

[The Washington Post]

Inside

- Upcoming events
- A chair for kids of all ages
- Optimism in the garden
- Growing your own artichokes

HOMIE

THURSDAY, JANUARY 17, 2002

EXTRA
District Community
News Inside

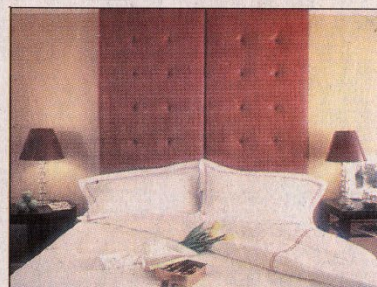
Auto
Classified



Washington, This Is Your WAKE-UP CALL



Bedding down in Washington's new boutique hotels: the Topaz, left, and the Rouge, below.



PHOTOS ABOVE BY RON BLUNT PHOTOGRAPHY





PHOTOS BY MARK FINKENSTADT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Positively shagadelic: The lobby of the Hotel Rouge beckons travelers with stylish accommodations: a white leather sofa, towering chair, faux fur throw and red cowhide coffee table.



A desk clerk from the Topaz dressed in his iridescent orange uniform.

By JURA KONCIUS
Washington Post Staff Writer

When well-traveled New York designer Clodagh checked into the new Topaz Hotel tucked away on a tree-lined block of N Street NW a few weeks ago, she was hardly expecting the unexpected.

Washington's hotel scene is known more for its, let us say, convenient, convention-friendly accommodations than for its memorable interiors. But San Francisco's Kimpton Hotel & Restaurant Group has arrived on the scene, bringing leopard-print carpeting, Annie Leibovitz photographs, molded plastic Verner Panton chairs and "Chill Rooms" stocked with PlayStation2s and color-coordinated Gatorade.

The Topaz opened in October. And tonight, a few blocks away at the Hotel Rouge a party celebrates the saucy make-over of the one-time Quality Hotel just off Scott Circle. Three more Kimpton properties for downtown Washington on are the drawing board.

At hotels like these, sleep is only part of the point. They cater to a design-savvy clientele that wants more than quilted bedspreads, muted color schemes and giant TV screens. These establishments, known as boutique hotels, are more intimate, more customized, with sleek, luxury-laden bathrooms, provocative decor and often an element of surprise.

"Boutique hotels have provided a great forum for educating people about the unlimited possibilities of design," says Andrea Dawson Sheehan, the Seattle designer who decorated the Topaz. "Kimpton doesn't want boring, beautiful convention hotels. They insist that we break the rules."

See HOTELS, Page 5

**HIP NEW HOTELS
ARE BRINGING
EYE-OPENING
STYLE TO
CONVENTION CITY**

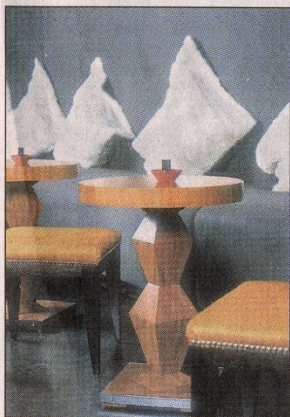
Hip New Boutique Hotels Greet Washington Sleepers

HOTELS, From 1

For travelers, such hotels are more like shopping at an intimate boutique than an impersonal department store. Instead of acres of wall-to-wall carpeting and grand overscaled chandeliers, boutique properties tend toward shag rugs, cork floors and low lighting. Instead of peanuts and a Bud in the minibar, you might find Red Hots and peppermint foot cream.

"I was bowled over by the Topaz, first when an extraordinary-looking doorman floated my way wearing a fabulous blue iridescent coat and hat that I wanted," says Clodagh, known for her earthy, edgy interiors. "The lobby had a wonderful sexy bar. The bedroom had wild wide stripes and a lot of color plus huge mirrors. The windows actually opened. I travel a lot, and the last thing you want is the same old, same old. It was sensual arousal."

The boutique concept had a bicoastal



PHOTOS BY MARK FINKENSTADT FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

birth in the 1980s. Nightclub-kings-turned-hoteliars Ian Schrager and his late partner Steve Rubell in New York and the Kimpton Group in California aimed to make good design accessible to the trend-conscious masses, at an affordable rack rate.

Many of Schrager's hotels—the Hudson in New York, the Sanderson in London, the Delano in Miami's South Beach—were transformed by French design superstar Philippe Starck, who concocted witty interiors with a tongue-in-cheek attitude. It didn't hurt that Schrager and Rubell knew how to draw celebrities like Madonna and Matt Damon to their hip lounges and how to court the press.

"These hotels are a manifestation of a lifestyle and a point of view. It's like 'You are where you stay'—not only where you eat or what kind of car you drive," says Schrager, who's stable now includes 15 hotels worldwide and who for years has said he is scouting locations in the District.

Kimpton, however got here first with the 99-room Topaz, its first East Coast property. The company's usual approach is to revive small, run-down properties with cutting-edge design, offering an alternative to larger chains while charging competitive rates. The Topaz, in what was the dated Canterbury Hotel, reopened with an East-meets-West exotic theme and rooms priced at \$145 to \$275 a night. (www.kimptongroup.com).

Several blocks away, the 137-room Rouge, which charges \$125 to \$255, welcomes guests with shag rugs, pop art and lots of red, including crimson cowhide coffee tables and burgundy velvet draperies.

Both properties, and two others still being planned, are owned by LaSalle Hotel Properties in Bethesda, a real estate investment trust, which contracts with Kimpton to design and

