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The

RIGHT DIRECTION

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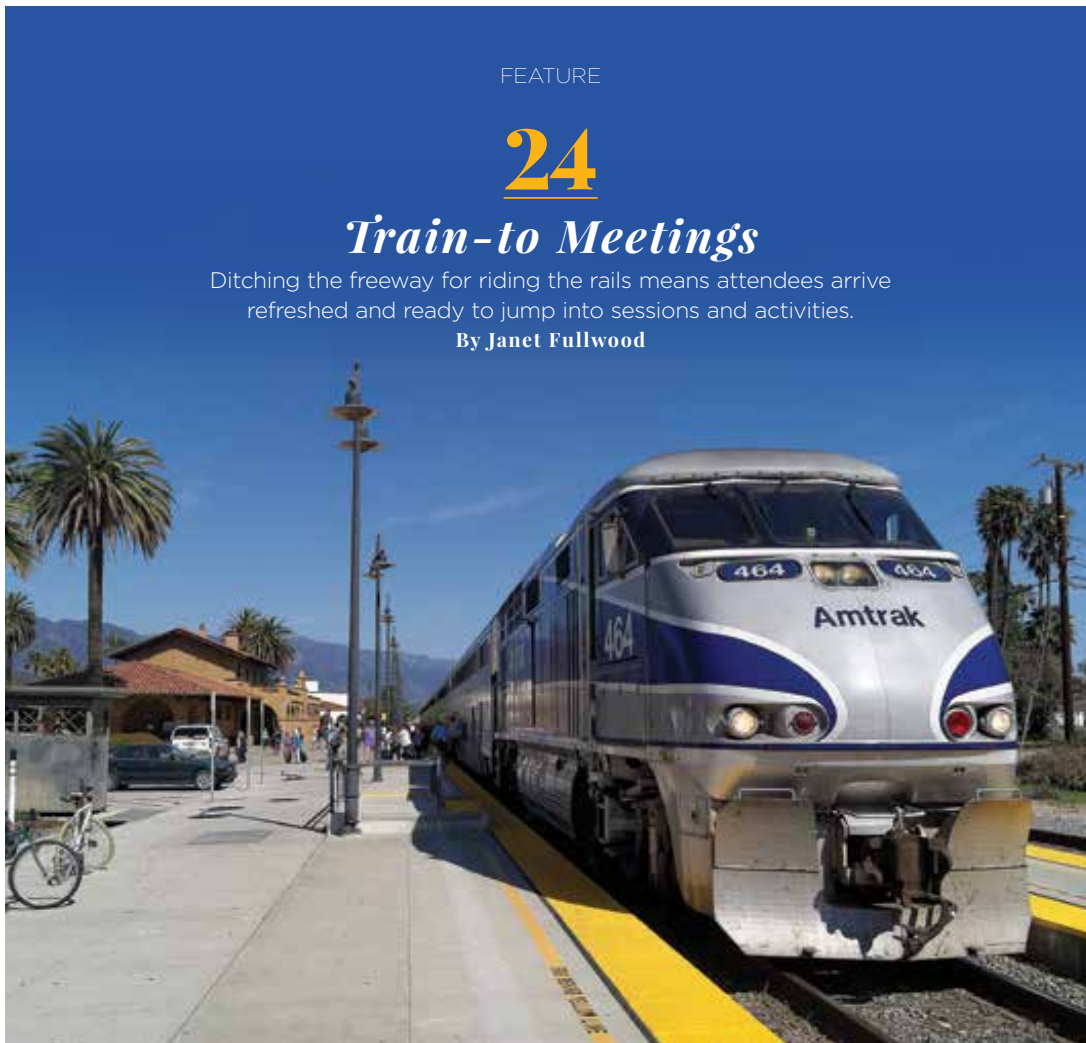
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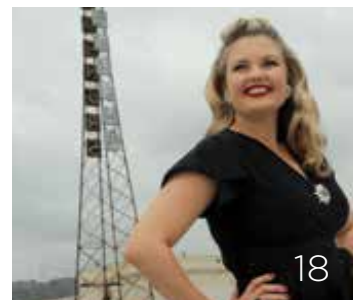
Train-to Meetings

Ditching the freeway for riding the rails means attendees arrive refreshed and ready to jump into sessions and activities.

By Janet Fullwood



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Hotels and local tour companies are teaming up to get groups walking.

By Jenny Peters

20 VENUE REPORT

A trio of stylish new hotels has set up residence in historic buildings in downtown Los Angeles. The long-awaited openings offer planners exclusive new meeting space, and some challenges.

By Valli Herman

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Veteran Pebble Beach sales exec Tim Ryan wants planners to know there's more than golf at his resort.

By Shelley Levitt

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Making Meetings More Affordable

Stretching your budget doesn't have to mean skimping on amenities or pizzazz.

By Ann Shepphird



PHOTOS: AMTRAK; HOTEL IRVINE; OLD HOLLYWOOD WALKING TOUR; HOTEL FIGUEROA



At Freehand Los Angeles the view from the rooftop is stellar, the design eclectic-chic.

HIGH STYLE

Three historic buildings in downtown LA transform into luxury hotels and meeting spaces.

BY VALLI HERMAN

THREE LONG-AWAITED AND ULTRA-STYLISH HOTELS have opened in downtown Los Angeles on the heels of the new and massive InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown hotel in the Wilshire Grand Center and the Hotel Indigo in the mega-development, the Metropolis.

The NoMad Los Angeles, Hotel Figueroa and Freehand Los Angeles offer design-driven options for event planners who want to offer their attendees an atmosphere of exclusivity in memorable surroundings.

All three newcomers occupy extensively remodeled historic buildings that challenged designers to carve sometimes-unconventional meeting spaces from tangled, existing floor plans. This new portfolio of photogenic lodgings and meeting spaces is a slice of a

continuing building boom that counts more than 100 commercial and residential projects announced or underway in the city's historic downtown. That kind of frenetic pace and stiff competition can mean you have to work a little harder for the booking, but the payoff will be bragging rights and access to stellar cocktails, top chefs and a foothold in a vibrant hotel and meeting scene.

Here's how the new boutique options stack up.

Freehand Los Angeles

The prolific hospitality firm, Sydell Group, converted the historic Commercial Exchange building into a combo luxury hotel and shared lodgings. Aimed toward millennials, the hotel is densely decorated with chunky tapestries, wood furniture and freehand-style pottery. Though it has captured attention for the 59 guest rooms with custom cedar bunk beds for a youth hostel-like experience, the remaining 167 private guest rooms and ample public spaces are plenty grown-up for the hotel's target market of creative thinkers and gastronomes.

The recently opened rooftop pool is home to Broken Shaker, a cocktail lounge that brings its vintage South Beach vibe to LA. The poolside space with city views hosted retailer Topman's party for 300-plus hipsters who downed tropical drinks, danced to a DJ and posed in the pool's giant inflatables. About 100 guests can be seated around the pool area.

For more intimate interactions, the hotel's wood-paneled private dining room features



ample seating for 16, serviced by an in-room bar. Other indoor options include the The Exchange, a ground-floor, full-service restaurant that seats 60 inside and 32 outdoors for meals that filter the multicultural flavors of LA through an Israeli lens. Buy out the lobby's Rudolf's Bar & Tea for up to 150 standing guests who will delight over tea-infused cocktails, full tea service and light bites. In addition, Treehouse, the mezzanine dining room seats 44, while two 745-square-foot suites can accommodate 25 guests each.

The hotel's veggie-heavy catering menu reflects the city's current obsession with all things Mediterranean. The most Instagrammed menu item? The seasonal punch bowls, which pair with skewers, dips and toasts, passed or plated.

Hotel Figueroa

Built in 1926 as a YWCA, the Hotel Figueroa weathered decades of change, including an era as an exotic Moorish/Moroccan-themed hotel for tour groups. After a two-year, to-the-rafters renovation, the hotel opened this spring as a sophisticated destination near L.A. Live that offers over 10,000 square feet of meeting space across six venues. The largest is

the 3,000-square-foot Tangier, a moody, Moroccan-inspired lounge, which can serve up to 200 guests who can relax in curtained cubbies. The space is well wired for DJs and A/V presentations.

The 2,100-square-foot Gran Sala functions as the hotel's compact ballroom. With 15-foot glass French doors that open to the pool deck, the Gran Sala fills with natural light and breezes to cool up to 150 guests. Terrazza is a 1,600-square-foot open-air terrace connected to two, second-floor suites. The terrace offers up to 100 guests views of the sky above and the pool deck below, which is also home to Veranda, the 1,200-square-foot al fresco venue featuring an historic fireplace and outdoor pizza oven.

The two-story pool house offers 1,500 square feet of tropical lounge space at Rick's, which is designed for seated dinners, cocktail receptions or luncheons, all softened by the sounds of the built-in fountain's delicate trickle.

While weddings have been popular at the new hotel, catering director Tammy Nguyen is seeing a growing interest from creative companies. Recently, a design-focused conference hosted a buffet dinner in the hotel's secret (for now) Casbah, a mirrored

The long-awaited rebirth of Hotel Figueroa offers a cozy retreat from the busy streets of DTLA.



NoMad Los Angeles brings the same exclusivity and style to the West Coast that made its sister property in New York a favorite gathering spot for the cool kids.

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room connected to a 300-square-foot suite and the by-reservation, 28-seat Bar Alta on the mezzanine overlooking the lobby.

Casbah is selling itself, said Nguyen. “I showed the client the suite and the secret room and he immediately booked the space.”

NoMad Los Angeles

A block from its corporate sibling Freehand, the NoMad Los Angeles is the newest hotel from the Sydell Group, which also operates the NoMad Hotel in New York.

Located at the corner of 7th and Olive streets inside the long-shuttered Giannini Place building (the former Bank of Italy headquarters), the 1922 structure has been restored and refreshed to new levels of luxury with richly embroidered upholstery, gold leaf ceilings and painterly color palettes. Attractive to the bi-coastal creative class, the hotel has an impress-the-client vibe and a somewhat complex floor plan that, nevertheless, has attracted a roster of top names, including the NBA, Citizens of Humanity, TrueCar and KPMG.

The hotel’s 10,000 square feet of total indoor and outdoor meeting spaces benefit from the skills of chef Daniel Humm and restaurateur Will Guidara.

The New Yorkers are making the LA outpost a foodie destination with luxurious ingredients like foie gras, hamachi, black truffles and a modernized Baked Alaska.

The hotel’s rooftop includes a pool, café and bar and can seat 125 or 450 for a standing reception. The Mezzanine restaurant can seat 100 (200 standing) and adjoins two smaller meeting areas: The Monnette Room, with seating for a dozen, and the multifunction Hoffman Room, a 617-square-foot rectangle rimmed with windows and full A/V capabilities.

Two upper-level suites can accommodate from 15 to 30 guests for receptions, with the larger including a kitchen.

The stunning décor of the main floor brings grandeur to each venue, which includes the Giannini Bar, Coffee Bar, Library and The Parlour. However, booking is complicated by parameters that reserve certain hours and spaces for hotel guests only. Still, the restraints can mean that your group can move seamlessly from happy hour at the Coffee Bar to an intimate dinner for 20 at the semiprivate and curtained Parlour.

For more casual gatherings, there’s a NoMad food truck dedicated to catering and special events. 🍷

PHOTO: COURTESY OF NOMAD LOS ANGELES