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Business



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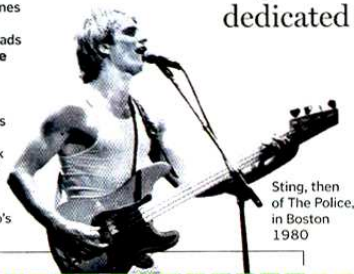
Talking Heads performed at The Rat in Kenmore Square in 1977. In 1997, after 23 years in business, the club closed.

THE RAT'S SECOND LIFE

Among the bands that played the legendary bar before becoming famous:



- The Ramones
- The Cars
- Talking Heads
- **The Police**
- R.E.M.
- Metallica
- Red Hot Chili Peppers
- Joan Jett
- Chris Isaak
- The Pixies
- Blondie
- Lou Reed
- The Go-Go's



Sting, then of The Police, in Boston 1980

High-end hotel adds suite dedicated to gritty music club

By Katie Johnston

GLOBE STAFF

The Rat, the late legendary punk club in Kenmore Square, was known for its filth: sticky floors, broken toilets, broken glass, and, yes, the occasional rat.

The Hotel Commonwealth, located in a high-end property built on the site of the old club, is known for its \$400 rooms with marble sinks and Italian linens.

Early next month, the spirit of the grungy basement bar will be revived at the luxury hotel when the Commonwealth unveils a suite in its honor. Memorabilia from the club will fill every nook and cranny of the 600-square-foot room: the mirror that hung in the Rat's dressing room, covered with band stickers; the duct-taped keyboard that belonged to club mainstay Willie "Loco" Alexander; drumsticks signed by Marky Ramone; a Cars guitar pick. And, of course, a papier-mâché rat.

With a \$40,000-plus decorating budget and a rate that will set guests

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1974 The Rat opens



1997 The Rat closes



PHOTOS BY HOTEL COMMONWEALTH

The Rathskeller Suite at the Hotel Commonwealth will cost guests \$500 to \$900 a night. A keyboard used in the original Rathskeller, also called The Rat, is on display in the hotel suite.



PHOTOS BY ZACK WITTMAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Interior designer David Ashen oversaw workers as they mounted decorations in the new Hotel Commonwealth suite.

The Rat will live on in new hotel suite

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back\$500 to \$900 a night, the opulent suite will be a far cry from its gritty namesake.

"If they're going to catch the true essence of the Rat, then it has to be a horrible room," said Dicky Barrett, frontman of the Boston-based Mighty Mighty Bosstones, who played, and was thrown out of, the Rat dozens of times. It would reek of cigarette smoke and urine and vomit, he said, and have a bashed-in toilet, in honor of the one that was destroyed by rowdy patrons so many times that the owner finally boarded it up.

Guests will be relieved that none of these features made the cut, but the "grit meets glam" decor does include a graffitied entryway wall, as well as bathrobes with the Rat logo. The Backstage Pass package, starting at \$1,095 a night, encourages guests to tap into their inner rock star by designating snacks for the room (no word on whether there is a no-brown-M&M option, a la Van Halen), riding around town in a limo, ordering a "hangover breakfast," and checking out late.

Henry Santoro, a veteran Boston radio DJ and news director at RadioBDC, which is owned by the Globe, said he finds no irony in paying tribute to a down-and-dirty club for "misfits and punks" inside a luxury hotel. "If this is how we can memorialize this establishment," he said, "by all means, let's do it."

The room, which Santoro helped curate, will officially be called the Rathskeller Suite, using the club's proper title, a German term for city hall basement taverns. But chances are good that most people will call it by a less refined name: the Rat Room.

Everybody who was about to be anybody played the Rat — the Police, R.E.M., Talking Heads — some of them were paid in beer. Punk fans flocked



A window in the Rathskeller suite gives a view of the original punk club's location in Kenmore Square. Below, a plaid jacket with the Mighty Mighty Bosstones logo was displayed in the suite.



to the Rat, slamming into one another on the dance floor, and no matter what, the show always went on. Rat owner Jim Harold, who is helping outfit the Commonwealth suite, recalls Metallica playing to six people on a below-zero night one February. Even during the Blizzard of '78, when every other business was shut tight, the Romantics went on as scheduled.

In 1997, after 23 years in business, the Rat closed for good, following a major rainstorm that flooded the club.

Little remains of that gritty

'70s and '80s era in Kenmore Square, which is now overrun with restaurants, high-end shops, and generally well-behaved patrons. But the area's rock 'n' roll past has undergone something of a revival lately. Another area hotel, the Verb, which opened earlier this month, features photos and concert posters from several local clubs, including the Rat.

The Rat suite is part of a \$50 million renovation and expansion underway at the Hotel Commonwealth. Within the next year, the hotel is overhauling all 149of its rooms, includ-

ing the addition of two other Kenmore Square-themed suites: the Terrier, with all things Boston University, and the Loft, featuring works by local artists. The hotel is also building awing with 96 guest rooms, including a Fenway Park suite overlooking the Green Monster.

Rat Room guests will be able to play a bass that belonged to Ken Casey of the Dropkick Murphys and try on one of Barrett's trademark Mighty Mighty Bosstones plaid jackets. Visitors can play vinyl records of Rat artists or, for those who prefer their music digitized, listen to an iPod loaded with Rat music.

"It's not a museum," said hotel general manager Adam Sperlberg. "People should be able to interact with it."

Harold, the owner of the iconic club, is loaning the tape case that held a demo of the Police's "Roxanne," although only temporarily.

"I need to stay in that room," he said, "see if there's any ghosts left."

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