

Rhode Island's rockin' new hotel (complete with complimentary fixies)



The Dean's rooms have a clean, industrial aesthetic, but no closets. (Christian Harder)

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. — Special to The Globe and Mail
Friday, July 25 2014

The Dean

22 Fountain St., Providence, R.I., thedeanhotel.com; 52 rooms from \$99 (U.S.), includes breakfast.

Smack dab in the middle of Providence's bustling DOWNCITY neighbourhood, the Dean brings a fresh and hip vibe to an otherwise drab collection of chain hotels. That people come here to party is clear — a painted sign on its side façade reads "For a long time, I went to bed early," suggesting such behaviour should be abandoned pronto, and the neon sign in my hallway proclaims that it is, "Time for another."

Location, location

Perhaps considering there are three universities within a 30-minute walk, the vibrant youthful theme and hotel name is understandable. At the Dean, you'll feel the influence of each of the nearby institutions: Expect the Ivy League panache of Brown University, the imaginative dining of Johnson & Wales University (known for its cooking school) and, most notably, the eye-catching pizzazz of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD).

Also nearby is the "Little Italy" neighbourhood of Federal Hill, as are local institutions such as the RISD Museum and the Providence Athenaeum, both open to the public. And don't miss WaterFire – a series of bonfires that appear every weekend on 80 braziers strategically placed amidst the Providence River – and the accompanying street party of food trucks and bands.

Design

Expect a clean, industrial aesthetic. Guest rooms feature iron bed frames and desks made by a local metal fabricator, dark plank floors, white beadboard and crisp black and white bathrooms with gleaming brass hardware. Some guests may be troubled by the lack of a closet, but I liked hanging my dresses from hooks on the bedroom wall like works of art. Also missing, though hardly missed: a phone, alarm clock and mini-bar. (I wouldn't have minded an empty cooler, though.) There was an iron and a hair dryer, but they were stored, disconcertingly, under the bed.

Best (Hipster) Amenity

A fleet of complimentary fixed-gear bicycles stand at the ready.

If I could change one thing

The hotel's solo elevator – a tiny, creaky affair – was charming at first, but I quickly tired of lugging open its unco-operative gates, which always seemed on the verge of closing on my arm.

Eat in or eat out

There are many options nearby but sticking to the confines of the hotel for a night doesn't feel like a compromise at Faust. It's a spot-on beer hall with wursts, schnitzels and pretzels. Then, fortified by drink, brave Boombbox, a karaoke bar at the back of the hotel. To wind down, slip into a banquette at the Magdalene Room, which offers an intimate speakeasy vibe of classic cocktails and confessional conversation.

Whom you'll meet

At breakfast, I discovered a youthful mixed crowd enjoying the free continental breakfast of artisanal java and pastries from Foremost, a local bakery. There was a young woman in a grey fedora logged onto her laptop, a professorial middle-aged man peering at his smartphone and two historic preservationists from Toronto soliciting the barista's opinions on the top "cottages" in Newport, about a 45-minute drive away.

The writer was a guest of the hotel.

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