

# PITTSBURGH RENEWED

The Steel City's regeneration is one of the US's greatest success stories, says **Lindsay Sutton**

**W**hen the White House press corps heard that the September 2009 G20 summit

of world leaders was to be held in Pittsburgh, they laughed out loud. Most people thought of it as "hell with the lid off", a reference to the days when the Steel City produced half of the US's iron-based output.

From the late 19th century until the mid-20th century, Pittsburgh – located at the western edge of Pennsylvania, deep in Appalachian Mountain territory – was so polluted that a blanket of smog regularly hung over its vast steel mills, spread out along its three major riverbanks. Gas lamps often remained on during the daylight hours and office workers would take a spare shirt to change into at lunchtime, in a bid to maintain their white-collar image.

From bleak industrial town to what the US's 2007 *Places Rated Almanac* called the "most liveable city in the US" is quite a journey to make, but as the world's press found out at the summit, Pittsburgh's regeneration is one of America's success stories. And choosing it for the G20 was astute – from his days on the stomp during the 2008 Pennsylvania primary elections, President Obama knew it would serve as an example of rebirth to a world reeling from the recession.

Approaching the city from the Fort Pitt road tunnel is breathtaking



– when you emerge, look down at "the Point", where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to become the Mississippi-bound Ohio River, and you'll see why a *New York Times* writer described it as a city with a truly grand entrance. Today, there's not a steel mill nor a wisp of smoke in sight as you gaze down on the city's skyscrapers, huddling on the "Golden Triangle" that forms the apex between the two tributary rivers. On the waterside, new offices, shops and housing have replaced the grimy plants that once blackened Pittsburgh's reputation.

Instead of coal and steel, the city now bases itself on advanced manufacturing, finance and business, healthcare, life sciences, energy, and information and communications. Doug Heuck, editor of *Pittsburgh Quarterly*, has seen the emphasis change from brawn to brain during his 25 years here. "When Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall, we wondered if they could put any of him together again. It took several decades but they did it, even though it needed a big change of culture, plus a pack of

**New offices, shops and housing have replaced the grimy steel plants**



## WHERE TO STAY

### FAIRMONT

This Downtown hotel opened in March 2010 and has river and city views from its 185 bedrooms. It was sustainably designed to gold LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards and has a 550 sqm health club, a ballroom and four meeting



philanthropic sticking plasters to see it through," he says.

These plasters – in the form of foundations set up by the city's early captains of industry – were required after the steel trade declined in the 1970s and 1980s. During the Second World War, 86 million tonnes were being produced, more than Germany and Japan combined, but as Marshall Plan money was pumped into Europe, Pittsburgh's high-wage steel industry failed to reinvest and fell behind.

Heuck says: "The shock was immense. People were thrown out of what they thought were jobs for life. Unemployment grew to more than 18 per cent and people's self-image crumbled. They were used to boom and bust – this time the bust stayed."

Bill Flanagan, executive vice-president of corporate relations at the area's economic body, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, adds: "There were ten years of denial, then the mills were pulled down. All the brownfield sites along the riverbanks were available for new developments." An old railway stockyard was the first to be developed into a marina, a centre for light industry and residential use.

Flanagan says: "The big foundations from the Carnegies and

venues. Habitat restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

- 510 Market Street; tel +1 412 7738 800; fairmont.com
- Rooms from US\$203

#### OMNI WILLIAM PENN

A few blocks away, the Omni has old-style charm and splendour



Omni William Penn

and has played host to presidents such as John F Kennedy. Built in 1916, it boasts a main lobby that's titanic in its vastness, and a stunning banquet venue. The Terrace Room restaurant even has palm trees inside it. It has 596 guest rooms, 38 meeting spaces and a 24-hour gym.



Westin Convention Centre

- 530 William Penn Place; tel +1 412 2817 100; omnihotels.com
- Rooms from US\$286

#### WESTIN CONVENTION CENTRE HOTEL

The Westin hotel is connected to the David L Lawrence Convention Centre by a skywalk. The property offers a good gym, pool and spa, plus free transport to the business district. The Original Fish Market has a great sushi bar, and the 616 rooms and suites boast stunning cityscape views. There are 23 meeting and break-out spaces.

- 1,000 Penn Avenue; tel +1 412 2813 700; starwoodhotels.com
- Rooms from US\$255

#### RENAISSANCE

Marriott has transformed this iconic, century-old building into a modern, 291-room, high-class

hotel under the Renaissance brand. Its riverside location makes for great vistas, and it's a short walk from the Andy Warhol Museum. Braddock's American Brasserie specialises in French cuisine, and there are seven meeting rooms.

- 107 Sixth Street; tel +1 412 5621 200; marriott.com
- Rooms from US\$272

#### COURTYARD PITTSBURGH DOWNTOWN

In the heart of Downtown's cultural area on Penn Avenue, this Courtyard by Marriott was formed from four historic buildings. It has 182 rooms with modern European décor, three meeting venues, a gym, and Sonoma Grill for West Coast cuisine.

- 945 Penn Avenue; tel +1 412 4345 551; marriott.com
- Rooms from US\$215



Mellons [both of these powerful US families made much of their fortunes here], and from the Heinz food industry, which is based here, helped to jump-start the recovery.”

The descendants of German immigrant H J Heinz have found 57 varieties for keeping his image alive, both as a food producer and as a major sponsor. Heinz Field stadium is the home of American football team the Pittsburgh Steelers, while Heinz Hall plays host to the celebrated Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

“Carnegie Mellon University became a major research and development facility, and the hospital, healthcare and lifestyle sectors grew, powering the ‘eds and meds’ base,” Flanagan says. “Finance and business services expanded, and robotics and nuclear engineering took root – all of these helped to replace much of the traditional industrial base.”

Today, Greater Pittsburgh – with a population of 2.5 million – still produces steel and specialised metals such as titanium, though with 4,000 workers rather than 25,000. In addition, at least 40 years’ worth of coal reserves are being mined in the region. However, it’s natural gas that represents a major energy resource for the future. The vast Marcellus Shale deposits may be deep down (more than 2,000 metres), with attendant environmental concerns about ways to extract them, but they remain one of the biggest natural gas reserves in the world.

Flanagan says: “This place was the birthplace of energy and it still promises to contribute mightily to the push for US energy independence. There’s every chance of using our resources in an environmentally acceptable way too. More than US\$1 billion-worth of research is being done into carbon capture, and cleaner-burn coal research is being spearheaded in Pittsburgh’s education institutions. New forms of energy are centred here too – we are at the cutting edge of solar and wind. Pittsburgh ranks alongside Paris as a development centre for commercial nuclear energy.”

## WHERE TO EAT

High up on the crest of Mount Washington, **LE MONT** has breathtaking views. The cuisine is fine-dining and starters range from US\$10

to US\$20, with mains up to US\$40. Open from 5pm Mon-Sat, 4pm Sun. ■ 1,114 Grandview Avenue; tel +1 412 431 3100; lemontpittsburgh.com

For meat lovers there’s the **CAPITAL GRILLE** (thecapitalgrille.com) on Fifth Avenue, **RUTH’S CHRIS STEAK HOUSE** (ruthschris.com) on South Broad Street, and **MORTON’S THE STEAKHOUSE** (mortons.com) on Liberty Avenue. Italian eatery **BELLA SERA** (bellaserapittsburgh.com), in Market Square, has been certified by the Green Restaurant Association.



Andy Warhol Museum

## FACT FILE

Continental Airlines flies daily from London Heathrow and Manchester to Pittsburgh via New York Newark. Go to [continental.com](http://continental.com), [visitpittsburgh.com](http://visitpittsburgh.com)

Also on the agenda is the development of “green” building technology. The city boasts numerous achievements in this field, the trailblazer being Pittsburgh’s Convention Centre, which became the largest green building in the US when it received a LEED Gold standard rating in 2003.

The Green Building Alliance, based in an old riverside trading centre, is the champion of everything green in the city. A spokesperson for the alliance says: “Pittsburgh now has 12 high-visibility buildings designed on green principles, ranging from a bank’s call centre to a state-of-the-art sports arena.”

Pittsburgh is also a significant corporate HQ city – companies with bases here include US Steel, Allegheny Technologies, Mylan Laboratories, Consol Energy and PNC Financial Services. It’s the operations centre of Alcoa, one

of the world’s largest producers of aluminium, and is home to Bayer’s spin-off chemical company, the Lanxess Corporation.

Lanxess president and chief executive Randall Dearth is helping to develop the “Pittsburgh Compact”, which facilitates training and education to retain young talent and develop skill bases. He says: “We estimate there are 20,000 good jobs out there that will need filling, so we will need a great number of people to take these up as they arise.”

The big names that drove industrial growth also pumped wealth back in to fund world-class museums, galleries, theatres and the orchestra, whose concert in Amsterdam reportedly prompted a deal with Air France-KLM’s US partner Delta Air Lines for a direct flight from Paris in 2009. Major attractions include the Andy Warhol Museum (warhol.

## Tourism pumps about US\$3 billion a year into the local economy

org), which celebrates the iconic pop artist who grew up here, and Andrew Carnegie’s Museum of Natural History (carnegiemn.org). These help to attract ten million tourists to the city each year, who pump about US\$3 billion annually into the local economy.

One local devotee goes so far as to say the city’s arts and music attractions justify the epithet “the Paris of the US”. This may be an exaggeration, but Pittsburgh is certainly no longer “the pits” in anyone’s language. ■