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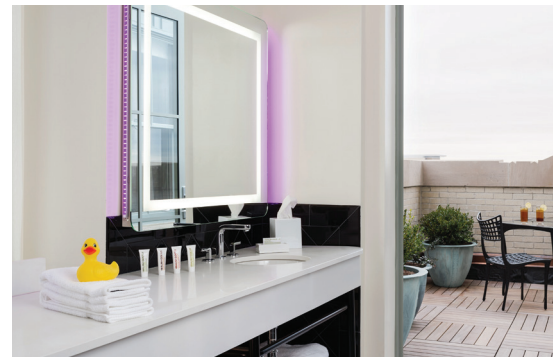
DESIGN IN DURHAM

How the city's hotel interior design is proving that Durham is a hot bed for design in the South.

By Blake Miller

In the last several years, Durham has fast become one of the Carolinas' top destinations. Frequently covered by travel magazines like *Travel + Leisure* as a great weekend getaway spot, Durham's years-long place marker as a hidden gem is now being exposed. And for good reason: besides the fantastic food scene and cultural offerings (much of which is thanks to the city's nearby universities Duke and University

of North Carolina-Chapel Hill), Durham is easily one of the most design savvy areas in the Southeast. And one of the best indicators of this is the city's growing list of stunning hotels, an eclectic mix of traditional English country cottages to more contemporary, mid-century modern options. Here's a look at three of the top properties in Durham (with one just outside the city limits) that boast stellar design, reinforcing claims that Durham is ready for the spotlight.



21C MUSEUM DURHAM

Known for its contemporary art gallery-meets-luxury boutique hotel concept, 21c Durham exemplifies this hotel line's brand. The 1937 Art Deco-style Hill Building, which was designed by Shreve, Lamb & Harmon – who most notably drew the plans for the Empire State Building – was once home to the L.S. Stone department store. 21c teamed with design firm Deborah Berke Partners to create the modernized Art Deco-inspired interiors. “We looked at what was happening at the time of the building’s heyday, and the glamour and modernity of Art Deco architecture influenced the original architects,” Molly Swyers says, chief brand officer at 21c, which is based in Louisville, Kentucky. “Our team thought about innovation in the 21st century and what would those interiors from decades ago look like today. How do you inject 21st century animation into this historic space.”

HIGHLIGHTS

The artwork

It may seem obvious to highlight the artwork throughout the hotel. After all, the onsite curator rotates artwork frequently, so almost every visit provides a new exhibit to view. But it’s the permanent installations and pieces that are worth a second look. At check-in, atop the oversized desk is an installation by artist Claire Shegog. Underneath Lucite cases, three concentric circles feature hundreds of tiny identical figurines, each hand-painted by Shegog, and placed in circles resulting in a dramatic pattern of color. A large three-piece work by Duke Riley in The Counting House restaurant pays homage to the city’s tobacco history, while each table in the restaurant’s bar boasts hand-etched maps of Durham.

The vault

One of the original features the hotel’s design team was able to save was the vault, which was restored to its historic appear-

ance and transformed into a meeting space. Interestingly, the original safety deposit boxes remain, but it’s the artwork on the actual floor of the vault that’s worthy of scrutiny. Created by artists Leslie Lyons and JB Wilson and consisting of 305 ceramic hand-painted tiles, *BANK (Unswept Floor series)* is a nod to the building’s rich financial history and illustrates the transformation of the Hill Building into 21c.

The entry

“We wanted to embrace the historic fabric that was original to the building,” Swyers says of existing materials, such as the terrazzo floors found throughout the hotel and guest rooms. The building’s original silver leaf ceiling was restored and the existing green marble walls, which were once covered up by the previous tenants, were uncovered. “These features were exactly the type of design details our team wanted to emphasize in the interior design of the hotel.”



Above: Photography by Travis Dove



Top and Bottom: Photography by Spencer Lowell

DURHAM HOTEL

This one-time bank building was built in the 1960s, which became the inspiration for its decor when it was restored to its original grandeur and transformed into the current 53-room Durham Hotel. “The idea of the hotel was very much inspired by the overtly mid-century architecture of the building,” general manager Craig Spitzer says. “There was no choice but to pay homage to that great era of design based on how the building screamed it from the street side.” Los Angeles-based Commune Design was tasked with creating an interior aesthetic that boasted mid-century modern detailing with a contemporary vibe. To achieve that, the design team drew inspiration from Black Mountain College, a school founded in the early 1930s near Asheville, which inspired several craft and design movements in the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s.

HIGHLIGHTS

The throws

“We wanted to create something that felt like home,” Spitzer says. “A small, independent boutique hotel should feel like home. You should feel like you can kick your feet up and enjoy the environment, not be intimidated by the high design of the space.” To that end, Commune added soft denim throw blankets by local designers Raleigh Denim to each guest room bed to create a cozy environment where you’re encouraged to curl up with a blanket and a good book.

The guestrooms

Unlike traditional guest rooms, Durham Hotel’s unique rooms are designed to highlight the floor-to-ceiling windows, a trademark architectural detail from the original building. Sofas are tucked away in small nooks and closets are non-existent, a purposeful feature that is thoughtfully replaced with hand-carved wooden hooks to hang various items of clothing. In lieu of luxury finishes like marble,

Commune opted to incorporate Corian countertops and Marmoleum flooring in the guest bathrooms to give the space a warm, homey vibe.

The dining chairs

In the rooftop bar and restaurant, Commune wanted a more rustic look that was both comfortable for lounging and stylish. Leather sling-back baseball chairs were designed by Texas-based Garza Marfa to give an organic accent to an otherwise modern space.

Brass accents

There were a few original design elements that were salvageable during the renovation process including the brass accents that are featured prominently throughout the two-story in-house restaurant. The metal brackets provide a dose of the mid-century modern vibe that Commune incorporated throughout the hotel’s interiors and was a subtle nod to the building’s heyday.



THE FEARRINGTON INN

Designed to feel like an old English country village and nestled on an old dairy farm, Chapel Hill-based Fearington Inn was founded in the early 1970s after its owners became enamored with the English countryside. The Relais & Chateau property’s traditional architecture lent itself to more traditional interior design, which worked well for several years after its opening. But today, the interiors have been updated with modern touches and finishes—many of the guest rooms’ bathrooms have been renovated—that are decidedly clean, sleek, and comfortable sans the oversize floral patterns and dark wood antiques. No two guest rooms are alike in layout or decor as general manager and head designer, Theresa Chiettini, reworks each room every few years to keep things fresh and interesting to new and returning customers alike.

HIGHLIGHTS

The upholstered furniture

During its most recent renovation, general manager Theresa Chiettini and her team, who are behind the interiors of the 32-room property, spa, and restaurant, chose to have nearly all upholstered furniture designed by Hickory-based Gabby Home. “We really want to focus on supporting locally-made and manufactured furniture in our decor so we have been sourcing pieces from North Carolina furniture makers,” Chiettini says.

Rustic elements

To soften the clean, white interiors of the spa, which opened in 2010, Chiettini and spa manager, Angela Avellino, added small doses of rustic elements throughout. Instead of traditional porcelain tubs, oversize metal buckets serve as the basins for pedicures and foot treatments, a nod to the property’s dairy farm history.

Floors

During their travels abroad to England, the owners came across reclaimed wood from a theater on the Thames River. They brought the wood back and used it in the flooring in the guest rooms.

The traditions

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