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JULY 2, 2014 AT 1:00 AM

Former Detroit fire HQ being turned into boutique hotel

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A man walks past the distinctive arched red doors of the historic and vacant Detroit Fire Department headquarters building located across the street from Cobo Center in Detroit on July 2, 2014. Developers intend to turn it into a luxury hotel. (John T. Greilick / The Detroit News)

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OPEN FULLSCREEN

Detroit — A Chicago group that’s won praise for its distinct hotels has formally closed plans on the historic Detroit Fire Department headquarters downtown, vowing to retain its industrial charm as it becomes an upscale boutique hotel.

Aparium Hotel Group said Wednesday that it and Detroit developer Walter Cohen plan a \$28 million renovation of the 1929 building on West Larned along with an adjacent structure that once housed the famed Pontchartrain Wine Cellars restaurant. More recently the building, now empty, had become a nightclub called Envy.

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The new establishment will be called The Foundation Hotel. It is tentatively slated to open late next year with 100 rooms.

“We are looking to preserve not only the great history of this building, but, we want to celebrate Detroit as much as possible,” said Mario Tricoci, CEO and one of the founders of Aparium.

The buildings are across the street from Cobo Center, whose bookings continue to increase. The areas’ hotel scene is also surging, giving Detroit a healthy occupancy [rate](#) of 63 percent, according to convention officials.

Downtown Detroit is a particular hotspot where there are at least two other plans for hotels in the works.

There’s currently about 4,500 hotel rooms downtown and within a few years [convention](#) officials expect that number to reach 5,000.

The Foundation Hotel will include an expansive ground floor restaurant in the former fire engine hall. Aparium has a Michelin-starred restaurateur as its executive culinary director.

The restaurant will pay homage to the region through partnerships with local distillers, brewers, [farmers](#), and other food purveyors.

The Detroit hotel is the fourth “locally relevant hotel project” for Aparium, which was founded by Tricoci and Kevin Robinson.

The group has won numerous awards for its projects, including its conversion of a former mattress factory in Milwaukee into the Iron Horse Hotel.

It also was behind The Elysian in Chicago, which was ranked the No. 1 hotel in Chicago on TripAdvisor for 21 consecutive months. The hotel became a Waldorf-Astoria in 2011.

In Detroit, “we want to create something that many Detroiters will feel proud to come to and hang out,” Tricoci said.

But the homage to Detroit authenticity won’t come cheap.

“We anticipate having the highest (room) [rates](#) in the city,” Tricoci said.

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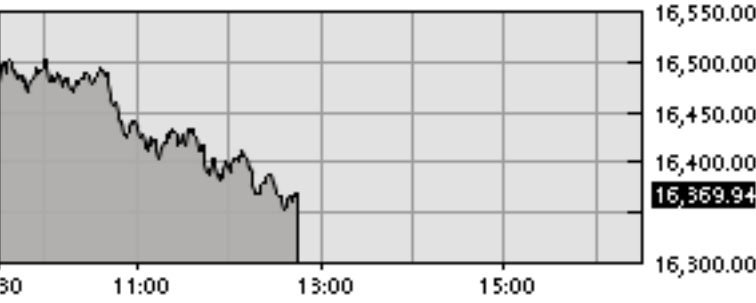


Aparium Hotel Group managing partners Mario Tricoci, left, and Kevin Robinson, both of Chicago, plan a \$28 million renovation of the 1929 fire building on West Larned. The new establishment will be called The Foundation Hotel. / John T. Greilick / The Detroit News

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