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Provenance Hotels, which bought the Hotel Preston in 2004, has completed a \$6 million renovation on the property near Nashville International Airport. The owners are hoping to make the boutique-hotel concept a success outside the downtown area.

Hotel Preston near airport hopes makeover will lure creative types

'Boutique' quirks include 'living art,' musician packages

By CHAS SISK
Staff Writer

Boutique hotels, those quirky little inns meant to appeal to the hipster set, are fast becoming a fixture of downtowns across the country, including Nashville's. Now a Pacific Northwest hotel company is trying to take the concept a much less hospitable environment — the airport.

Provenance Hotels, the Portland, Ore., firm that bought the old Radisson next to Nashville International Airport and renamed it the Hotel Preston in 2004, has just completed a \$6 million effort to morph the 34-year-old property from boxy airport high-rise to something that will appeal to the creative class.

With modern art, tour packages geared toward the aspiring musician and, perhaps most unusual, a "living art concept" in which a scantily clad young woman stays in a glass-plated room four nights a week,

VIDEO

Search **HOTEL** to see a video of the Pink Slip Bar inside the Hotel Preston.



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Shay Hart relaxes in her "fishbowl room" at the Pink Slip Lounge in the Hotel Preston. As part of a \$6 million renovation, a mock hotel room was built into the lounge, and various women are hired to stay in the room for several hours a night.

Provenance is betting that it can steal sophisticated business travelers away from Nashville's upscale inns in Midtown and downtown. Rates range from \$119 to \$319 a night.

"This is very different from your typical Hilton, Marriott, et

cetera," said Howard Jacobs, Provenance's chief operating officer. "We target (travelers from) Nashville's feeder cities — L.A., New York, Dallas, Atlanta — and most of those are cities that have really had exposure to the independent

boutique property."

The boutique concept is not totally new to Nashville. Provenance has been calling the Hotel Preston a boutique since

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Preston: Hotel chases after arty younger professionals

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it bought and renamed the building four years ago.

The owners of the Wyndham Union Station on Broadway and the Hotel Indigo on West End Avenue, likewise, call their properties boutiques.

Unusual for a 'boutique'

With 200 rooms, a restaurant and 24-hour room service, the Hotel Preston stretches the definition of a boutique, a term the lodging industry has typically reserved for small, independent hotels in historic buildings, with limited services.

In its marketing strategy, the Hotel Preston is clearly chasing the same clientele that stays in boutiques, namely younger professionals with an inclination toward offbeat decor.

"They're usually ... forward-thinking and at times kind of out of step with the mainstream," said Drew Dimond, chief executive of Nashville-based Dimond Hospitality Consulting. "A boutique goes after the younger, hipper generation."

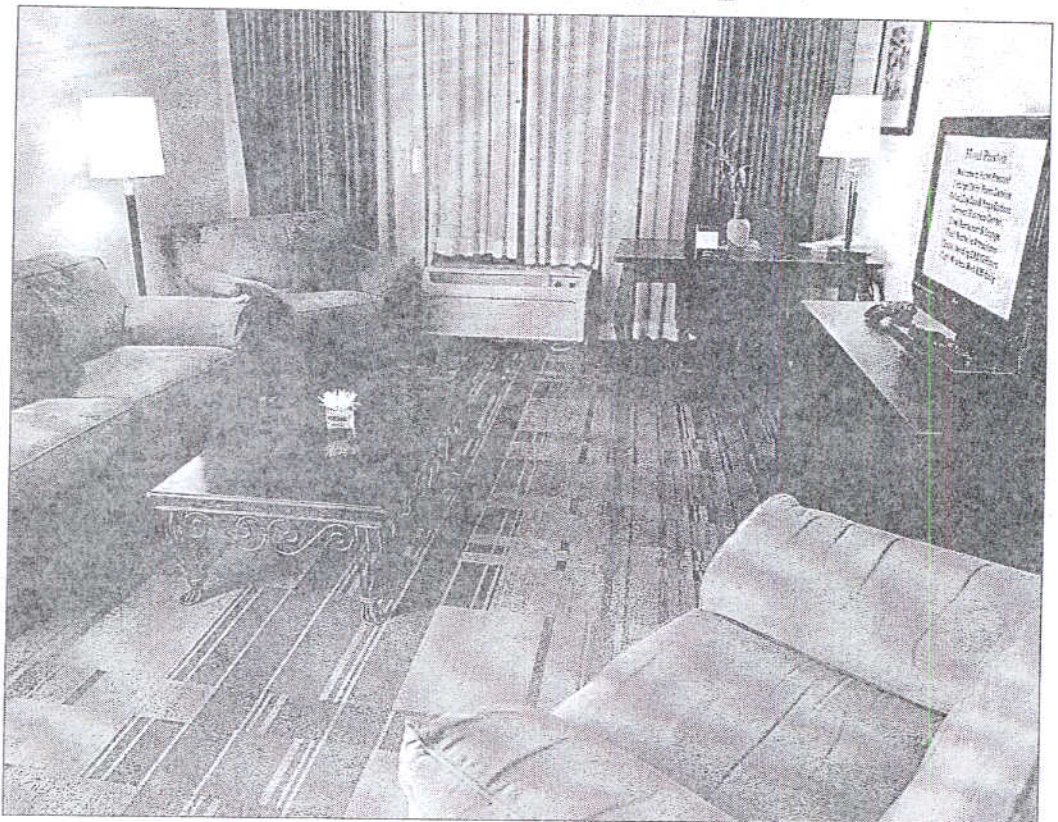
To attract such travelers, Provenance has decorated every room with prints by famed Nashville photographers Ed Clark and Wilmer "Slick" Lawson, and the public areas with pieces from other local artists.

Guests are offered a pillow menu that lets them select the headrest that suits them best.

Provenance also has developed a tour package in which guests perform on the barroom stage with professional musicians.

Even the Preston's signage is meant to contain a dash of creativity.

The word "Gather" appears over the entrance to the hotel's 4,400-square-foot ballroom. "Sit" appears on the door to the women's restroom. "Stand" is on the men's room.



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'I don't get it'

No detail is more unusual than the hotel's voyeuristic living art concept. From 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, the Preston hires a young woman to live in a glass-plated mock hotel room in a far corner of the cocktail lounge wearing a pink, thigh-length slip.

The Preston's local managers find the women, who change nightly. Provenance officials declined to discuss the women's pay.

At 8 o'clock on Thursday, the performer was a 20ish, chestnut-haired woman with black-lacquered toenails. She lounged on the bed next to a laptop and a half-drunk bottle of Sprite, while fiddling with a cell phone, watching an episode of *Friends* and periodically tugging down the hem of

her slip.

A lady at a nearby table repeatedly muttered "I don't get it" to her companion, a man in a University of Kentucky jacket.

"Art is always bringing out opinions in people," Jacobs said. "It may be favorable, it may be unfavorable, but the key is to bring out opinions in people."

Provenance hopes the installation, which the hotel began about a month ago, will draw guests and locals to the club, which also features live music.

Location is unusual

Getting people to check out the Hotel Preston is its biggest challenge, Dimond said.

Boutique hotels are almost always located in the downtown, where guests can wan-

der to nearby restaurants and bars. Few boutique hotel developers venture outside the urban core, much less as far as the airport.

"That doesn't mean it can't be successful," Dimond said. "It just means it doesn't follow the normal pattern."

Provenance believes Nashville International Airport's proximity to Music Row and the Grand Ole Opry House — two big draws for the people it hopes to attract — as well as the downtown itself will help it woo guests.

"The traveler base that comes to a property like this has every frequent-guest card in their wallet," Jacobs said. "But they don't care about the points, and they'll forgo it to have a different experience."

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