



Post Magazine

Hot spots: Hotel Hotel, Canberra

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THE DINING ROOM.

What is it? Canberra's newest hotel and arguably one of the most groundbreaking boutique developments in Australia for the past decade. Hotel Hotel is located on the first three levels of an architectural oddity, the NewActon Nishi building, which locals have dubbed "The Pineapple" due to its segmented, off-kilter façade (pictured). We aren't sure what the architects were smoking, but we definitely want to try some.

You sound impressed. You betcha. For a start, the hotel says it embraces the principles of sustainability, community and diversity (the Hotel Hotel people refer to their place as being for "people people"). And the Nishi building is a veritable "vertical village", incorporating luxury residential apartments, government offices, a "global" cinema, independent book and pop-up stores, cafes and bars. What's not to love?

What about the design? It's so cutting edge it should come with a warning. Guests enter the hotel via a grand stairway of floating timber, some of it salvaged from the site the hotel was built on and an old sports court. Industrial materials, most prominently concrete, are used throughout the property. The concierge desk and the wall behind it are created from Ultrafloor (a concrete used in car parks) arranged as cleverly stacked beams, with the aggregate left exposed. Ditto, the ceiling of the lobby/dining room (pictured), which is simple bare concrete with circular voids cut into it to reveal the tree-fern garden in the atrium above. The focus of the lobby is on the cantilevered concrete hearth (pictured), reminiscent of something

architect Frank Lloyd Wright might have designed for a ski lodge. That aesthetic is enhanced by the placement of 1960s leather sling sofas around the fireplace. Furniture throughout the hotel was chosen by Renaissance man Don Cameron.

Hang on, isn't that the video guy? Yep, Cameron directed music videos for the Pet Shop Boys, Garbage and Simply Red, but don't let that put you off. This is the first hotel he has designed, having sourced myri-ad funky 50s and 60s designer pieces and revamping them, often in wild upholstery. Cameron also commissioned a series of 50s-style metal "lozenge" kidney-shaped tables and has used them throughout the hotel.

Do you have a favourite piece? It's hard to choose but the mosaic wall leading to the "secret garden" is hard to beat. It was created with ceramic tiles hand-made by the late Dutch immigrant artist Gerard Havekes.

How about the guest rooms? There are 68 in total (plus the hotel manages 28 of the residential apartments above). They are generously sized and appointed with more retro-fabulous furniture. The larger rooms look inwards to the central atrium of the building. Bathrooms are the size of some Hong Kong apartments and each includes a free-standing stone egg-bath.

Is there anywhere to eat in the neighbourhood? Your stomach is in luck. NewActon is Canberra's emerging foodie district and, this month, Hotel Hotel is due to launch an open kitchen, its chef producing a mod-Oz menu using local produce. Also recommended are breakfast, lunch and dinner at A.Baker, a trendy eatery in the heritage building adjacent. It's a popular spot with young professional types, especially on Sundays, when there's live music in the courtyard. Also worth a visit is Mocan and Green Grout, a local cafe that started out as a hole in the wall but is now so much more. Very popular with locals and cyclists as a breakfast/espresso destination, the cafe owners also manufacture high-end "fixies" (fixed-gear bicycles) that the hotel loans to guests free of charge.

What if I get bored? That isn't going to happen; the hotel is within walking distance of the excellent National Museum of Australia, and just a five-minute drive to the National Gallery, Questacon (a fabulous interactive science centre), Parliament House, the Australian National Botanic Gardens and the Australian War Memorial. All except Questacon are free to visit. For two-wheeled tourists, Canberra has some of the best cycling infrastructure in the country. A must-do is the 38-kilometre loop around Lake Burley Griffin, which starts right in front of the hotel. Livelo (www.livelo.com.au (<http://www.livelo.com.au>)) hires out high-end road bicycles for more serious rides.

Will a stay at Hotel Hotel break the bank bank? Not really; rooms start from about A\$250 (HK\$1,740) per night. For details, visit www.hotel-hotel.com.au (<http://www.hotel-hotel.com.au>).