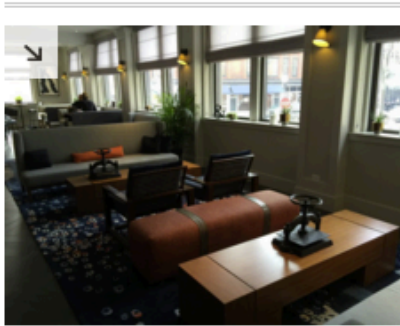


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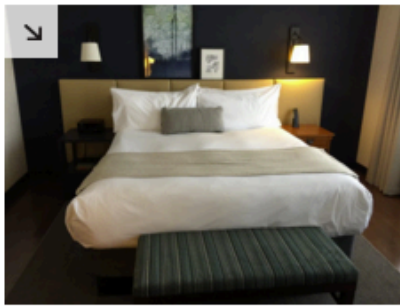
TRAVELIN' MAINE(RS): Portland

Press Hotel is gorgeous and modern without letting go of its history

BY GEORGE AND LINDA SMITH



Lounge at the Press Hotel in Portland.



Bedroom at the Press Hotel in Portland



Bedroom at the Press Hotel in Portland.

Walking into Portland's Press Hotel for the first time was an awesome experience. I'd read a lot about the conversion of the Guy Gannett Building, which houses the Portland Press Herald, into a beautiful, luxurious downtown hotel. But seeing it was a special treat. They have managed to create a gorgeous, modern hotel, with tons of amenities, while keeping its history alive — starting with a wall of old typewriters just to the right of check-in desk.

I loved the large, beautiful writing desk in our room (where I sat to write this column) and the famous sayings posted everywhere, including this one on the desk, from Winston Churchill, "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." The staff must read this one every day, because they are friendly and helpful.

Our room was stunning, with so many little details that make a stay here memorable and comfortable. There are also beautiful works of art throughout the hotel, including wooden benches by Thomas Moser.

I was concerned about parking, and knowing that you can park on the street for free at night, I did that, only

to get a \$30 parking ticket after I failed to notice the small print on one sign indicating no parking on that side of the street during certain hours. The next day, we took advantage of the hotel's valet service, which takes care of your car for your entire stay, delivers it to the front door when you need it and even shuttles you around town in a van. For \$22, it was a real bargain.

The first night of our stay, we enjoyed the annual awards banquet of the Maine Restaurant Association. The social gathering before dinner featured a bunch of chefs offering tasty appetizers, and I do mean tasty.

My favorite was a scallop appetizer from the chefs at Nonantum, in Kennebunkport. Linda's was the potato and gorgonzola pancake by the chef/owner of Bintliff's, in Ogunquit.

It seemed appropriate to enjoy a Smiling Irish Bastard microbrew from the Geaghan family, given that they were recognized at the evening dinner as restaurateurs of the year. If you read this column regularly, you know how much Linda and I love Geaghan's Pub, in Bangor. Larry Geaghan gave a wonderful, heartwarming speech when they all got up on stage to accept the well-deserved award with his brothers Larry and Peter and his son Andrew.

Videos by Portland's Nomad Pictures were featured with each award, and the one of chef of the year James Walter, of Five-O restaurant in Ogunquit, was particularly interesting. Krista Col, owner of Sur Lie in Portland, won the Rising Star Award. Indeed she is.

The speeches and memorials about Bill Zoidis brought back wonderful memories of eating at Bill's Pilot's Grill in Bangor. It must have been special for Michael Carney, of Governor's Restaurants, to win the Bill Zoidis Lifetime Achievement Award.

Linda

“Beyond Words” is the motto found beneath the Press Hotel’s name on its website. And that it is. Through clever, subtle images, you will be constantly reminded that this is a former workplace where words were churned out on a daily basis.

The gray carpet with letters scattered as if they’d spilled onto the floor made me smile each time I went into the hallway. Eye-catching wallpaper composed of headlines from decades of stories published here is like a giant piece of artwork. It’s cleverly designed and just plain fun to read.

The Inkwell, located in the lobby, is a bar serving drinks, coffee and light breakfast pastries. With lots of seating, natural light and many artifacts to catch your eye, this is a comfortable spot to lounge in. Also in the lobby is a fireplace and cozy seating. The stunning two-story art installation of a wall of typewriters, by Erin Hutton, will definitely draw you in.

The rooms are light and modern. Elegant simplicity is created through modern furniture and a chic color scheme of black, white and taupe. The rooms feature a vintage-style reporter’s desk, wood floors and large comfortable beds with heavenly linens. Local artwork and an Angela Adams woven art piece decorate the walls.

Quotes and one-liners appear in unexpected places. “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog” was found on the back of the leather swivel chair. Anyone who took a typing class might remember that one, as it got us to use all the letters in the alphabet. Words are carefully used here, and they often evoke a smile.

You are likely to feel pampered here. The modern bathroom fixtures included a large walk-in shower with a rain shower head. Ahhhh. Stone walls, counters and floor add to the elegance. One of the features I liked the best was the oversized windows. Not only did they make the room bright, but also the views of Portland were outstanding. You can even glimpse the ocean in one direction and Back Bay in the other. The location is prime for walking, and it is fun to strike out and find all the shops and eateries in this wonderful city.

Visit George’s website — georgesmithmaine.com — for book reviews, outdoor news and all Travelin’ Maine(rs) columns, found listed by town in the “Best of Maine” section.