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Luxury hotel set for Waikīkī

Ultra-stylish Edition brand will make global debut at former Yacht Harbor Tower next to Ilikai

By **Andrew Gomes**
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Two hotel industry stalwarts are about to add some pizzazz to Hawai'i's visitor industry with the launch of a new high-fashion luxury hotel brand in Waikīkī.

Marriott International and New York boutique hotel developer Ian Schrager are expected to open the first in a global line of Edition hotels as early as August or September at the former Yacht Harbor Tower that was once part of the Ilikai.

The 353-room mid-rise dubbed The Waikiki Edition will be the first example of the ultra-stylish brand designed for Marriott by Schrager, who is also known for co-founding the famed New York disco Studio 54.

The hotel, which is still under renovation and has been kept very low-key by its owner and operators, is generating excitement among local hotel industry officials, and should deliver a nice pop to Hawai'i's slowly recovering tourism industry.

"The worldwide launch of this luxury brand happens here in Waikīkī," Michael Rock, a Marriott veteran retained to run The Waikiki Edition, said in a presentation to the Waikīkī Neighborhood Board recently. "This is the very first one."

Numerous cities have been mentioned on the Edition website as locations for an initial batch of hotels. But Honolulu hasn't been among them.

Marriott and Schrager purposely have tried to keep details about the new hotel brand secret until closer to the first opening. Edition representatives would not provide any information for this story.

Rock, in his presentation, said the publicity strategy runs counter to more traditional marketing efforts that aim to get consumers interested in and familiar with a new brand far in advance of a launch. With Edition hotels, Rock said the strategy is to wait until the last minute.

"It's like a bottle of champagne," he said. "You would not pop the cork too soon or you'll lose the fizz."

Rock told neighborhood board members that the property will include a restaurant operated by celebrity chef Masaharu Morimoto, who gained widespread fame for his role on the Food Network TV show "Iron Chef." Two pools, banquet facilities and sophisticated, elegant entertainment are also part of the plan.

A little more than 300 employees will be needed

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for the hotel, and Marriott has been busy recruiting for positions online. A "casting party" is scheduled for tomorrow. Another 80 to 100 jobs will be needed for the restaurant, Rock said in his presentation.

Marsha Weinert, tourism liaison for Gov. Linda Lingle, said the Edition hotel is another major addition to what has been a multi-billion-dollar renaissance of Waikīkī over the past several years.

"The more we open these new hotel properties and reinvest in the product, the better off we are going to be in the long term," she said.

Some condominium residents at the Ilikai are especially excited that the long-shuttered Yacht Harbor Tower is close to reopening, though some also have expressed concern over how operations of the Edition will affect such close neighbors, including use of the pool and meeting room areas that used to be part of the Ilikai.

Rock has said that Edition, which will be managed by Marriott, will be a good neighbor and have a positive impact on Waikīkī.

The Yacht Harbor Tower is owned by an affiliate of San Diego-based development firm eRealty Cos., which bought the property in July 2006 for about \$80 million from local developer Brian Anderson, who had just bought the property along with many units and commercial space in the Ilikai's main Y-shaped tower for \$218 million.

eRealty promptly closed the 360-room Yacht Harbor Tower and cut off the connection with the Ilikai. Rooting out tenants including a wedding chapel and restaurant Tanaka of Tokyo upset some Ilikai residents. For the better part of three years, the property appeared to be under slow-moving renovation. It is unclear when eRealty partnered with Marriott.

Marriott announced its partnership with Schragger

in mid-2007 to open as many as 100 new hotels in an effort to diversify Marriott's luxury hotel operations beyond its Ritz-Carlton and Bulgari hotel brands.

"The brand will be about an attitude, about a feeling rather than a look," Schragger said in a statement at the time.

Schragger is regarded as a pioneer in boutique hotel development. He got into the business in the early 1980s, and is known for incorporating "cheap chic" elements to the hotel experience, and sometimes living for a year in his new hotels.

Properties developed by Schragger include Morgans Hotel, Gramercy Park Hotel, Royalton Hotel, Paramount Hotel and Hudson Hotel in New York City. Others include the Delano Hotel in Miami and the Clift Hotel in San Francisco.

The Edition name was unveiled in January 2008, and Marriott said there were nine deals with developers expected to result in the first hotels opening in 2010 in cities including Paris, Madrid, Miami and Los Angeles. Honolulu wasn't among the nine, though Marriott said it was in advanced discussions for 20 more hotels.

Rock in his presentation said The Waikī

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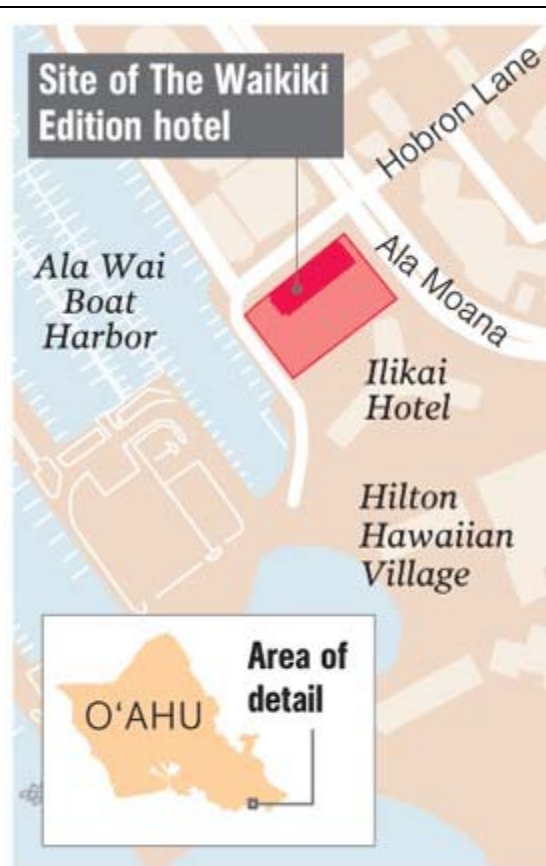
kī Edition will be followed by the opening of a second Edition hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, later this year. Three other Edition hotels are slated to open in the next couple of years in Bangkok; Barcelona, Spain; and Mexico City.

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The former Yacht Harbor Tower adjacent to the Ilikai is under renovation and is expected to soon reopen as a luxury Edition hotel.

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Marriott International and New York boutique hotel developer Ian Schrager are partners in the Edition venture. The property will include a restaurant run by celebrity chef Masaharu Morimoto.

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