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The Meandering Room, Hotel Hotel, Canberra.



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Canberra's newest stay, Hotel Hotel, has a national-museum-worthy design pedigree, but is it a good home away from home? **Georgia Rickard** checks in to find out

"There is nothing in a caterpillar," the shampoo dispenser announces, "that tells you it's going to be a butterfly".

An odd quote to find yourself sharing a shower with, one might think, but it is an apt one to discover in this indulgently oversized grey cube of a bathroom, here in Canberra's newest accommodation offering. Indeed the building encountered so many difficulties during its metamorphosis from site to sexy that more than one insider suggested it might ever remain a mere bug.

Much like [Canberra](#) herself, however, [Hotel Hotel](#) has defied expectations, quietly undergoing its transformation despite scepticism, and it would be hard to find a better beacon for the city's changing times.

Designed by architects Fender Katsalidis (of MONA fame, thanks very much), the Nishi building, in which the hotel resides, stands tall in Canberra's low-lying skyline; 14 shiny new floors of swaying curvature and sharp angles are punctuated by bright green wall-dwelling plant life.

Inside, there's not only a hotel offering, but offices, apartments, a cinema, an art gallery, an artisan bakery, a swish bar, an underground speakeasy and a craft-slash-vintage-fashion store. This commercial combo is condensed on the hotel's website as "Australia's most radically sustainable mixed-use building". It's a neat summation: radical. Nothing about this hotel is ordinary.

It might just be Melburnians, accustomed to hunting down obscure addresses, who are pleased that Hotel Hotel is hard to find — tucked away as it is on Nishi's labyrinthine second floor. It's a little disconcerting carrying our bags to reception through the slick, young-ish 6pm crowd ordering dinner in the lobby restaurant, but the bellboy's efficiency — he whisks our bags away before we've even announced ourselves to the concierge — does a lot to establish the hotel mindset, and every interaction with service thereafter is faultless.

Hotel Hotel is built around the pillars of sustainability, creativity and Australian craftsmanship, and the consideration that has gone into realising these concepts is as refreshing as it is obvious. 'Design' accommodation is nothing new, as the glut of concept hotels that appeared over the past five years has shown, but unlike the vast majority of these, Hotel Hotel seems to wholly live its ethos.

A biodegradable hotel room key (made from sustainably managed maple wood) opens the door to a suite of concrete, cork board and low-level lighting, which conspire with fluffy woollen chairs and canvas artworks to

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create an industrial-chic, retro-Australian vibe. It is wonderfully on-brand and happily unique. Another reviewer might, on an off-day, venture to call it 'bare', but with Aesop toiletries and a craft beer from the mini bar in hand, and an intuitively formatted iPad waiting beside a thickly pillowed bed, we'll settle for 'spacious'.

The lack of light, however, is harder to overlook. Mood lighting is wonderful if you're not in the mood to see anything, but makes for a challenging morning make-up routine, and while top-to-floor windows provide generous daytime light, the view from room 217 is of a highway. Meanwhile the giant bathroom seems almost too spacious – if that can be said – probably because, without a bath, it feels under furnished. It's conceivable that the owners, finding themselves short of funds, decided to omit the tubs rather than install anything less than wonderful.

And that is the good and the bad of Hotel Hotel. Here is a hotel where quality undoubtedly triumphs over quantity, but in the quest to champion its ethos as loudly as possible, the designers have sometimes allowed unpredictability to take precedence over practicality. It's a forgivable sin.

At a time when this city is finally ready to embrace an image more befitting the affluent mini-metropolis, brimming with Sydney/Melbourne transplants, that it is, Hotel Hotel could not be a more welcome – or appropriate – addition. All hail the new Canberra.

The details

The verdict: More avant-garde than old-guard, Hotel Hotel is a breath of original air in a gorgeous piece of architecture. At times it's a little too self-consciously hip, but the bones of a great hotel – service, style and comfort – are all there.

The score: 16/20; great

We rated: The on-site artisan bakery, the Aesop toiletries, the unique design touches and the ridiculously comfortable bed. Check out the sustainable wooden keyboards and computer mice at reception.

We hated: Nothing, but the dim lighting, heavy carpet, and windowless, Alice-in-Wonderland corridors all contribute to a wintry, chalet feel. This hotel will really shine in the colder months.

Where: The Nishi Building, 25 Edinburgh Ave, NewActon, Canberra

Notes: We paid \$325 for a Creative Room (junior suite).

Contact: 02 6287 6287; hotel-hotel.com.au

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AUTHOR



Steve Madgwick

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