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TRAVEL

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Thompson Beverly Hills

HOTEL REVIEW

Cool but not terribly quiet

You'll get a surfeit of style —
but not shut-eye — at this
Beverly Hills hotel. [*Page 4*]

HOTEL REVIEW

Where nighttime is the right time

Noisy, spirited and hip, the California mod-style **Thompson Beverly Hills** is at its best in the evening — if sleep isn't a priority.

By VALLI HERMAN
Times Staff Writer

YOU'VE met this guy. He's well-dressed, bounces mostly between New York and Los Angeles, knows everyone. And he won't shut up.

The newest high-concept hotel in Southern California, which aims at the well-traveled hipster, is a lot like that guy. The Thompson Beverly Hills at Wilshire Boulevard and Crescent Drive may be one of the more intriguing hotels to open within walking distance of Rodeo Drive, but it has serious noise issues.

And yet a few days after my early February stay, I remembered the design more, the noise, well, slightly less. The Thompson is just what stuffy Beverly Hills needs — a daring, fun, noisy hangout for the art/fashion/talent agent crowd. It has a hot restaurant imported from New York, BondSt, which has a sexy lounge and a vibe that's attracting tastemakers who meet over breakfast or potent cocktails.

Just don't bring the kids; this former Best Western, built in 1961, is now an adult's retreat.

Few places in the city's Golden Triangle offer the kind of instant drama you get just driving up to the valet stand. A hugely long, black-leather Chesterfield couch lines the driveway and hints at what's inside. My valet took me from car door to check-in to room door.

He must see a lot of eyes go wide as they take in the high-impact décor. The hotel is very nearly the personification of its designer, Dodd Mitchell, an energetic aficionado of fast cars, beautiful women and sultry environments, and he has given the Thompson some of his sexiest signatures — leather, mirrors and dramatic lighting.

The hallways on the guest floors feel like a setting for a hot-rod magazine. Their walls and ceilings are lined with glossy, pure black panels that resemble rain-slicked asphalt at mid-



Thompson Beverly Hills Hotel

ADULT'S RETREAT: Décor in the hotel lobby at the Thompson Beverly Hills is leather, mirrors, chrome and dramatic lighting and carpets.

night. The black and ivory carpet is woven to look almost pre-worn with skid marks, like a drag racer's favorite strip.

A floor-to-ceiling, back-lighted action photograph — my hallway featured a tattooed ATV rider — cut through the darkness. In my noise-rattled dreams, I thought he had sprung to life and staged a race with the Ferraris from the dealership next door. But it was only the traffic mixing with the high-heeled shoes tapping on the wood floor above my fourth-floor room at 2 a.m. The ebony-stained wood may not mute noise, but it does make the place look slick and sophisticated.

The scene stealer in my 16-by-12-foot bedroom wasn't the king platform bed, but the wall behind it. Mitchell, a former art director and set designer, upholstered the entire expanse with black-leather panels inset with vertical, smoky mirrors. The mirrors extend in strips along the ceiling to create a sly take on the signature feature of every no-tell motel.

Continuing the '60s groove, chrome ball lamps with dimmer switches hang beside the bed, which has a headboard embedded with mood lights. Black sheer panels and raw-silk, silver

curtains frame the sliding-glass doors; a stiff black-leather-and-chrome chair stands guard nearby. A yard-wide, flat-panel TV hovers opposite the bed.

Two words: bachelor pad.

It's also a man's lair in the dark, 5-foot-wide bathroom. Inky black marble tiles shot with streaks of white line the shower and walls, and the chrome stand mirror is best for guiding a shave, not mascara. The Sferra towels were a revelation: They're terry cloth but as soft as cashmere.

Mitchell and his team made BondSt not just some pricey sushi palace but a restaurant with a (loud) bar atmosphere. It surrounds all in retro California mod allure.

It may be hard to fathom, but this hotel represents a trend in hospitality that aims to keep you up all night — drinking sake cocktails at the lounge and sampling the inventive sushi. Should a whim or hunger pang strike at 4 a.m., the hotel says it offers 24-hour room and concierge service.

Every aspect of the hotel comes to life at night, and it looks better than too. The second-floor lounge within BondSt is illuminated so the scene looks like a paparazzi snapshot. The black, chrome and cream color scheme throughout the hotel glistens

How it rates

★ ★

New and noteworthy: Hip hoteliers bring their New York style to a former Best Western.

The stay: Come for the groovy design, the scene, the restaurant, the lounge, but don't plan on sleeping.

The scene: A cross-section of the pretty people who eat sushi, roll in for photo shoots and drink till dawn.

Deal maker: Location, location, location. Steps to Rodeo Drive.

Deal breaker: Location, location, location. Inches from Wilshire Boulevard's nonstop traffic.

Stats: 9360 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills; (800) 441-5050, www.thompsonhotels.com

Rooms: Published rates for standard rooms begin at \$495.

Rating is based on the room, service, ambience and overall experience with price taken into account in relation to quality.

***** Outstanding on every level

**** Excellent

*** Very good

** Good

* Satisfactory

No Star: Poor

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beneath carefully trained lights. During the day, the restaurant fills with natural light, which lifts the potential gloom from the noirish furnishings.

Day or night, you'll likely spend most of your time in the guest room perched on the bed. That's because the tight quarters give you few choices. The setup is serviceable as a work space, given its free wireless Internet access and 8 feet of tabletop running along the combined dresser, mini bar and desk.

Despite the two-year renovation, the expensively designed room still featured the original, flimsy sliding-glass door. Unless the soundproofing is improved, the hotel isn't a great buy. Though I paid \$199 a night for my fourth-floor king deluxe room (a special during renovations), brochure rates begin at \$495 and climb to \$4,000 for the eighth-floor penthouse.

I was given various explanations for the noise problem, including "we're

still under renovation" and "we're hoping to double the glass next year" — even though I was told the rooms were complete when I made my reservation.

The distractions weren't from construction of the rooftop pool and lounge, ABH (short for Above Beverly Hills). The source: Wilshire is a bus route and major all-day (and night) thoroughfare, and the aggro drivers who power along Crescent aren't slowed by its speed bumps.

Perhaps this hotel's guests find comfort in traffic noise, or else they're desperate to check out the Thompson, the latest addition to a chain that includes the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel (also a Mitchell project), and New York's 60 Thompson and 6 Columbus hotels. For added in-crowd value, TBH, as it's called, is promising that only hotel patrons and "invited" guests will be allowed at ABH. Whatever.

The owners have learned from their many properties and do some important things right. The staff seems well-versed in all aspects of the hotel. Service in the restaurant and bar was friendly and swift. Rooms are cleaned in a snap because the showers have curtains, not easily spotted glass stalls, and the bed has no top sheet, just a Sferra duvet.

The hotel has allowed BondSt owner Jonathan Morr to implement his vision of room service too. Morr, who also owns the Townhouse Hotel in South Miami Beach, recently told me that the goal of room service should be, "Get in, don't futz around, and get out." True to that philosophy, less than 15 minutes elapsed between the time I ordered my \$18 continental breakfast and had it delivered. (The waiter's 18% tip was automatic, as was the \$4 delivery fee). The menu had comfort food, such as chicken soup and grilled-cheese sandwiches, but no kids' menu.

For dessert? Raid the mini bar of its \$6 Rice Krispie treat from local gourmet shop Joan's on Third. Joan's also provides the brownie bites the maids dispense each evening. That snack may come in handy at 2 a.m. when you've been rattled awake. Take it in stride (or take a Tylenol PM). This hotel may be a nonstop talker, but at least it has something to say. Maybe someday we'll even be able to hear it.

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