

# The Boston Globe

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## He slept around so you don't have to

By [Christopher Muther](#) | GLOBE STAFF

It's hard to believe now, but when the see-and-be-seen W Boston opened eight years ago in the Theater District, locating a hotel lobby bar where you could lounge with a gimlet while rubbing knee caps with ladies in tight black dresses and their handsome paramours was as difficult to find as a watchable Adam Sandler movie.

Now, as the city's hotel scene booms — there are nearly 2,000 hotel rooms under construction in Boston and Cambridge — the lobby scene has become one of the most important aspects of the lodging experience. As those entrances evolve, big changes are also taking place in the rooms upstairs.

I can say this with authority because I spent a week dragging my suitcase into some of Boston's new, and newly-renovated, hotels. The one thing these properties all have in common is that they're fighting for your attention with big, bright personalities. From voice-activated rooms to carefully curated spirits in the minibar, hotels are eager to show patrons that they're unique. We've entered an era where almost every hotel wants to be labeled boutique. They lend out bicycles and offer cucumber-infused water upon arrival. Neutral has become a dirty word. Hotel chains know that their

discerning patrons watch a lot of HGTV, and these days everyone considers themselves a budding Joanna Gaines with a design opinion.

The other sweeping change is technology. When I conducted a similar survey of Boston's hotels two years ago, some were still charging for Wi-Fi. Now the practice seems obsolete. Meanwhile, USB ports and extra outlets have become as essential as a comfortable pillow, and most of the hotels I sampled have smartly adapted.

Let's head back down to the lobby. Once upon a time the lobby was just the chipper place where guests checked in, or sat and ate a continental breakfast of stale donuts. Now these spaces are the defining welcome mat of your stay. A decade after the W pioneered the concept, and the chain citizenM (which is arriving in Boston soon) refined it, communal gathering areas with fireplaces, games, DJs, or custom-made sofas abound. Some glow purple, others are zen, and some, like the Envoy in the Seaport, are just a scene.

Before the specifics, a quick word on my somewhat subjective survey. None of the hotels knew that a reporter was staying with them. I received no special treatment or discount rate. To make my reviews consistent, I tried to stay in the same room category at each location. I didn't include the Envoy hotel in this list because [I wrote about it](#) shortly after it opened. Also, please note that the rates that I paid were in the winter and will likely rise as the weather gets warmer and more tourists descend upon the city.



### THE HOTEL COMMONWEALTH\*

**The lowdown:** The Commonwealth has anchored the Fenway neighborhood for years, but in late 2015 the hotel, like much of the Fenway, got fancy. The hotel underwent a \$50 million makeover and added a new wing with 96 additional rooms. The new wing has a big Fenway Park focus, including rooms that overlook the park. Technically those rooms overlook the Massachusetts Turnpike, but after that you see Fenway. The lobby isn't necessarily a spot for hanging out at length, but it's so beautiful and comfortable that I loitered there with my laptop. If you want a bar or restaurant, head next door to Eastern Standard.

**The experience:** Before I go any further, I have to confess that I was completely smitten with the Hotel Commonwealth. My spacious room in the new wing faced Fenway (well, the Pike), and the design gave a subtle nod to the 1960s (or maybe it was the early 1970s) with mod lighting, cool wall art, a sofa that resembled a Chanel jacket, a sleek bathroom, and a lot of houndstooth upholstery. Despite the proximity to the highway, I slept like a baby jacked up on Vicks and lemon gin. This is exactly what a hotel room should look and feel like in 2017.

**Coffee maker:** Yes.

**Breakfast included:** No.

**Room service:** Yes.

**On-site dining options:** Eastern Standard Kitchen and Drinks, Island Creek Oyster Bar, the Hawthorne

**Minibar:** No minibar, but there's a refrigerator in the room.

**Gym:** Very small, with treadmills and free weights.

**Theft-worthy toiletries?:** Yes. These are from the Brooklyn brand Apotheke and what I didn't use came home with me.

**Parking:** Valet at \$53 per night.

**Published nightly rate:** Rooms start at \$229 a night. You can also stay in suites starting at \$399 a night, or themed suites at \$599 a night.

**What I paid:** \$272

**Worth the stay?:** A resounding yes. The Commonwealth is my new favorite Boston hotel

*500 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, [www.hotelcommonwealth.com](http://www.hotelcommonwealth.com).*