

Hotel Hotel is twice as nice

SUSAN KUROSAWA | THE AUSTRALIAN | FEBRUARY 07, 2014 12:00AM

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Hotel Hotel reception. Source: Supplied

Hotel Hotel, Canberra, ACT

Hello, hello. Our nation's capital now has "a place for people, people" and despite the stuttering and self-conscious nature of everything to do with Hotel Hotel's nomenclature and collateral, this is no bad thing.

The property has just opened when I visit in December and there are a few of the inevitable techno-gremlins in residence, including the automated lock on my guestroom door refusing to behave (an issue swiftly sorted by the chirpy front-desk staff). Such unrelenting wizardry does rather make one long for old-fashioned keys and paper folders but there's no latitude for such out-of-date thinking here - everything you need to access in your guestroom is on a touchscreen by the (divinely comfortable) bed.

The 68-room Hotel Hotel occupies the first three floors (above are 28 integrated apartments) in the new environmentally acclaimed Nishi Building at New Acton; it's the work of Fender Katsalidis, the Melbourne firm that designed Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art, and Japan's Suppose Design Office. It's a major design development in every sense, from the pineapple-faceted exterior profile to the vast assembly of original artwork and even the highly considered minor details, including brown and dark green beer bottles that have had their tops sliced off to serve as carafes and tumblers. Cue glassmaker Amos Enders-Mojo, whose ingenious work for Hotel Hotel also includes pendant lights and platters.

This ambitious project by the Molonglo Group's Efkarpidis brothers was due to open in the middle of last year, but the building contractor went belly-up, there were further delays and you get the feeling staff are sighing with relief that the doors are finally open.

From the residential-style lobby with its library nook and witty fittings to the mid-20th-century sofas in each guestroom, Hotel Hotel is an establishment most likely to appeal to next-big-thing addicts, but it's nicely comfortable as well and fills a boutique niche in an otherwise predictable accommodation scene (the initial gush is that it's more Copenhagen than Canberra).

The list of artists and craftspeople involved stretches to almost 60 and their creative work encompasses a neat array of repurposed materials, with an emphasis on the local. This is not a sleek white and shiny bolthole but more akin to an interactive gallery of curated pieces that loosely follows a theme of Australian settler chic-not rustic but deeply earthed and organic.

My chamber, No 130, faces the Nishi Building's central atrium, which is planted with Tasmanian ferns.

This perfect bower for the jet-lagged feels rather sexy and shadowy, with block-out blinds on the high windows; it is in a room category known as Meandering, and so it does, with curved contours and a leisurely flow of space. I love the rounded three-seater in strawberry pink velour, the standard lamp under a wingback chair straight from Dad's den and the little stool with tufted rag top that is sheer community hall arts and crafts. Big tick, too, to what general manager Tracy Ahernton calls the "futti-frutti collection"-kidney-shaped side tables with spindly little legs that lend jaunty pops of colour.

The interiors are the vision of filmmaker Don Cameron and he has achieved a studio-set feel of tableaux and staged moments, all with a dash of Mad Men cool.

The Meandering rooms come with a double shower and basins and a polished concrete tub (which, amusingly, takes about 20 minutes to fill) in the spacious ensuite (with heated floors for those perishing Canberra winters). Other accommodation styles are Cosy, Original and Creative, all smaller than Meandering but with many of the same interior design highlights, such as a palette of timber colours, chipboard surfaces and tactile textures of felt and clay rendering.

Many have views of Lake Burley Griffin and Canberra's abundant swaths of city-centre parkland.

Bedheads have been fashioned from a dismantled French provincial barn, there's widespread use of seasoned oak and timbers salvaged from worksites and throughout Hotel Hotel you'll spy materials as disparate as kangaroo skin and mosaic glass tiles in vivid hues.

Minibars feature Australian products, including organic and niche brands, and space has been deliberately left for guests to pop in their own stash of drinks and goodies.

DINING:

Lobby-level dining at Deadset is not fully open when I stay but the cafe/bar is serving ACT-district wines and generous cocktails and breakfast, including free-range goodies from Boxgum Grazing at Young and honey from hives around Lake Burley Griffin.

Behind Hotel Hotel, across Phillip Law Street, is A. Baker, an agreeable combo of artisanal French bakery, all-day diner and hip bar (check the Australian spirits, including gin and vodka from Kangaroo Island). It's a terrific hangout with boppy service, house-roasted coffee and an emphasis on share plates and parish produce (mushrooms from Yass; trout from the Goulburn River; lamb and olives from Crookwell; mackerel from Eden).

EVERYONE'S TALKING ABOUT:

There's real generosity with the extras here, including complimentary WiFi. Thanks to a partnership with Aesop, 500ml containers of delicious-smelling body balm, handwash, shampoo, conditioner and body cleanser are provided. Each guestroom comes with a broly, ironing board, quality gowns and minibar stocked with locally sourced drinks and snacks and fresh milk.

Hotel Hotel also provides free Goodspeed bikes with helmet and safety lock to whoosh around the cycle paths of the (mostly dead-flat) neighbourhood.

HOT TIP:

Future initiatives as Hotel Hotel is fully unveiled will include a retail space of selected tenants (Shop Shop, perchance), which should add to an enhanced integration with the adjacent New Acton urban village.

STEPPING OUT:

Hotel Hotel is about 15 minutes by road from Canberra airport, set on the Edinburgh Avenue and Parkes Way perimeter of New Acton, also home to sister property from the 8 Hotels Collection, The Diamant. There's a cinema, stores, day spa, salon, cafes (try the terrific Mocan & Green Grou), bars and brasseries within cooee.

ESSENTIALS:

Hotel Hotel, New Acton Nishi, 25 Edinburgh Avenue, Canberra 2601; (02) 6287 6287; hotel-hotel.com.au. Rooms from about \$285 at designhotels.com

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