


# A Look Inside the New Chicago Athletic Association Hotel

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The CAA logo on the wall made out of the original gymnasium floor

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On Wednesday, May 27, one of the most architecturally and historically significant buildings in Chicago will reopen as the new 241-room [Chicago Athletic Association](#) hotel (rooms from \$369). Built in the 1890s, the Venetian gothic CAA operated until its close in 2007 as a private men's club. That means that next week, the 125-year-old CAA will open to the public for the first time in history.

We got a first look around with hotelier John Pritzker, part owner of the new CAA and Chairman of [Commune Hotels and Resorts](#), and nabbed some photos to share.

Strap in, folks, this hotel is going to blow your mind.

Here's what you need to know.

## This Hotel is a Passion Project for a Talented Team

Pritzker calls the CAA the “how-could-we-not” project. “In the White City Ballroom, there was a drop ceiling and we were going to do a plaster ceiling,” recalls Pritzker. “Then somebody started producing historic pictures, and it turns out there were these plaster stalactites—that’s what we call them— with light bulbs on the end. We looked at them and went, ‘Oh my God, how could we not replicate this ceiling? That’s what it’s suppose to be.’ And somebody said, ‘because it costs this much, that’s how we cannot.’” But Pritzker said they had to do it. They found a plasterer who made a mold and then they went on to make 167 more.

Pritzker’s partners in the CAA, Chicago-based [Agman Partners](#) and the visionary [AJ Capital Partners](#) share the same passion and commitment. “This was certainly a once in a lifetime opportunity,” said Ben Weprin of AJ Capital, the driving force behind the CAA and four other innovative Chicago hotels, including Soho House Chicago.

Other notable players behind the CAA include: Hartshorne Plunkard Architecture and MacRostie Advisors; New York-based interior design duo, Stephen Alesch and Robin Standefer, of [Roman & Williams](#); [Heritage Bicycles](#), who are creating a custom fleet for the hotel, including their first tandem bikes; and a whole roster of impressive food and beverage pros and outlets, including Danny Meyer’s Shake Shack, chef Christian Ragano and mixologist Nandini Khaund serving the rooftop Cindy’s, and Land & Sea’s Paul McGee spinning out spirit-forward cocktails across the entire second floor.

## The Details Inside Are Extraordinary

It turns out the CAA really is a showpiece, even if you’re only looking at the details. The millwork, craftsmanship, and materials seen inside are rarely seen today. Floor-to-ceiling fireplaces in *Game-of-Thrones*-meets-Harvard style; original chandeliers and light fixtures; mosaic-tiled floors; an abundance of stained-glass windows; even windows partially obscured by the building’s exterior Venetian lattice work.

“This place is a whole treasure trove of historic items,” says Pritzker. “We’d pull up a carpet and there was marble that’s been extinct for 75 years and you can’t buy it anymore. We pulled ceilings down and there was this intricate lattice woodwork. There’s a suite with a hand-carved door on the bathroom with these iterations of Satan’s face.”

## It’s Not a Museum—and Yet It Is

Standing for nearly 125 years, the Chicago Athletic Association is full of fabulous Chicago stories. Its members included William Wrigley, who basically repurposed the CAA logo—which shows up everywhere in the building— for the Chicago Cubs; Johnny Wesimuller, who swam on the club’s swim team; and Pudge Heffelfinger, who was the first football player to be paid to play football in America.

The hotel will be working with the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Architecture Foundation to deliver guided tours, as well as with its own employees to craft the art of storytelling. “We want [our employees] to know where they’re working and that this isn’t just a building,” says Pritzker. “We want them telling the stories about the building.”

All this history is matched by modern additions and design that pay homage to athletics, to Chicago, and to the idea of play. Nothing is off limits—you get to sleep in these rooms and enjoy these same fireplaces carved over a century ago. In your room, a pommel horse at the end of the bed, table legs wrapped in tennis grip wrap, and an old-school wooden climbing wall remind you of the notion of sport and fun.

### **The Views From the Rooftop are Pretty Impressive**

One of *Chicago's* [six hotel rooftops to visit this summer](#), Cindy’s rooftop terrace and lounge atop the CAA is unique in that it looks directly over the Art Institute and Millennium Park. “Cindy’s on the rooftop didn’t exist before, and when you stand outside and look at the view, your jaw is going to drop,” promises Pritzker. “It’s really something else.”

### **You Can Give It a Whirl on Field Day**

This Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., the Chicago Athletic Association is hosting a [Field Day of free events](#) at the Jay Pritzker Pavillion lawn to get you acquainted with the hotel. Highlights include tours led by CAA hotel staff and the Chicago Architecture Foundation, a 50-minute training session with Nike Master Trainer Emily Hutchins, a preview of the new fleet designed by Heritage Bicycles, and sneak previews of the in-house sports drink that will be served at Cindy’s.