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A Durham Hotel With a Sense of Place and Midcentury Style

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By INGRID K. WILLIAMS JAN. 27, 2017



The Durham Hotel lobby is saturated with the look of the “Mad Men” era. Robert Rausch for The New York Times

Rates

Rooms from \$199.

Basics

You'll sense the retro vibe even before entering this 53-room boutique property that opened in the summer of 2015 in the former Home Savings Bank building, adding a restaurant later that year. A stylish restoration by the Los Angeles-based design firm Commune preserved many of the midcentury structure's architectural features, including the zany gold-and-white-striped facade. The lobby's gorgeous interiors look plucked from a set of “Mad Men,” with patterned red-and-cream carpeting and curved cognac-leather couches illuminated by golden pendant lamps. Beyond the cool aesthetics, this local-focused property stands out for its dedication to all things made in North Carolina, from breakfast offerings to bedding textiles.

Location

At the epicenter of downtown [Durham](#), the property is a convenient base in this transitional neighborhood, which has undergone a stunning revitalization in recent years. Short-term street parking is plentiful, and there's a nearby municipal lot. More convenient (and often, more economical) is valet parking (\$14 overnight).

The Room

A long hallway carpeted in colorful geometric patterns led to my deluxe king, the basic category. The fifth-floor room was spacious and bright, with plush indigo carpeting and a floor-to-ceiling window. Along one wall was a long wooden desk with a turquoise ceramic lamp and a chair clad in nubby red fabric. Other eye-catching accents ranged from the heavy mustard-hued drapes and cherry-red bedside tables to an abstract art print above the bed. There was plenty of storage space between wall hooks and a wood-paneled closet. But best of all was the bed itself, which had a supremely comfortable pillowtop mattress and crisp white sheets topped with a handmade patchwork-denim quilt from Raleigh Denim.



The Durham Hotel, once home to a bank, stands out for its striped exterior. Robert Rausch for The New York Times

The Bathroom

The compact L-shaped bathroom had a large mirror, a glass-walled shower stall with basic white and gray tile, and organic bath products from Red Flower. A wooden crate filled with towels and a blow dryer was tucked beneath a drab brown vanity, while a pair of soft robes hung behind the door.

Amenities

Going way beyond free Wi-Fi, the Durham pampers guests by placing lip balm from Durham-based Burt's Bees beside the bed and stocking minibar trays with treats from North Carolina producers, like sea-salt bars from Raleigh's Escazú Artisan Chocolates. Your choice of freshly ground beans from the local Counter Culture Coffee is delivered every morning, ready to brew in the room's percolator. A basement gym is well equipped, and yoga classes are offered on the rooftop five days a week (free for guests).

Dining

The hotel has two dining spaces, the rooftop and the restaurant, both run by Andrea Reusing, the James Beard Award-winning chef and owner of Lantern in neighboring Chapel Hill. The beautiful lobby-level restaurant space is open throughout the day, serving coffee and tea in the hours between breakfast and dinner. Evening menus hew to the local and seasonal, with Southern-inflected plates like fried rice with North Carolina blue crab. Breakfast, included in the rates, is a pick-two affair; recent options included heirloom apples, hard-boiled farm eggs, and jars of yogurt with house-made granola and muscadine jam. Hot dishes, like Anson Mills oats or smoked bacon, cost extra. Temperate evenings see crowds — more locals than guests — gather on the rooftop for creative cocktails and casual meals of oysters and fried chicken served alongside panoramic city views. Selected dishes are available for room service from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m.

The Bottom Line

With a strong sense of place, style and community, the city's namesake hotel is poised to become an anchor in the New Durham.

The Durham Hotel, 315 East Chapel Hill Street; 919-768-8830; thedurham.com.

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