The Biltmore Hotel is transforming for the 21st century. You won't recognize the rooms.

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In the grandiose lobby of the Biltmore Hotel, massive 25-foot Corinthian columns still bloom into sapphire, starred-frescoes on the ceiling. The glamor of the 1920s lingers, but the space has a fresh new feel, too.

Gone is the beige monotone and period furniture that long dominated the entrance of the National Historic Landmark, built in 1926. In their place: An updated look that plays off the bright blues, greens and purples in the lobby's frescoes. The $550,000 renovation of the lobby, completed in September 2017, was the first in a series of major changes coming to the historic hotel by the end of the year.
The $25 million renovation will usher in a more modern era for the Biltmore — but without sacrificing the storied history that makes the hotel unique in Miami's tourism industry, say its managers.

To update the lobby, the Biltmore worked with Coral Springs-based D'Shakil Designs and Coral Gables-based Studio 5 Design + to add new drapery and furniture, including custom-built pieces in green and blue velvet. An indigo wool carpet now runs across the lobby.

The new direction is inspired by the old. The brighter colors and more modern approach were chosen to play up South Florida's tropical landscape in the warm Mediterranean architecture of the hotel, built by Coral Gables founder George Merrick and hotel magnate John McEntee Bowman, said Gene Prescott, president and CEO of the Biltmore Hotel.

A similar redesign is coming to the Biltmore's 275 rooms and hallways. Also getting a facelift: the 18-hole golf course.
Standing in the renovated lobby of the Biltmore Hotel are Matthias Kammerer, managing director, left, and Gene Prescott, president and CEO, on Tuesday, June 26, 2018.

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The change, owners hope, will help keep the Biltmore a major player in Miami-Dade's fierce hotel market. Faced with declining revenues of about 6 percent in 2017 and a growing number of new hotels in the region, now seemed like the right time to update the property, said Prescott, who is also president of Biltmore Hotel Limited Partnership. The partnership has to uphold the city of Coral Gables' 99-year lease with the hotel.

"We have a good market but it's competitive. You've got to be prepared," Prescott said. "You want to keep it the icon, but not be old and musky and dreary."

About $10.5 million of the total $25 million in renovations will be spent to preserve the hotel's historic value, with updates including a new roof, balcony door replacements and elevator renovations. About $5.5 million will go to replace all of the hotel's 800 windows. The funding for historic preservation will come in part from the City of Coral Gables, which voted unanimously this month to allow the hotel to use half of its rent payments to the city to cover those costs.
The 10,000-square-foot fitness center at the Biltmore Hotel has already been touched by the hotel’s ongoing renovations with new TechnoGym equipment installed.

Biltmore Hotel Miami

The 10,000-square-foot fitness center has already been touched by the renovations, with new TechnoGym equipment installed. The spa has also already started displaying a new line of products from skincare line BABOR.

Next up are upgrades to the guestrooms, where the current brown color scheme will be replaced with plum, silver, sage and gold accents. The rooms will get brighter walls, updated furniture, plush imported carpets and gemstone chandeliers.

In the hallways, cream walls with brown runner carpets will give way to white walls and bright blue-and-green carpet featuring the hotel's signature birds, finches. (Live ones are found in real-life form in two large cages in the lobby.)
Before and after photos of the guestrooms at the Biltmore Hotel.

City of Coral Gables

The golf course, designed by acclaimed golf course designer Donald Ross, will also undergo a major revamp to make it more similar to the original design. It will be the golf course's first facelift in more than a decade.

As part of the $2.5-$3 million upgrade, Biltmore managing director Matthias Kammerer said the course will get new Bermuda grass added to the existing tees, fairways and greens. The updated golf course, designed by veteran golf course architect Brian Silva,
will feature new bunkers, enhanced short-game and range areas, and new signature holes. Overall, the renovation will extend the course by more than 7,100 yards — a move the hotel hopes will put it in the running to host the PGA-Champions Tour. The Biltmore is already in talks with the PGA, Prescott said.

The hotel will remain open throughout the year as the renovations take place. They are set for completion by December.

The 18-hole golf course at the Biltmore Hotel will be renovated to look more like the original Donald Ross design. Biltmore Hotel Miami

In all, the Biltmore hopes the new look will bring the hotel in line with modern trends and technology without sacrificing its history. The hotel considered adding Amazon's Alexa in each room, for instance — a move being tested by hotel chains like Marriott. Ultimately its leadership team decided the voice-activated assistant wasn't fine-tuned enough and instead added more connectivity in the rooms with more outlets.

"We wanted to get something user-friendly but not go too far with the advancements ...where something that is supposed to be a plus for us turns out to be a big problem," said Philippe Parodi, the Biltmore's vice president of marketing and sales.

Parodi thinks they've found the sweet spot.

"We are getting the Biltmore into the 21st century," he said.
Gene Prescott, president and CEO of the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, in the hotel's renovated lobby on Tuesday, June 26, 2018. Al Diaz adiaz@miamiherald.com

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As part of the Biltmore Hotel's ongoing renovation, the spa has started offering a new line of products from skincare line BABOR. Biltmore Hotel Miami

In its guestrooms, the Biltmore Hotel's current brown color scheme will be replaced with plum, silver sage and gold accents. The rooms will get brighter walls, more modern furniture, new plush imported carpets and gemstone chandeliers. Biltmore Hotel Miami
In the lobby, the Biltmore worked with Coral Springs-based D'Shakil Designs and Coral Gables-based Studio 5 Design+ to add new drapery and furniture in the space as part of a $550,000 lobby renovation. Biltmore Hotel Miami

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