Change in Motion

As Raleigh, North Carolina, transforms into a hub for tech and tourism, three innovative hotels are leading the charge.

By Betsy Andrews

RALEIGH IS RISING. I experienced this firsthand on a trip last summer, eating and drinking my way around the city, a new business on seemingly every corner. This vibrancy is largely down to two things: a blossoming tech industry—Apple announced its plan last year to add $1 billion to Raleigh campus, scheduled to open in 2023—and the young transplants and visionaries who have followed.

As a result, new hotels are popping up to accommodate both business travelers and vacationers. Rather than look outside the city, many are tapping hometown talent to build, design, and furnish these sophisticated spaces. Each one is a self-contained community that showcases a decided contemporary vision of Raleigh, and each has its own take on this constantly evolving destination.

ORIGIN HOTEL RALEIGH

Two dramatic pieces of art anchor the lobby of this 12-story high-rise in the nightlife-forward neighborhood of Glenwood South: a giant white statue of a squirrel—a symbol of Raleigh, the City of Oaks—and a mural of a ruffled Sir Walter Raleigh, the city’s namesake. Walk through the common spaces, and you can’t help noticing other artistic nods to the area, like a vintage neon sign for Krispy Kreme, which is located in North Carolina, or a photograph of a wolf, North Carolina State University’s mascot.

I ran into the pipe-smoking Sir Walter again on my room’s Do Not Disturb sign: “Sir Walter Raleigh is tired. Please come back later.” Perhaps. If I were a guest at Origin today, he would have let us calm as I did by the sea and earth tones of the decor, and as buoyed by the polka-dot curtains and plaid armchairs. He might also have enjoyed the bathroom’s barn door and hardwood combo of zebra and subway tiles. And in between sending emails at the solid oak workstations—a book in desk that spanned the entire room—he could have ordered up a pint of Red Oak Amber Lager, made in the nearby town of Whitsett, and a side of truffle fries for sustenance from Good Day Good Night, the property’s restaurant, which uses regional ingredients in dishes like pad thai and ceviche tacos. originhotel.com; doubles from $179.

HEIGHTS HOUSE

Sarah and Jeff Shepherd used to walk by this beautiful, but dilapidated, old building on streets through their leafy Inman Heights neighborhood. They saw the potential in this old mansion—which was originally constructed in 1858—that they could buy the place to fulfill their dream of moonlighting as hoteliers. The house of architectural history permeates the building, from its Neoclassical-revival façade to its foyer sundials, which rise up to a stained-glass roof. Local interior designer Bryan Costello chose a charcoal and white palette and a mix of modern Italian and vintage furnishings for the communal spaces. “I didn’t want to take away from the architecture of something so beautiful with tons of pieces,” Shepherd told me.

There are nine individually designed rooms, each with its own personality. Warmed by lime-wash textured walls and a candleabra-like chandelier, my soothing space helped me to sleep at night. In the morning, before a breakfast of pastries from A Place at the Table Café, a beloved local bakery, I washed up at my bathroom’s solid-stone trough sink. The sweetest touch? The clawfoot tub, set in a little raised room, heightshouse.com; doubles from $229.

LONGLEAF HOTEL

A converted motor lodge, the 57-room Longleaf Hotel is steeped in nostalgia, and the Prairie-style stone lattice makes it look straight out of the 1960s. My room had a similar feeling, with its wooden headboard nightstand combo, analog bedside clock, and decorative accents made by local artisans, like illustrator Claire Cavan’s abstract wallpaper and Blue & Robine’s old-fashioned dyed pillows. At night, guests can help themselves to board games in the common room. But it’s not all hush here. Bookending the big, busy patio, a pair of mammoth steel cisterns lend architectural cool to the hotel’s exterior. Their purpose is to catch rain from the roof to water the property’s longleaf pines, North Carolina’s endangered state tree. Like the other new hotels in Raleigh, the Longleaf aims to be a good citizen in a city that’s ready to grow. thelongleahotel.com; doubles from $194.

From top: Heights features nine spacious, globe-humming hotel rooms; a wine and cheese hour each night.