

## The Suite Smell of Success

Boston's Commonwealth Hotel has raised its game with its Fenway Suite.

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I struggle with Boston. I know, I know: It's a great American city, filled with history, beautiful neighborhoods like Back Bay and the South End, impressive cultural institutions like the Museum of Fine Arts and, well, the Museum of Fine Arts, and enormous civic pride, as evidenced by the city's inspiring comeback from the Boston Marathon bombing in 2013.

But having lived around Boston for some years and visited countless times, I've never found the city very welcoming. Literally and existentially, it's cold. Folks don't say hello on the street; shopkeepers seem more wary than welcoming; those beautiful doors of Beacon Hill loom over pedestrians like the gates of heaven before a sinner. Boston never seems to give outsiders the benefit of the doubt.

But...there's something I need to confess: I'm a New York-born Yankees fan. And I'm a Yankees fan old enough to remember the days when the rivalry was more intense, and the two teams played with the ferocity of players who didn't like each other on or off the field. I liked that era so much, I even wrote a [book about it](#), which—Sox fans, consider this a trigger alert—required me to write sympathetically about Bucky Dent.

It's possible that my decades of devotion to the Bronx Bombers have influenced my feelings toward Boston.

These days, though, I'm a Yankees fan with mixed feelings, because as a lover of baseball generally, I appreciate what the Red Sox have done over the past 15 years, building terrific teams with smart trades, a strong farm system and the judicious use of free agency. And the way the Red Sox ownership has converted the area around Fenway Park into a fan-friendly hangout on game days is brilliant. (That the Yankees haven't done the same is a real shame, and I don't mean that metaphorically.) Yawkey Way actually feels...friendly.

So when the Hotel Commonwealth, just around the corner from Fenway Park in Kenmore Square, invited me to bring my family to stay in its new Fenway Suite for a couple of nights, I decided to give it a try. Yes, I'd be in hostile territory—a suite of rooms dedicated to the history and tradition of the Red Sox. The experience could be like sleeping on a bed of nails—constant pricks of pain, heartbreaking reminders of 2004, photographs of David Ortiz. But the hotel's PR folks knew that I'm a Yankees fan. If they were confident enough to invite me anyway...





The Hotel Commonwealth is about 15 years old, and for most of that time it was owned by Boston University, one of the larger landlords in the Kenmore Square area. In 2012 the university sold the hotel for a reported \$79 million (though not the land it sits on) to a Denver-based hotel company called Sage Hospitality and a private equity firm called Fundamental Advisors. The new owners promptly started investing in the then-145 room hotel and finished a \$50-million expansion at the end of 2015. The result was a new wing with 96 rooms looking across the Mass Pike toward Fenway Park, one of which is the Fenway Suite, an homage to the Red Sox and their handbox of a baseball stadium.

Physically, the suite consists of a bedroom, a spacious living room, a generously sized bathroom and two hallways, one of which features a small kitchen area. But it's what the suite contains that really matters. Along one wall is a replica of the Fenway Park scoreboard; it's actually a chalkboard, so that children can write on it. The living room features a wooden coffee table signed by dozens of recent Red Sox. There's a pitching rubber signed by Yankee-killer Pedro Martinez, a second base signed by Yankee-killer Dave Roberts, a home plate signed by Yankee-killer Jason Varitek. (You'll notice a theme.) There's a rectangular balcony containing seats from Fenway Park. (They're fun, but let's be honest, no one would sit in Fenway Park seats if they weren't in Fenway Park.) Other collectibles include signed baseballs from Ted Williams, Dom DiMaggio and Johnny Pesky, and framed World Series tickets from 1946, 1967 and 1975. The living room features CDs from every band that's played in Fenway—a nice touch. Even the drapes have stitching inspired by the seams of a baseball, which is some impressive attention to detail.



Does it work? Absolutely. Even a Yankee fan can appreciate the fun of a baseball-themed hotel room, and the folks at the Hotel Commonwealth, working in conjunction with the Red Sox, have curated this suite expertly. It's true that the view to Fenway isn't particularly scenic, but you can't expect the hotel to move a highway. Still, looking toward the bright lights of Fenway during a night game, you can't help but feel a little thrill, and you can hear the crowd roar when something big happens. On one night of my stay, I went to Fenway. The Yankees were in town, it was a gorgeous early summer evening, and, walking along the top of the Green Monster, I waved at my wife and two toddler sons standing on the balcony. They waved back. A night at the ballpark doesn't get much better than that. Well—except for the fact that the Sox trounced the Yankees by a score of 8-0. But the pain of loss was softened by the fact that it took about three minutes to walk back to the luxury of the Fenway Suite, a vast improvement over the misery of taking the 6 train home from the Bronx after a Yankee defeat.

Just as important, the hotel works. The renovations both old and new look terrific, and the hotel staff is consistently warm, thoughtful and friendly. The room is expensively outfitted and really comfortable—you'd want to stay here even if you weren't a baseball fan. In fact, if the Sox were playing and you didn't have tickets, this would be a lovely place to order room service and watch the game on TV. The Fenway Park suite costs around \$1000 a night, depending on the time of year. To a New Yorker, that didn't seem particularly expensive—football fans probably spend that much on a couple of decent tickets and a day of tailgating. Staying here during a World Series? That might be a Yankee fan's nightmare, but it would be a baseball lover's dream.



