

# BUILDING & CONSTRUCTION

SOUTHEAST

BUILDING A STRONGER REGION



*Beyond Expectations*  
Suffolk manages the erection of an 'engineering marvel' in downtown Miami. *Page 76*

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## THE WINDS *of* CHANGE

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# A Lofty Endeavor

+ Using a unique structural system, Winter Construction built a hotel on top of an existing building that was still in operation. *By Kathryn Jones*

## Winter Construction - aLoft Hotel

[www.winter-construction.com](http://www.winter-construction.com)

Construction budget: \$16 million

Location: Charlotte, N.C.

Scope: 10-story hotel

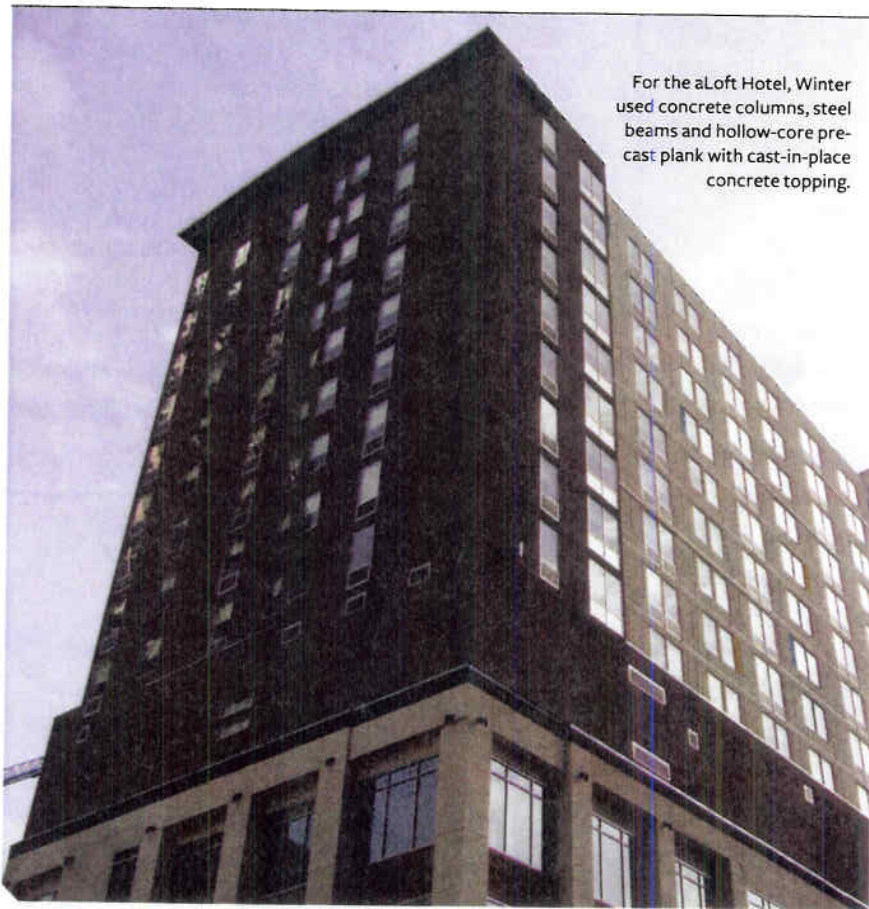
Role: General contractor

> **Some contractors shy away from** projects they have never done before; others, like Winter Construction, thrive on them. Based on its extensive experience in hospitality construction, the Atlanta-based firm was selected to build the \$16 million aLoft Hotel - a new prototype brand of Starwood Hotels & Resorts - in Charlotte, N.C.

Charlotte is undergoing a massive revitalization to create a unique, upbeat environment for young professionals to work and play. An entire city block is under development, with a portion of the effort being the 10-story aLoft Hotel, which Winter completed in January.

A unique aspect of this project, Project Manager Chris Geganto says, is that Winter constructed aLoft on top of an existing five-story building that also was under construction. In addition, five separate contractors were working on the site. Adding to the complication was the fact that when construction began in September 2007, aLoft was still a new concept, with no completed examples to model. The location within this development called for a significant departure from the aLoft prototype design. This version entails more vertical construction with a much smaller permit.

"The master developer's plan was to turn the space over as quickly as possible and open all the retail spaces - located in the five-story building below the hotel - as soon as possible," Geganto says.



For the aLoft Hotel, Winter used concrete columns, steel beams and hollow-core precast plank with cast-in-place concrete topping.

Geganto explains that with Winter Construction's help, the master developer obtained a certificate of occupancy for the retail and restaurant spaces well before the hotel was completed.

"We would be in the middle of a concrete pour and somebody would be eating downstairs in Jason's Deli," he recalls. "It was a really difficult project as far as site logistics and coordination with all the trades." Regardless, it was a very rewarding project for Winter and gave the contractor an opportunity to demonstrate its skill and innovation, he says.

## No Shoring Needed

To successfully construct a 10-story, 175-room hotel atop an existing five-story building still in operation requires an immense amount of patience and skill, Geganto explains. "The structural system we used is called Diversakore," he says. "It's a patented technology that utilizes concrete columns, steel beams and hollow-core precast plank with cast-in-place concrete topping. This was the first hotel to be constructed using this new system. The whole premise is to provide a structure without any deck shoring.

"We would be in the middle of a concrete pour and somebody would be eating downstairs in Jason's Deli."

- Chris Geganto, project manager

“This allowed us to put the structural steel beam down and pull the shoring members out so you have the whole floor to commence the infrastructure and finishes earlier,” he adds. “With a concrete building or post-tension building, you have to have the shoring and three or four levels of slab, which delays the start of rough-ins and finishes. In our case, that was not required. However, we did have four elements for every floor that had to be coordinated perfectly to make it run smoothly.”

#### Passing the Inspections

When it came time for the building inspection, “the inspectors didn’t know what they were inspecting,” Geganto notes. “They didn’t understand what stay-in-place formwork meant. We had to educate the inspectors on what was

required. And with the way the structure was created, you can imagine the number of bottlenecks we had trying to build this. However, we saved the owner time and money as far as rebar. In fact, he saved 10 percent on the structure using this alternative.”

The inspection phase is usually stressful, but in the case of aLoft, Winter had a more difficult time passing Starwood’s specifications for quality.

“The specifications were still being written at the time we constructed the hotel and we had to be cognizant of the fact that we’re trying to provide a product not only for our developer, but also the hotel brand,” Geganto says. “I learned that it doesn’t matter if the developer finishes the hotel; they don’t get the green light until the brand comes in and gives them permission to open.”

aLoft is a pioneering brand with unique finishes that appeal to lovers of modern design. The hotel features exposed ceilings and a blend of materials that are inconsistently displayed to create a loft-inspired effect. Geganto was especially impressed with the use of lighting and millwork. “The bar area has a unique finish called SensiTile, which is poured-in concrete with LED lighting with various colors inside of it to make the bar light up,” he describes.

He says the project would not have been completed to the developer and brand’s specifications without the help of Winter’s loyal subcontractors. “Due to the complexity and pace of the project, we really focused on a cohesive team-oriented relationship,” Geganto states. “That sort of approach is the only way we were able to finish this project on time.”



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