

BENCHMARK Adds Graduate Berkeley to Gemstone Collection, Formerly Hotel Durant

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The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, July 2017...BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, announces the addition of Graduate Berkeley to its Gemstone Collection. Formerly the historic Hotel Durant, the property has been revitalized and renamed Graduate Berkeley following an extensive renovation. Graduate Berkeley pays homage to the historic building's roots and UC Berkeley founder, Henry Durant, through its distinct design and revitalization of Henry's, the hotel's restaurant and bar. A dynamic and expanding new boutique hotel brand, Graduate Hotels was founded in 2014 by AJ Capital Partners to create distinctive, approachable hotels in America's most vibrant university-anchored towns. Each hotel reflects the local college and community in its eclectic décor, food and beverage programming options and homage to the school and town it is designed to serve.

"We are delighted to reintroduce this iconic hotel as Graduate Berkeley, and to welcome this new brand to our Gemstone Collection portfolio," says Alex Cabañas, Benchmark's CEO. "The Gemstone and Graduate brands share the goals of providing highly personalized service and hospitality that reflects the charm and distinctive character of a destination while imaginatively inspiring guests with curated and memory-making experiences," Mr. Cabañas observed. "Graduate Berkeley, with its rich history, distinguishing charm and new contemporary design will certainly provide that opportunity."

Mr. Cabañas also noted that since many firms have moved from San Francisco to the East Bay, the area has seen an increase in corporate travel in addition to the numerous visitors drawn to the Berkeley campus for reunions, games, events, college tours, meetings and academic and research projects.

Drawing inspiration from Berkeley's Bohemian roots, Graduate Berkeley captures the spirit of adventure, global exploration, and constant quest for knowledge cherished by the city's residents, students, and countless visitors. In the lobby, guests are immersed in printed velvet walls with Persian motifs, a feature wall of thousands of National Geographic magazines, and colorful murals by local artist Chris Lux. In both the public spaces and guest rooms, the furniture and art are curated to feel residential, eccentrically preppy, and curated from different eras, as well as all corners of the globe. The same retro vibe is found in the hotel's 144 guest rooms with original art work, ceiling fans, touch tone replicas of 1930s telephones and in some rooms, posters from the iconic film, *The Graduate*, parts of which were filmed on Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue. The hotel draws Bay Area residents, visiting scholars and Cal alumni where they can meet, socialize and rest their laptops and tablets on a communal table, and will find free, high-speed WiFi.

With 1050 square feet of conference space, including the California Room and the Boardroom, Graduate Berkeley is perfect for meetings, receptions and gatherings. Like other Graduate Hotel properties, the hotel is geared for destination weddings as Berkeley alumni return to the town and university where they first met.

Graduate Hotels is working in partnership with two industry veterans – renowned restaurateurs Bill Chait, himself an alumni of UC Berkeley, and Carl Schuster, longtime managing partner of Wolfgang Puck

Catering – to reimagine Henry’s, the hotel’s beloved restaurant and bar. Known for being a game day watering hole and neighborhood staple for Golden Bear fans and hotel guests, Henry’s will open officially in early Fall. The menu features an elevated take on traditional pub fare designed to appeal to hotel guests and locals alike.

Graduate Berkeley is set on Durant Street, adjacent to the UC campus and just steps from Shattuck Avenue and its noted shops, restaurants, clubs and galleries. Other nearby attractions include the Berkeley Art Museum and the Pacific Film Archives. The city of San Francisco is just minutes away by the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART). The hotel is 15 miles from Oakland International Airport and 25 miles from San Francisco International Airport.

Created for travelers who seek memory-making journeys, Graduate Hotels are part of a well-curated, thoughtfully crafted collection of hotels that reside in the most dynamic, university-anchored cities across the country. Every property celebrates and commemorates the optimistic energy of its community, while offering an extended retreat to places that often played host to the best days of our lives.

Locations include Ann Arbor, Mi.; Athens, Ga.; Charlottesville, Va.; Lincoln, Ne., Madison, Wi.; Oxford, Ms.; Richmond, Va., and Tempe, Az. Earlier this year, Graduate Hotels announced plans in 2018 and 2019 to open hotels in Minneapolis, Mn., Bloomington, In., Iowa City, Ia., Seattle, Wa., and on New York City’s Roosevelt Island at Cornell Tech’s campus.

About AJ Capital Partners

Adventurous Journeys Capital Partners, based in Chicago, is an accomplished team of hospitality and real estate investors whose innate passion is to create a one-of-a kind portfolio of timeless assets. The counter-culture investors acquire, design and develop transformative real estate throughout the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean. In fall 2014, AJ Capital Partners launched the Graduate Hotels brand.

AJ Capital Partners continues to grow its portfolio of lodging investments, firmly establishing the group as visionary leaders in the lifestyle-driven investment industry. For more information on AJ Capital Partners, please visit www.ajcpt.com.

About Gemstone Collection

The Gemstone Collection includes distinctive hand-picked properties in spectacular and popular U.S. destinations coast to coast. Each upscale resort and hotel destination provides highly-personalized service and luxury reflective of the charm and unique character of the destination, while in keeping with the collection’s shared mission and passion for excellence. A distinguished portfolio of BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, which has been a leading US-based hospitality management company for nearly 40 years, the Gemstone Collection is the preferred choice of guests who yearn for inspiring and transformative experiences, customization over conformity, stimulation over predictability, and adventure over routine. www.gemstonehotelcollection.com To become a fan on Facebook, visit www.facebook.com/GemstoneHotelCollection, or follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/GemstoneHotels, on Instagram at www.instagram.com/gemstonehotels, and on Pinterest at <https://www.pinterest.com/benchmarkhotels/gemstone-hotels>

About BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company.

BENCHMARK®, a global hospitality company, is a trailblazer in the development, management, marketing and owner-advisory services of resorts, hotels, conference centers and exclusive private clubs. In addition to the company’s iconic Benchmark Resorts & Hotels portfolio, the Gemstone Collection is a distinctive luxury portfolio of independent hotels & resorts in highly preferred destinations.

BENCHMARK’S distinguished and proven reputation is deeply-rooted in core values that are focused and aligned with exceeding ownership and stakeholder performance expectations. The combined portfolios feature nearly 70 unique and distinctive properties domestically and internationally. The company leadership and valued employees are passionately committed to delivering the industry’s most authentic, enchanted, soulful, vibrant, unrivaled and memory-making experience. BENCHMARK’S progressive “Be The Difference” culture and values are a cornerstone to the company’s nearly 40 years of extraordinary achievement and prosperity. Many properties have been recognized with the Benchmark Conference Centers® mark of meeting excellence. BENCHMARK, a global hospitality company, is based in The Woodlands (Houston), Texas, and has regional offices in Park City, Utah; Miami, Florida; New Brunswick, New Jersey; Seattle Washington; and Tokyo, Japan. www.benchmarkglobalhospitality.com To become a fan on Facebook, visit

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