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## GILBERT-ASH LIGHTS UP THE BELFAST SKYLINE WITH AC HOTEL BY MARRIOTT

**Award-winning UK construction, refurbishment and fit out contractor, Gilbert-Ash, recently completed the £21.5 million build of the AC Hotel in Belfast, with the doors officially opening at the beginning of April. The new City Quays hotel, situated on the docks at Belfast Harbour, it is Marriott International's first development in Northern Ireland. With 188 bedrooms across eight floors, it is now one of the city's largest hotels.**

While Gilbert-Ash works across the globe in over 43 countries, this project has been particularly rewarding for the team as they have been able to apply their skills on home territory. With headquarters in Belfast, the company's work in delivering the AC Hotel has been hands-on and carefully considered at every point. A strong key account management strategy has enabled the team to build strong relationships with partners on-site but also importantly in the wider community.

During construction, over 1,000 people were inducted onto the site as 50 individual subcontractors were

involved in large-scale hospitality project. At peak times, up to 160 people worked on the hotel construction.

### Advanced Construction Process

Situated along the water's edge, the new hotel delivers real stand-out at the harbour with a modern, progressive exterior. Carea rainscreen cladding on the outside of the building in Iceberg and Basalt colours create a striking contrast emerging from the docks onto the Belfast skyline.

During the construction, the north, east and west elevations of the building used nine mast climbers in total, each secured to the concrete frame of the building. In contrast to MEWPS machinery, the mast climbers better facilitated the installation of the rainscreen cladding, with curtain walling and floor-to-ceiling windows. The south elevation of the building was used as a purpose-built platform for every level, including access points, loading bays and refuse chutes.

As the site was adjacent to the River Lagan, the project presented additional challenges for the Gilbert-

Ash team. It was imperative to minimise emissions and eliminate any pollution of the water. The hotel was therefore deliberately constructed in a way that any run-off would go to the road side, rather than towards the river, with grey water used to clean the roads in the surrounding area. Wet cutting was also incorporated for all brick, concrete and breaking of piling to reduce emissions and dust in the area.

Due to the conditions of the harbour site, the piling also needed to be carried out in a considered three-step process including pre-bore drilling to five metres, casing down to 12 metres and CFA piling in the final step to 30 metres.

The team were particularly aware that access routes for walking and cycling along the waterfront needed to be publicly accessible throughout the construction process. Consequently, the building was also wrapped during the construction process to keep noise and emissions within the building. It was also sealed with fire-rated polythene to ensure it was water-tight until the glazing was installed, ensuring fragments, materials or dust blowing was contained and

prevented from blowing onto the walkways during construction.

In terms of final design and construction, the exterior high-quality finish of the project continues inside, with the style in keeping with the classic AC Hotel signature branding, creating an elegance throughout the hotel and giving guests a contemporary experience. The dark polished wood detailing of the construction is complemented with the light of double height glazed curtain walling, maximising the views from the rooms. The floor-to-ceiling windows also booked the long corridors of the floors, creating a dramatic strip of light from the AC Hotel across Belfast at night.

The hospitality development also incorporates a spacious reception area, bar and lounge, fitness facilities, alongside two meeting rooms that provide 84sqm of meeting space. The hotel hosts a spacious 112-seat bar and restaurant, headed by multi-Michelin-starred award-winning chef Jean-Christophe Novelli, with bifold doors opening out onto a raised terrace overlooking the newly landscaped jetties at the water's edge. The outdoor space is completed





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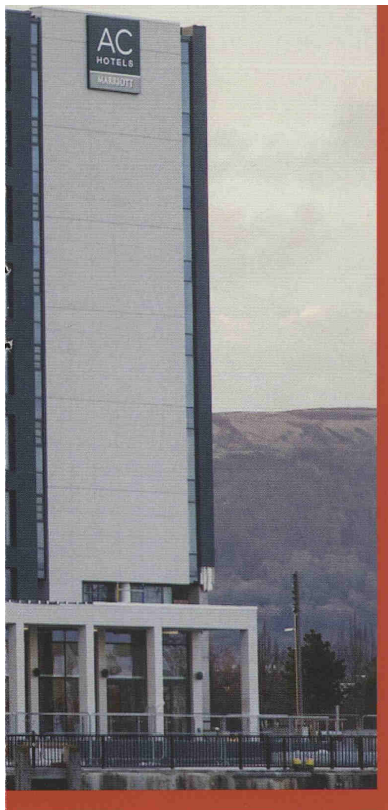
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with hard landscaping, encompassing a mixture of Portuguese granite and Irish limestone paving with fossiling, creating a space where the hotel guests can immerse themselves in Belfast's vibrant docks, in the heart of the city.

Gilbert-Ash Project Manager, Warren Copeland, commented, "This was a really interesting and enjoyable hospitality project for myself and the team, and even more so because it was on home ground. With in-depth experience in this sector, we incorporated a range of high-quality materials from all over the world – it really is a must-see hotel, boasting views of the surrounding landscape including Titanic Belfast, SS Nomadic and the Cavehill County Park overlooking the city. We are really proud to have played our part in Belfast Harbour's City Quays project."

#### Responsible Building Works

As Gilbert-Ash's Managing Director, Ray Hutchinson, takes up the seat as President of the Construction Employers Federation, attracting young people into the industry is a key focus for the company. The AC Hotel project presented the opportunity for Gilbert-Ash to educate school pupils and students from across Northern Ireland, on the wide variety of roles and opportunities in the construction sector.

In partnerships with Belfast Harbour and STEM Aware, a total of Northern

Ireland schools were invited by Gilbert-Ash to recreate the hotel as part of an immersive Minecraft initiative. The initiative demonstrated the role of technology in the design and construction of buildings.

Throughout the course of the project, the pupils who were aged between 12 and 18 visited the construction site and developed environmentally sustainable ideas. This unique community programme scored full marks for innovation within the Considerate Constructors Scheme, with a case study now featuring in its best practice hub. In addition, local Primary 4 pupils were invited to a tour of the hotel during construction following Gilbert-Ash's involvement in a design competition at their school.

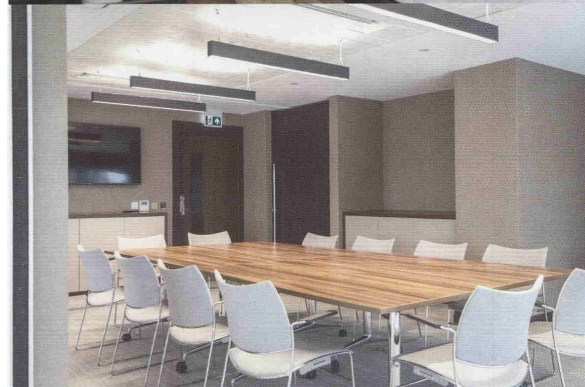
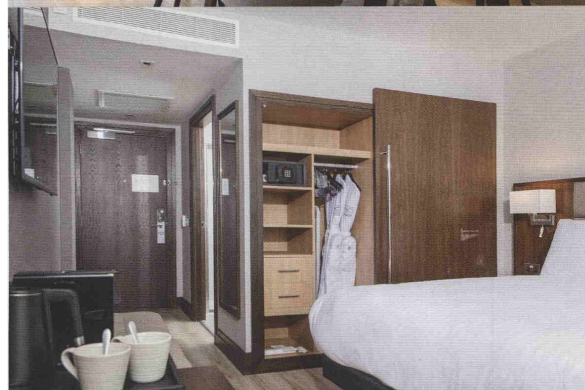
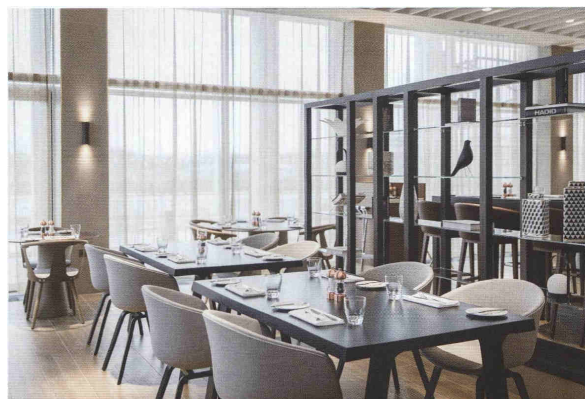
As part of Gilbert-Ash's commitment to promoting diversity, the project also provided a number of opportunities for education in this area. As a key sponsor of Womenstec, which provides training for women in non-traditional skills, Gilbert-Ash coordinated a site tour for the organisation as well as for CITB's Women in Construction Network. An immersive tour of the site on International Women's Day also highlighted the variety of roles fulfilled by women within Gilbert-Ash and open to those throughout the construction industry. With sustainability and responsible building also key to Gilbert-Ash, a partnership with Re:Store by Habitat for Humanity helped reduce wastage from the site. Surplus building products were collected and sold by Re:Store, with all proceeds going to the charity. Several fundraising initiatives were also undertaken by the team for The Simon Community, as well as donations to a local food bank.

The health and well-being of Gilbert-Ash employees was also prioritised during the construction process, with healthy meals provided and employees exercising at lunchtime and participating in 5k and 10k races. The site was registered with the Considerate Constructors Scheme and scored highly throughout the process.

#### Experience

Gilbert-Ash possesses a wealth of experience within the hospitality sector across the UK. The team work continually as the preferred contractor for Whitbread and Premier Inn throughout the UK, working on new-build, extension and refurbishment projects. Gilbert-Ash deliver the Premier Inn branded hotels both directly for Whitbread and on developer-led schemes. The company won the Whitbread for Construction Supplier of the Year in 2017 for their extensive work. Gilbert-Ash has also been shortlisted as a Construction News Contractor of the Year finalist in 2018.

Gilbert-Ash Managing Director, Ray Hutchinson said, "We are delighted with the completion of the AC Hotel Belfast and proud of our work with partners Belfast Harbour and Marriott International, creating a stunning new addition to Northern Ireland's burgeoning hotel sector. We believe the local community, businesses and



tourists alike will enjoy the stunning view over the impressive City Quays area and Belfast's vibrant and increasingly dynamic waterfront."

Highly detailed design, advanced logistical planning and development

goes into every Gilbert-Ash project, with the team skilled in delivering the finest quality projects in the UK and globally.

For more information on Gilbert-Ash visit [www.gilbert-ash.com](http://www.gilbert-ash.com)