Diva.

Indeed, there is much to see. The Diva's old brushed-steel and glass doors have been replaced by glass doors bordered on one side by a wavy green glass wall that guests feel compelled to touch. Lundberg says the wall has "a sedimentary quality," adding that the overall look and feel of the lobby was inspired by the classic ocean liners.

Another interesting feature is the reception desk, fronted by

three-quarter-inch-thick translucent onyx and back-lit. Above and to the side of reception are four video monitors mounted on the wall. Lundberg says light cast from the lobby through the glass wall at night makes the entrance of the hotel look like a lantern.

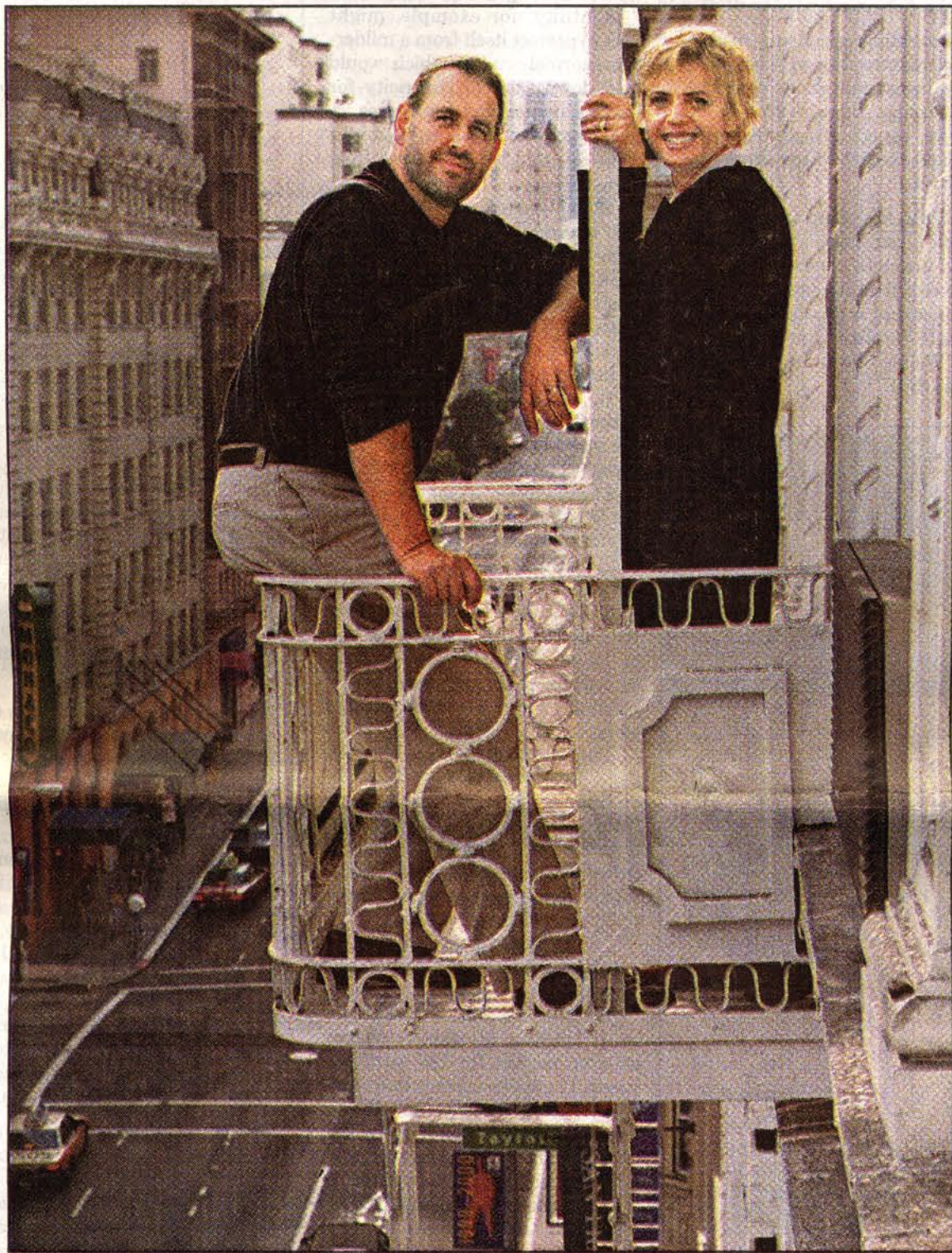
"The lobby definitely needed a new look — it was tired," he says. "The lobby was extremely dark. Outside, there was a big awning. You could walk by the Diva and almost miss it."

Hallways have cobalt blue carpeting, which extends into the guest rooms. Lundberg allows that the solid carpets can show shoe prints but likes the striking color and the fact that carpeting flows unimpeded from hallway to room.

Lundberg's signature touch is found in the bedroom. A tall, stainless steel headboard backs the beds. At the top, in the middle, the metal is bent back.

Elsewhere in the rooms, sturdy industrial filing cabinets are used for drawers. A video monitor is attached to the ceiling. Stainless steel mirrors with bent-back corners "quote" the headboards. In the bathrooms, a vibrant orange shower curtain that Lembi-Detert dubs "beyond pumpkin" catches the eye. If the wake-up call and caffeine don't do the trick, there's always the curtain.

All this, Lembi-Detert says, is designed to allow the Diva to keep its core clientele and lure newcomers. "The Diva," she says, "is a millennium eye-opener."



EXAMINER / KATY RADDATZ

Architect Olle Lundberg, left, redesigned the Diva Hotel for the hotel's co-owner, Yvonne Lembi-Detert.

## Union Square Hotel undergoes a make-over for the millennium

By David Armstrong  
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

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**L**IKE A STAR with loads of hauteur but a slightly dated repertoire, San Francisco's Diva Hotel was ready for a make-over.

It had, after all, been 14 years since the Diva threw open its doors at 440 Geary St., in the heart of The City's theater district, and the trendy crowd that cheered the Diva in the '80s was looking for something new and buzzy for the millennium.

Months of renovation work and \$2 million later, the Diva has emerged with a new look, unveiled at a re-launch party two weeks ago. San Francisco's Lundberg Design, which had never designed a hotel before, did the job at the behest of Yvonne Lembi-Detert, president of San Francisco-based Personality Hotels on Union Square, which owns the Diva.

As Lembi-Detert explains it, she was looking for

[See DIVA, B-3]

