

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JUNE 20, 2010

Travel

Affordable Boutique Hotels in New York

Heavy on design and lower on cost, a new breed of hotel hits the city. Stephen Heyman takes six rooms for a test drive.

Fashion 26

WHY BOOK? A quick step from the Fashion Institute of Technology, this shiny new hotel by Wyndham tries hard to live up to its name. There's a Best Dressed Guest contest held occasionally (winners get room upgrades), the Mondrian-like mural above the front desk is made from thread spools, and the concierge keeps tabs on sample sales. No, you won't see a gaggle of models during check-in, but the hotel does have fun playing dress-up.

ROOM A standard room was maybe a size medium, with plenty of nods to fashion: buttons on the door numbers, a merino herringbone throw on the bed and mint-green polka dots on the walls. Housekeeping staff members wear custom dresses that hint, naughtily, at French maid. A big window offered postcard views of the Empire State Building, as well as peeks inside garment showrooms across the street.

VIBE Despite all the sartorial trappings, guests dressed like any in your typical off-the-rack hotel. On a recent

Monday, there were F.I.T. parents in the slate-gray lobby, and suits trading airport stories in the elevator. There's a chatty cocktail scene at the lobby bar, but Rare, the fiery orange dining room, was desolate. Maybe the ho-hum menu — part burger joint, part formal steakhouse — was to blame. A rooftop bar is expected to open this month.

MINTS Service was elegant and unobtrusive. Arriving two hours before check-in was no problem; the attendant had a room ready. Come back from dinner and the bed is turned down: the pillows stacked upright, the comforter removed, a note left on the sheets with tomorrow's weather, and a mint. There's also a decent gym in the basement and a single-cup Keurig coffee maker in the room.

152 West 26th Street, between Avenue of the Americas and Seventh Avenues; (212) 858-8888; f26nyc.com; free Wi-Fi and a \$15 cold and \$19.70 hot-breakfast buffet, along with à la carte; 280 rooms from \$229.



The lobby at Fashion 26.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TONY CENICOLA/THE NEW YORK TIMES