

HOTEL HOTEL

NewActon's Hotel Hotel is pushing the boundaries of design and creation, offering an oasis of beautiful artworks, intriguing rooms and relaxing public spaces. **AMELIA DALE** checks in.



NewActon's most recent accommodation offering isn't really a hotel in the traditional sense of the word – forget generic landscapes on the walls and bored businessmen at the breakfast buffet – it's a vessel for delivering arts and culture, and a place for adventurous people who are looking to explore somewhere different. Housed within the Nishi building, a relatively new but already iconic addition to the Canberra landscape, Hotel Hotel has 68 unique rooms that come in three different sizes – original, creative and meandering. "The hotel reflects our love for domesticity, the curious, the well-made and the comfortable," co-founder Nectar Efkarpidis says. "Some highlights include bespoke furniture commissions, restored furniture, and carefully chosen artworks and objects. The emphasis is on art, makers, and making the everyday interesting." Efkarpidis, who founded the hotel with his brother Johnathan, explains that the hotel was founded on three main principles, the first being that the hotel should reflect our nation with a uniquely Australian aesthetic. "We've thought about it from an Australian perspective and created a local typology

rather than borrowing an American or European vernacular," he says. The rooms are inspired by the look and feel of a traditional Australian bush shack, with predominantly raw and natural fibres including salvaged oak beds and textured clay walls reminiscent of corrugated iron. Hotel Hotel's second principle is working with artists – the entire place was created as a collaboration between 56 artists, makers and designers. Efkarpidis worked closely with the hotel's aesthetic curator, filmmaker Don Cameron, to commission artists and makers to create a range of objects, both decorative and functional, for all the rooms and public spaces in Hotel Hotel. "We're different from the standard boutique art hotel," Hotel Hotel general manager Tracy Atherton says. "We don't just display artworks in the rooms and public places. We have worked with artists, makers and designers to actually make this place. "From the crockery to the water jugs to the robes and even the bins in the bathrooms – they have all been made using local skill rather than being mass-produced items bought off the shelf in factory volumes." The water glasses and jugs are some of the most eye-catching functional pieces used

throughout the hotel, made by artists Amos Enders and Wade Briggs from recycled beer and wine bottles. Enders' and Briggs' artistic philosophy of reuse fits in perfectly with that of Hotel Hotel, which has incorporated a number of design elements to reduce its environmental impact. All the rooms contain large bottles of Aesop bath products rather than small, disposable ones, all cleaning is done without chemicals and there are sensor lights installed in the rooms to save energy. The third principle of Hotel Hotel is what Efkarpidis describes as "the philosophy of public occupation". "We've designed the hotel in such a way that isn't just for guests and for commercial users – it's for everyone to come and enjoy," he says. Entering via the grand staircase in the Nishi foyer, visitors to the hotel are immediately met with a visual feast – a huge stack of vintage suitcases, a light installation floating above geometric tables, and the hotel's functional art collection inspired by Canberra's original designers Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. "In the foyer, the bar and lounge at the moment are becoming a bit of a gathering place for creative types, but we have university students, business people, people

that work in the neighbouring offices, and of course art and design lovers," Atherton says. "We think of the bar and lounge as a public space for everyone, like a public fountain where you can just sit about or meet up with friends." Hotel Hotel's bar Deadset is up and running, serving breakfast from 7am and offering an extensive range of cocktails and an all-day menu of light snacks with a focus on ingredients from local farmers. There is a quaint outdoor garden, a library stocked with art and design books, and commercial spaces that include a pop-up shop housing vintage clothing sellers and local designers preparing for Fashion Week. In winter patrons will be able to gather around a huge indoor fireplace, and the hotel's kitchen will be fully functional in March, so foodies can expect an even more elaborate and delicious menu to come. **Hotel Hotel**
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Hotel Hotel's cosy library, and one of the impressive rooms and bathrooms (inset).

THE ROOMS

No two rooms at Hotel Hotel are the same. Thanks to the innovative design of the Nishi building, every room takes on a slightly different shape and none are conventional square or rectangular spaces.

"Each room has been furnished with pieces that have a history – salvaged and re-upholstered mid-20th century furniture, commissioned pieces and eclectic found objects and art. Each one is different and has its own story," general manager Tracy Atherton says.

There are different vintage pieces in every room and the myriad quirky artistic things to explore, from original paintings and collages framed on the walls to bespoke pendant lighting and the tactile walls of clay and pressed woodchips.

The rooms are fitted with iPads running newly developed hotel software that allows guests to browse the room service menu and order items at the touch of a button (hotel employees will receive instant updates on their phones and be with you in a jiffy).

The mini bar is stocked with local wines and organic cola, along with four different kinds of tea and freshly ground coffee from neighbouring restaurant A.Baker, and in the bathroom you will find divinely scented Aesop bath products, rainwater showers

and, in the Meandering rooms, a huge, concrete, freestanding bathtub.

THE FACILITIES

Hotel Hotel has a range of facilities for guests and visitors, just in case you want to do more than sleep, eat, and lounge in your enormous bathtub during your stay.

There are bikes from the NewActon-based Goodspeed Bicycle Co available for hire if you feel like seeing the area on two wheels, and if you feel the need to work out there is a state-of-the-art gym complete with internet-enabled treadmills.

The lobby has a fireplace, library and bar Deadset, as well as some brilliant furniture and art installations for guests and members of the public to enjoy while they hang out.

Pop-up fashion shop Three Little Birds and Little Boy Blue is located in the lobby and is well worth a visit, and in the coming months the lobby will also be home to a host of other retailers, a boutique hairdresser and a fully-fledged hotel kitchen offering a wide range of meals.

The NewActon precinct is buzzing with activity, and within a minute's walk of Hotel Hotel you can find the newly refurbished Parlour Wine Room, bar and restaurant A.Baker, quirky cafe Mocan & Green Grout and the gorgeous Palace Electric Cinema.

"There is so much going on in NewActon. Pretty much every night there is an event or something new to try either at the hotel or in the neighbouring cafes and restaurants or in the Nishi gallery," Atherton says.

"Then there are the community vegetable gardens, the old trees, the landscaping and urban design and all of the nooks that it provides for people to sit in. It really is like being in a community village."

THE ART

Art and design is an integral part of the Hotel Hotel experience, and you can spend hours just wandering around examining the fascinating objects on display.

Co-founder Nectar Efkarpidis has been carefully curating much of the hotel's art collection for more than 10 years, and the rest has been designed especially for the hotel by dozens of different designers and makers.

One of the most eye-catching art installations is the mosaic room in the lobby, a function room where the life's work of ceramic artist Gerard Havekes has been put up in one breathtaking display.

The lobby is also home to the hotel's public collection of functional art. Created by Broached Commissions with designer-makers Lucy McCrae, Anna-Wili Highfield,

Charles Wilson and Adam Goodrum, the pieces are inspired by Canberra, from couches based on Walter Burley Griffin's love of geometry to bogong moth chandeliers.

Even everyday items have been especially designed for the hotel – the luxurious robes come courtesy of a collaboration with Australian designer-maker Elizabeth Pertile, and the bathroom bins are made by Canberra metalworker David Aarons.

Local artist Amos Enders created pendant lights, water glasses, water and milk jugs, vases, platters and coasters for the hotel with his business partner Wade Briggs.

Their recycled glass cups and jugs, made from old beer bottles and wine bottles, are used throughout all of the rooms as well as in the bar, and are some of the hotel's most memorable pieces.

"Hotel Hotel was a great project to work on," Enders says.

"When you really look around there are so many discarded objects of everyday use that have unnoticed potential. What gets us going is seeing that potential – you can make a few changes to something that was thrown away and turn it into something that can once again be suitable for everyday use."