

# The New York Times

## At Budget Hotels, Local Flavor Is Now Included

It's not unusual to view local art, consume regional foods or meet area trendsetters in boutique and luxury hotels. Now — to the great welcome of penny-pinching travelers — the trend in lodging to embody the location has trickled down to budget hotels and even brands generally regarded as cookie cutter.

Graduate Hotels, recently opened in five college towns across the country and with another five opening in 2016 (rooms average \$120 a night), tries to tell the story of its locations through design. Among them are the Graduate Madison in Madison, Wis., where the chandeliers are made from canoes and oars, and the Graduate Athens in Georgia, which hosts a music club that pays homage to the local music scene (groups including R.E.M. and Widespread Panic hail from Athens).

Opened in December outside Aspen, Colo., the new Element Basalt-Aspen (rooms from \$169), part of Starwood Hotels & Resorts' extended-stay Element brand, serves locally roasted Bonfire Coffee, pours local beer and booze at its daily complimentary happy hour and hosts a branch of Basalt Bike & Ski for rentals or tune-ups.

Many large hotel companies are



The décor at Hyatt House Denver/Downtown reflects its location.

adding affordable, locally skewed brands to their portfolios, including AccorHotels, which acquired a 35 percent stake in the French boutique chain Mama Shelter and plans to open 20 new locations in the next five years, including London and New York. Mama Shelter Los Angeles (from \$169) features Los Angeles-based film scripts in the rooms and a restaurant with a ceiling displaying chalk draw-

ings by local artists.

In Denver, the new Hyatt Place and Hyatt House Denver/Downtown, combining a budget business hotel and an extended-stay option (from \$149), recently opened with lobby décor that defies brand norms to include an art installation made of snowboards, another made of climbing ropes, and a third of wood harvested from trees killed by pine beetles. Several pairs of

locally made Icelantic skis are on display, and interested guests are directed to buy them from a shop nearby.

"People want differentiation, and they want to experience a place," said Chad Cuddy, general manager of the new dual Hyatt in Denver. "Our management company challenged the brand to step away from everything being mandated and to see the benefit of regionalizing it and making it unique."

The Courtyard San Francisco Union Square (from \$139) just completed a \$38 million renovation to ensure that its 1929 building looked independent despite waving the Marriott flag, including creating Art Deco-inspired light fixtures, wood-framed dining nooks in the lobby and abstract large-scale photos of the city.

"The designer has to look for the underlying story based on where the property is located and the target demographic," said David Dunphy, principal at Studio HBA, which designed the hotel and is currently working on similarly customizing a Courtyard and a Hampton Inn, both in Santa Monica, Calif. "Out in the suburbs it gets harder to tell that story."

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