



Storytelling is the North Star at Olympia Hospitality's boutique hotels

History, sense of place boost boutique hotel appeal for today's travelers



John Schultzel, chief growth officer for Olympia Hospitality, shares the inspiration for the company's latest independent hotel. (Olympia Hospitality)

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John Schultzel loves the branding exercise.

That's the process hoteliers go through to define a new hotel's story, its distinction, what makes it unique. It's particularly compelling for independent boutique hotels that don't fly a major brand flag, because the hotel's story becomes its unique selling proposition — a big part of why a guest chooses that hotel over another.

Building the story for the Hotel Ursa on the Orono, Maine, campus of the University of Maine, was a process where all the stars aligned in a really fun way, Schultzel said. Schultzel is chief growth officer for Olympia Hospitality, a Portland, Maine-based hotel management company that specializes in independent boutique hotels, many of which are on college campuses.



The [Hotel Ursa](#) opened in March 2024 through a public-private partnership that revitalized and repurposed two rundown campus buildings into a 95-room hotel operated by Olympia, complete with a new-build section.

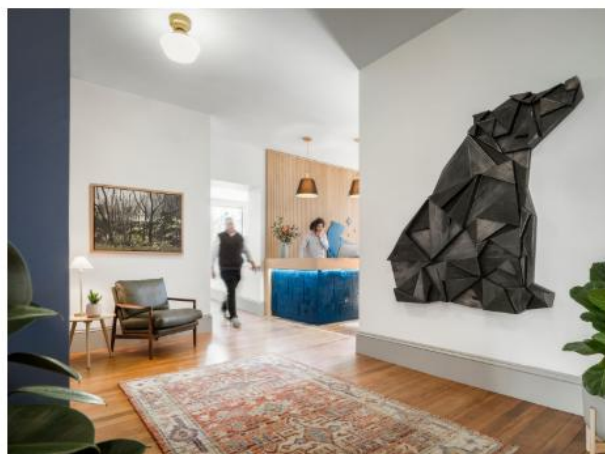
The branding exercise had Schultzel and the Olympia team leaning into a couple fun elements, including the University of Maine Black Bears, the campus' historic planetarium and the northern night sky.

"We leaned into this celestial format for the branding," he explained. "Ursa is Latin for 'bear.' In the Maine sky, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor are part of our New England lore ... same as in the academic space, you have majors and minors."

The hotel coffee shop is called MajorMinor. The new-construction wing of the hotel is called Polaris Hall, named after the brightest star in Ursa Minor. And bears are everywhere, from the lobby to the cafe to the study.

"In boutique and independent hotels especially, we all want a story to tell," Schultzel said. "That's where the fun is."

Olympia has more than 40 hotels in its management portfolio, a combination of brands and independents. The company most recently added a portfolio of four hotels owned by Suburban Capital into the fold.



"Ursa" is Latin for "bear," and both bear and celestial imagery plays into the storytelling of the independent Ursa Hotel, managed by Olympia Hospitality. (Olympia Hospitality)

Olympia's independent hotels are uniquely niched — many like Hotel Ursa, the Alford Inn at Rollins, The Hotel at Oberlin and The Inn at Swarthmore are on college campuses. Others cluster in prestigious leisure destinations such as Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and the Adirondack Mountains.

University campuses hold special appeal for Schultzel.

"There's so much thought leadership, there's so much engagement from the faculty and staff on what they want there," he said. "They care for their assets and for the experience at an uber-high level and that makes the work fun. You have a really creative, compelling partner who wants to do the right thing for the long term. For us, that's great work to do."

Listen to the full podcast above for more from Schultzel on Olympia Hospitality's growth strategies, how to manage best in seasonal markets, dealing with labor issues and more.

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