

Travel

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CHECK IN

THE DURHAM HOTEL, DURHAM, N.C.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT RAUSCH FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Durham Hotel is saturated with a vintage “Mad Men” vibe, from its colorful lobby to its striped exterior.

Sense of Place, Midcentury Style

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 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.

INGRID K. WILLIAMS

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