

THE LAST WORD



HOTEL SWEET John Pritzker can't help but smile as he sits in the stunning library in the Chicago Athletic Association Hotel's second-floor lobby.

Game Changer

The CAA Hotel was a labor of love for John Pritzker—and it shows.

| By Lisa Shames |

| Photography by Frank Ishman |

You never know what you might find when you take a 125-year-old landmark building that's been vacant for five years and attempt to turn it into a 241-room world-class hotel. And that's just fine with John Pritzker, who, as chairman of Commune Hotels + Resorts and founding partner of Geolo Capital, was the driving force behind the Chicago Athletic Association Hotel, which opened in May after two years of painstaking restoration. (Good luck, though, getting him to say it was anything but a major team effort.)

As the son of the late Jay Pritzker, who helped create the Hyatt chain, you could say hotels are in John Pritzker's DNA. But the CAA Hotel project is much more than a business venture for the North Shore native, who, despite having lived in San Francisco with his wife and children for many years, still has a major soft spot for Chicago. "When I first walked in here and looked at the building's history and structure, I was like a kid in a candy store," says Pritzker. "It was a no-brainer."

While not everyone would jump at the chance to renovate and modernize an 1893 Henry Ives Cobb building, that was part of the fun for Pritzker. He gleefully recalls finding the Cubs logo—before the Cubs were the Cubs, mind you—embedded into the floor of the Cherry Circle Room, the hotel's (and former private club's) second-floor restaurant. Then there was his first experience of standing on the tar roof (now the location of Cindy's restaurant, named after Pritzker's philanthropist mother) and seeing the amazing views, and wondering why nothing was up there. Says Pritzker, "We referred to a lot of what we did as: How could we *not* do this?" We, for one, are very glad he did.

PRITZKER'S HOTS *The Grateful Dead* reunion tour, Koval Distillery spirits, beekeeping

PRITZKER'S NOTS *Rumors of Modern Family* being canceled, high-fructose corn syrup, flavored vodkas
