

# The Boston Globe

## Magna cum laude lodging: Providence's hippest new hotel is the Graduate

By [Christopher Muther](#) Globe Staff, May 14, 2019, 4:50 p.m.



The grand lobby of the Graduate hotel in Providence. (TRENT BELL)

### *PROVIDENCE*

It was five years ago when both Travel + Leisure and Architectural Digest trumpeted that Providence was the best city in the US. The following year, GQ magazine brazenly proclaimed that Providence was the world's coolest city.

The common denominator in all of these declarations of Providence's superiority was the Dean hotel. When it opened in 2014, the Dean represented a fresh, indie-hipster lodging alternative. At last, there was a hotel as cool as the Providence restaurant scene. Even Gwyneth Paltrow's Goop fawned over the Dean. Goop!

Well Dean hotel, I'm here to tell you that your days of being the coolest hotel in Providence are over. The Graduate hotel has unceremoniously shoved you off the throne. The Graduate is now the chicest, hippest, and most vibrant hotel in Providence. At least that's what I wrote in my reporter's notebook. It's also an incredibly good value.

The Graduate name may not be familiar, but the setting is. It opened last month in the 18-story former Biltmore Hotel. The building is a Beaux-Arts beauty that debuted in 1922 and has gone through a series of economic ups and downs. It was designed by the architectural firm of Warren and Wetmore, which also designed New York's Grand Central Terminal. It was the height of Providence glamour.

In the 1970s it was shuttered for four years and faced demolition. A consortium of local businessmen purchased the hotel, and it reopened in 1979. It was added to the National Registry of Historic Places in 1977.

But in the years following the renovation and reopening, the Biltmore was passed around like a hot potato. Hotel chains and management groups took turns with Biltmore ownership, each doing little to infuse it with any kind of individuality or charm.

Then came the Graduate. The Graduate is a rapidly growing small chain of hotels — there are currently 21, with several more opening next year — that took the old Biltmore and gave it some much-needed pizzazz.



A portrait of fashion editor Andre Leon Talley in the lobby of the Graduate hotel in Providence, Rhode Island (TRENT BELL)

The décor is heavily influenced by the city and its colleges. There's a portrait of Brown University alumnus and former Vogue editor Andre Leon Talley in the lobby. Art from Rhode Island School of Design students is sprinkled throughout the hotel. My room sported a feature wall of black and white photos of famous local graduates. There's even artwork inspired by "Dumb and Dumber," which was written and directed by Rhode Island's Farrelly brothers.

It is a colorful place that doesn't take itself too seriously, but it is a seriously good hotel.

I booked an expansive two-room suite with two king beds for \$170 (including tax). The room was filled with texture, color, and a still life painting of doughnuts. It also had all the hotel necessities, such as a coffee maker, refrigerator, large closet, and Malin + Goetz toiletries. I wasn't entirely impressed by the bathroom renovation, but I'm the first to admit that I'm a design snob.

After my stay I reached out in an e-mail to Andrew Alford, chief creative officer for Graduate hotels, to find out the research that went into the renovation.

"We try to select decorative styles that represent all stages of the building's existence," Alford wrote. "It should feel like one continuously curated history. One guest will view it as a warm, vintage throwback, where as another might feel like they're in a Wes Anderson movie."

I would have loved to see some references to the old Biltmore's haunted reputation. There are several tales of ghost sightings in the building through the years. But perhaps the ghosts were exorcized from the building when the beige wallpaper hit the dumpster and the Biltmore's colorful spirit reemerged.