

The Dubya



Here in Texas where Southern drawls and accents are part of our culture and ya'll is a part of day-to-day conversation, we sometimes hear the fourth to last letter of the alphabet referred to as "dubya". In Austin, this letter has a new (and a very large) presence that has changed our skyline and our downtown landscape. The upscale Westin hotel chain has gotten one link longer by opening the W Hotel Austin on 2nd Street last week. Recognizable by its large solid dark gray modular architecture and the line of valets standing out front readily waiting to take care of visitors and guests, the W may have more of big-city feel than down-to earth Austin may be used to, yet, it caters to the Austin community in unique ways and it just feels like a treat to visit this new hip landmark.

Upon entering the W, I received instantaneous service, from the bellman who opened the door for me, to the front desk hostess, who referred me to Jenny, my tour guide, who was excited to debut the hotel to me. I was informed that every W has what they call a "living room", or lounge area upon entrance, but our W split the area into 4 distinct rooms, all presenting a different vibe and diverse decor. The Living Room was cozy, with a fire place and cushiony chairs. The Record Room is my favorite, projecting a sophisticated atmosphere in a room bordered by a wall housing about 8,000 records (playing into the Austin musical scene). The Secret Bar has vibrant red lighting and a fluorescently lit bar where the hip will hang. And, the Screen Porch has windows that open during the warm season, but is more like a sunroom for guests to convene in. Beverages can be ordered from all four rooms, which provides an opportunity for your happy hour experience to be different four days out of the week! Or, when holding a business meeting, match your guest's personality to the feel of the room. The restaurant, Trace, is receiving lots of attention because of their full-time "forager", who scours the Austin area for local ingredients to incorporate into the menu. And, the hotel complies with environmental design guidelines required for LEED certification, which is highly recognized for eco-friendly building (another plus for earth-conscious Austin).

Next, I was taken upstairs to view the meeting rooms, complete with white lounge couches waiting for attendees to be adjourned for their coffee break. Even the conference tables look modern, which black fitted table wrappers and exotic flowers (orchids) sprinkled throughout the space. We went outside to take a look at the upper deck. The view of 2nd Street, City Hall, and the city center do make Austin feel more urban. The open concrete expanse of a deck sits outside of the new ACL Live studios, and provides for a very customizable event-- you can make the space anything you want to since it's wide open, with few restrictions. Event venues are sometimes restricted by poles or layout, but this open space has its arms wide open to entertain guests in the heart of downtown.

Other highlights included the Mini Munchie box in each guest room, including local snacks such as Kakawa cocoa beans, which I recognized from the Downtown Farmer's Market. There's no doubt that if I stayed in one of these rooms, I would be digging into that munchie box. The views of downtown Austin and Lake Austin can be clearly seen from spaces throughout the hotel, such as guest

rooms, the gym (called Sweat), and the Yoga room. Yep, there's a Yoga room. The spa (called Away), in addition to the Record Room for happy hour, may be one of the reasons I visit the W, since I'm typically not needing a hotel in the city where I reside. The spa space is still being finalized, but I got to peek in, and I can definitely see myself enjoying a pedicure there.

Take a look at the photos on the next page for a glimpse of the tour I so generously received from Jenny at the W. And, maybe you'll find me in the Record Room sometime soon...