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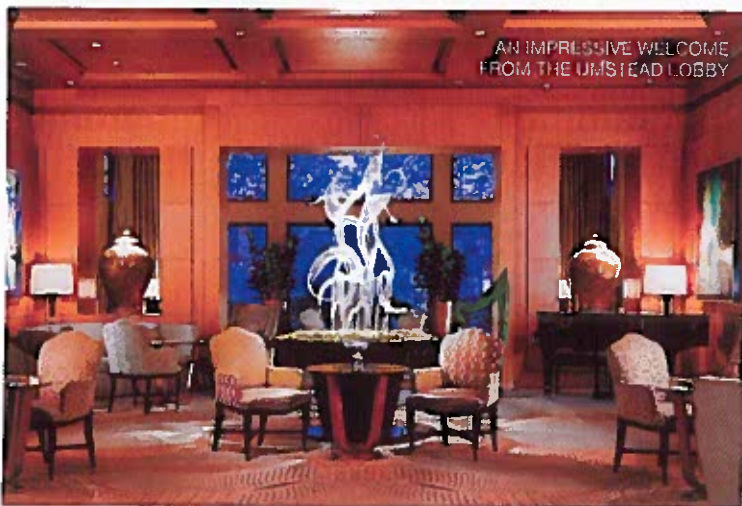
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PLP 5

You're Inn: The Research Triangle

BY HAYLEY PHILLIPS

Surprising options abound, from an elegant oasis on the outskirts of Raleigh to a cozy inn nestled amid the campus of a famed Carolina college...



AN IMPRESSIVE WELCOME FROM THE UMSTEAD LOBBY



OUTDOOR DINING COMES WITH POOLSIDE VIEWS

YOU LOVE: restrained, elegant surroundings, impeccable service, James Bond movies

YOU NEED: a hotel fit for international business with a luxurious spa and primo dining

YOU STAY: at The Umstead

THE UMSTEAD is polished. Service proves seamless from the moment you walk in and are swiftly unburdened of your luggage. Falling somewhere between the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, Japanese Zen gardens, and Art Deco in its influences, The Umstead is a building of clean geometrical lines, wood, glass, and stone, surrounded by carefully tended landscapes. But the most distinct impression The Umstead makes is that of a retreat. Somehow, just off the highway in the midst of the bustle of the Research Triangle, you've stumbled onto the shores of a lakeside oasis.

Whether I'm answering e-mails in the handsome downstairs lobby, walking the trail along the lake, or meditating in the eucalyptus steam room, the environs is notably without any lingering air of pretense or new-age aura. Like the multifloor spa, the hotel rooms are spacious, with walk-in closets, his-and-hers sinks, and Italian linens. Large prints on the walls depict serene nature scenes, but step out on your private balcony and you'll find yourself face-to-face with the real thing.

The beauty of The Umstead is simply this: that with refreshing straightforwardness and consistency, everything is in its right place. This practice extends to the food at Herons, where Chef Steven Greene balances the ceremony and art of dining with elevated culinary offerings. Canapés of trout cannoli and foie gras caramel lollipops come shortly after a taste of rooibos tea. Dinner is served in the kaiseki style; duck comes with bamboo rice, turnips, kumquats, fennel, and honey magnolia liqueur, while a perfectly seared scallop is presented over truffled tapioca. Lastly, pastry chef Evan Sheridan wows with rock-mineral-looking chocolates in flavors like "Toddy" and "Forest." The flavors are just as—if not more—moving than the views.

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF THE UMSTEAD HOTEL AND SPA, BRYAN REGAN, AND COURTESY OF THE CAROLINA INN.