



Resort strives for green inside and out

From paints to irrigation, the focus is on environmental care

The JW Marriott San Antonio Hill Country Resort & Spa will not only be the largest and one of the most distinctive destinations in the JW Marriott family, it is also striving to be one of the most environmentally friendly destinations anywhere. The design, engineering, construction and management of the resort have all been done with an eye toward gaining LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification, a much sought after designation bestowed by the United States Green Building Council.

“Marriott has spent the last several years fostering a culture of environmental stewardship,” said General Manager Arthur Coulombe. “This remarkable property gives us the opportunity to do more in walking the talk of protecting our world. As Bill Marriott has said, “We’re all guests of this planet.””

The resort is taking a number of factors into consideration from the amount of water in the flush of a toilet to the way the TPC course is irrigated.

Taking the right steps

“There are so many opportunities to be environmentally conscious at all stages, from the construction, to the maintenance, to the continued operation of the property,” said Alison Rivenburgh, CEO of Sustainable Perspective Group, the green building consultant on the project. “It means using paints and adhesives that are low in volatile organic compounds, which improves the indoor air quality. It’s using alternative fuel fleet vehicles like electric carts and hybrids to move around the property. It’s using highly-reflective roofing which helps to cut down the cost of cooling the property in the summer.”

The JW Marriott San Antonio will use the latest in air conditioning technology that will reduce energy use at the property. It’s essentially a “smart” air conditioning unit that senses when someone leaves a room so it can turn off the air conditioning and save that energy. If a balcony door is opened, it will also shut off so as not to “cool the outdoors.”

“Those are just some of the features of this system,” said Marriott Engineer Steve McGuire. “There will be a master control center that will allow us to make adjustments from a central location, so if a guest is about to check in, we have the ability to adjust their room temperature, but then we can turn it off once they check out.”

There is recycled steel inside the walls of the project. There will be compact fluorescent bulbs used throughout the property wherever appropriate. There are also plans to use low-flow showerheads as well as low-flow toilets that would cut nearly in half the amount of water used per flush. The cleaning supplies will also be environmentally friendly.

“We’ve really been promoting a green cleaning policy,” Rivenburgh said. “We’re able to use the least toxic cleaners possible for the cleaning services at the property. There are environmentally friendly cleaners available for cleaning everything from the toilet to all-purpose cleaners. Most of the cleaning products which will be used at the property are Green Seal certified, and these will have a very low impact on the environment.”

Other green housekeeping efforts will include the staff changing sheets or towels at the guest’s request rather than automatically every day. It’s another step toward water and energy conservation. It’s a step that gets used about 30 percent of the time, according to McGuire.

Reuse of onsite materials

Recycling and reuse has been in effect since Day One of the project. The hilltop where the resort is being built was thick with limestone. It’s the limestone that makes the Hill Country hilly. Limestone that was removed for the construction of the building has been used for construction of retaining walls and other features around the property. It’s similar to what settlers have done in the Hill Country for nearly two centuries.

Hundreds of live oak trees that covered the hilltop have also been preserved. A number of those that had to be removed were relocated to other parts of the property, preserving these vital elements of the Hill Country ecosystem.

“Simply removing these trees and starting with a blank piece of land was not an option,” said Sales and Marketing Director Mike Kass. “This is a Hill Country resort and it would never be that without the trees and without the limestone that make the Hill Country such a unique destination.”

There will also be recycling opportunities throughout the property with four-tiered recycling/trash bins. “We’ll have containers for recyclable plastic, glass and aluminum, as well as containers for commingled waste,” McGuire said. “We want to do as much sorting as possible to limit the amount of waste that comes out of the project.”

Keeping the greens green

That same commitment is extended to the TPC San Antonio courses, the AT&T Oaks course designed by Greg Norman and the AT&T Canyons course designed by Pete Dye. Both courses are striving for certification by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, one of the highest designations in environmental management in the golf industry, which can be earned once the courses are completed.

Great care is being taken to preserve the nearby Edwards Aquifer including taking the extraordinary measure of installing a “closed-loop” irrigation system, which makes these courses two of the most ecologically friendly courses in the country. “We put a one-foot clay cap on top of

the limestone which acts as an impervious layer and prevents water from seeping into the aquifer. Drain tile is placed on top of this clay layer which is then capped with an additional 8" layer of sand from growing the turf" said course General Manager Jimmy Terry. "Water draining through the sand profile is captured by the drain tiles and channeled into several capture ponds on each course.. Each of these ponds is attached to one primary retention pond for each course which collects all the water, to be reused on each of the courses."

Nurturing nature

The entire resort and golf courses are part of the Cibolo Canyons master-planned development which was planned with an eye toward preservation and environmental stewardship. More than 800 acres throughout the property – most surrounding the courses and resort – have been set aside as a nature preserve. There will be no development in those areas. Additionally, work is underway to create nature trails through that area so visitors can get out of the city and lose themselves in the Hill Country surroundings.

Part of that preserve will include habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler. It will also provide opportunities for bird-watching, which is a rapidly growing pastime in South Texas, as the area is on the migratory route of a number of species.

"We are operating on borrowed time on this earth," General Manager Coulombe said. "So it is important that whatever we do, we do it with an eye toward preserving the land, the environment and resources, so they may be enjoyed by future generations."