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Stylish Stays in College Towns

By CEIL MILLER-BOUCHET DECEMBER 11, 2014 5:00 PM



The lobby at the Graduate Hotel in Athens, Ga. Christian Horan

Graduate Hotels is attempting to make college towns cooler.

The company is redeveloping former motels and inns with a focus on community-centric design as well as convivial bars, diners and coffee shops.

“Of course, alumni have strong links to their university’s towns for sports and other events,” said the president of Graduate Hotels, Christian Strobel. But he said he also sees tourist and business travel potential in these places because “they’re true hotbeds of creativity and entrepreneurship, where anything seems possible.”

That thinking has informed each hotel’s individual design, he said, by going beyond the usual college colors and mascots.

The Tempe, Ariz., Graduate Hotel, for example, a 141-room former Howard Johnson, references Arizona State University’s programs in life sciences and the arts by featuring a stylishly designed art farm in the lobby and Native American artwork throughout the hotel.

There’s also Tapacubo, a food truck-inspired Mexican restaurant, and the Normal Diner, serving comfort food like pancakes made from local blue corn with pecans and agave nectar in the former International House of Pancakes space.

A Graduate Hotel in Athens, Ga., has also opened, with Oxford, Miss.; Madison, Wis.; and Charlottesville, Va., to open soon.

Rates begin at around \$100 a night.