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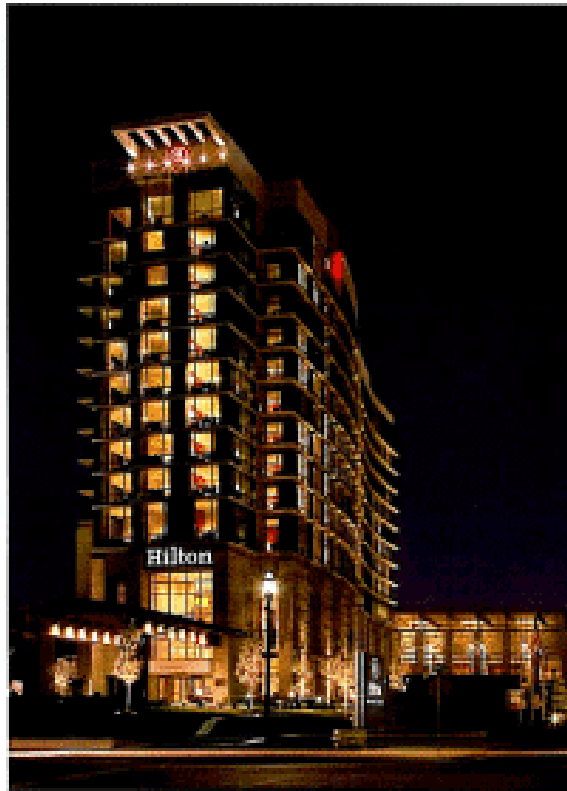
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Passing the Torch

Outgoing president Marla Davis reflects on her two years in office—and the future of the organization

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Left to Right: The Hilton Branson Convention Center Hotel's lobby and facade.

Harmonious Duet

Two Hilton hotels define one large complex in Missouri's music town **By Alia Akkari**

WITH ITS VARIETY OF ALL-DAY SHOWS, from country and western acts, to Rock 'n' Roll legends filling the American Bandstand Theater, Branson, Missouri, has emerged as the music capital of the Midwest. To appeal to a younger secondary market, not the core group of bus tour and family reunion visitors, the city built Branson Landing, a \$420 million family-oriented shopping and entertainment district that spans 1.5 miles on Lake Taneycomo, complete with a new convention center.

Anchoring both projects are two new Hilton properties: the 294-room Hilton Branson Convention Center and the boutique-style 242-room Hilton Promenade at Branson Landing. "They are two distinctly different projects," says Amy Hulbert, senior director, interior design, Hilton Hotels Corporation, and Arizona Chapter member. In February, the boutique hotel, designed by Habitat Interiors in Colorado, opened with the leisure traveler in mind, attracting convention center overflow. Built to look like residential condos, the guestrooms are large and a palette of caramel, red, and chocolate brown and the use of travertine and natural stone add a home-inspired warmth throughout the property. "We really made an effort to give it a sense of place and the feel of the Ozarks," adds Hulbert.

Connected to the convention center, the larger property, which

opened in August, features a sophisticated two-story lobby with high ceilings and a fireplace surrounded by a waterfall. A collaboration between Thompson, Ventulett, Stainback & Associates in Atlanta and Dallas-based Duncan & Miller Design, the hotel is recognized for its uniquely modern touches. One is the property's magical fountains incorporating "dancing" water and fire from the same people who created the famous fountains outside the Bellagio on the Las Vegas. "As we were so close to the lake, we wanted to bring in a water feature to the space, but we didn't simply want to do another "typical" fountain," explains Chad Rogers, one of the lead interior designers for the project from Duncan & Miller. "Our twist was that we incorporated the "water" into the fireplace, thus fusing it with the "fire."

The lobby is also marked by a large crystal chandelier; stairs with a stainless steel railing and glass panels; the "Meeting Tree," the hang-out between the convention center concourse and hotel's public areas; and a wall illuminated with acrylic panels. At night, the light feature is particularly striking, but during the day, Megan Ybema, another lead interior designer from Duncan & Miller, thinks the lobby's oxidized copper is the standout element: "The veneer not only brings a lot of color into the walls, it creates overall warmth throughout the space." ■