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HOME SUITE HOME

Guests are emulating the boutique-hotel look in their own houses

By Christopher Muther GLOBE STAFF

February 23, 2006 -- When Shari Savitch stays at the fashionable W Hotel in Chicago, she feels remarkably at home, and it's not just because of the pillow-top mattress or the crisp linens. Not unlike the guest rooms at the W, Savitch's two-bedroom Beacon Hill condominium possesses all the earmarks of a posh boutique hotel. Her clutter-free bedroom is a study in sleek minimalism, and the living room is a meticulously planned gathering area that could very well be located in a secluded nook off a swank lobby. All that's missing is the cocktail lounge with a DJ spinning Thievery Corporation records.

"I wanted a look that was simple, very clean, and uncluttered with sleek, elegant lines," says Savitch, who works as a nursing administrator. "It just so happens that is exactly what you find in these high-end hotels. It's less is more, which is my new philosophy."

Savitch is one of a growing number of dwellers who has adopted the ultimate less-is-more philosophy by re-creating the calm surroundings of boutique hotels at home. It's easy to see why: Most designer hotels possess gorgeous, spotless rooms tastefully appointed in muted palettes of warm browns, soothing grays, and hints of aubergine. Hotel style, a phrase that once would have raised eyebrows and brought to mind visions of pilled, scratchy comforters and spartan Super 8 shower stalls, is now a designer buzz word for modern elegance.

"It's all about self-indulgence," says Newton-based interior designer Leslie Fine. "If you enjoy staying in these hotels on vacation, then naturally you want to bring that facet into your home."

Fine, who designed Savitch's condo and who also decorated several rooms in her Newton home in the style of a boutique hotel, is one of many experts with clients looking to emulate hotel living at home. Page Ikeda, whose Atlanta-based company Modern Basics does private design work and makes pillows that are in use at W Hotels in New York and Chicago, recently worked with a client who had stayed at a San Francisco boutique hotel and came back excited to overhaul his interior to achieve the same effect.

"He specifically said, 'This is the look that I want.' The room he stayed in had a lot of soothing colors and was very calming," she says. "I think what people are

after is a specific feel. When they're away on vacation and staying in these spaces, they feel relaxed. They want that same element in their homes."

It's not only professional designers noticing the trend. After repeated requests (and thefts) from guests looking to bring their cosmopolitan vacations home with them, high-end hotels have begun offering customers an opportunity to buy the furnishings that fill their rooms. The W was one of the first, starting with robes and pillows and eventually expanding to offerings such as Philippe Starck's Ghost Chair and Alessi's E-Li-Li Vase. You can now buy the duvet cover that is used in Times Square (Starlight) or San Diego (Blue Marine). You can even buy the ambient, chill-out compact disc that plays in the clock radio when you check into the room. Hotels such as the Ritz, Four Seasons, and Marriott have all started selling furnishings that are used in their rooms, while stores such as Nordstrom, Linens-NThings, and Williams-Sonoma Home are selling goods that are billed as "hotel collection."

"Over the years, our customers have ripped rooms apart trying to figure out who makes the mattress, or where they can get the shower head," says Marriott spokeswoman Laurie Goldstein. "Because these are goods that are made specifically for us, we usually can't tell them a store where they can find them. So it makes sense for us to sell them."

Designers and hoteliers have realized that luxury hotel rooms are the new model homes, and the fact that these hotels are the auberge of the sleek, bronzed, and wealthy is only enhancing the spillover from commercial to residential. The rooms also serve as decorating showplaces because guests are given an opportunity to live in a room that highlights clutter-free, modern design. Meanwhile, people are anxious to buy hotel mattresses, sheets, pillows, and comforters because they can sleep on them, something they're not able to do in stores.

"I had a friend who stayed at the Mondrian in Miami, a guy with very traditional tastes," says Liz Bates, co-owner of Montage. "And he said 'I get it. I understand what this is about.' And now he's starting to incorporate more of this look in his house. He hasn't gone completely modern, but I think after staying in the room, he doesn't think modern design is so cold and stark. He can now picture himself living in that kind of space."

A Boston company has taken the concept of re-creating hotel rooms in the home a step further, allowing consumers to buy everything in the room — from the headboard to the light fixtures to the porcelain sink — and in the process letting them create a replica. The company, Hoteluxury, started with a partnership with the Nine Zero Hotel and plans to add more hotel partnerships this year. "You have some very big names who are designing for these boutique hotels," says Hoteluxury vice president Sarah Bates. "The average Joe obviously can't afford to hire Philippe Starck or Ian Schrager to design their master suite. But if they can re-create the room in their home with the exact same products, then they

have a room in their home that was essentially designed by a very famous name.”

Not all designers are buying into the concept that hotel style is infiltrating the residential sector. Boston-based designer Frank Roop says that the trend is actually going in the opposite direction and that hotel design is copying home design. The idea behind boutique hotels is to create a space that feels more homelike, Roop says, and therefore people are simply becoming savvy to an aspect of design that hotels stole from homes. David Foley of Foley-Fiore Architects has seen the trend of clients looking to inhabit spaces that resemble hotels, but he offers a word of warning to those who think such a posh environ will fit their lifestyle.

“I remind them that when they’re in a hotel, part of the great feeling of staying there comes from the fact that there’s someone to change the sheets every day, stock the bathroom with new towels, and to straighten up the room,” he says. “Unless you have a live-in maid, those things aren’t going to happen automatically in your house, no matter how nicely you decorate it.”

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