

EDITORS' PICKS

Rooms We Adore

Choose from one of these stylish and striking hotels.

The three of us—all *Southern Living* Travel staffers—have slept in our share of so-so hotels as we research stories around the South. We all have tales about bad mattresses, dripping faucets, and air-conditioning units that sound like a 757 idling on the runway.

Happily, every now and then we hit the jackpot, as far as lodgings go. These top choices (from three writers with very different personalities) feature a little something extra. Whether it's a rooftop restaurant in Louisville, snazzy digs in Houston, or a luxurious oasis in Chapel Hill, we think you'll love these picks as much as we do.

Galt House Hotel—Louisville, Kentucky

If you want big, this one's for you. Located on the banks of the Ohio River, its 1,290 rooms fill two towers. But I discovered the real draw—brought on by a recent \$60-million renovation—is a fabulous rooftop restaurant called RIVUE. After taking the elevator to the 25th floor, I was stunned by the panoramic view of glittering downtown on one side and glistening river on the other. The restaurant slowly revolves, so I didn't even have to choose which view was best. Nor could I have asked for a better meal to accompany the heavenly atmosphere. Superbly prepared sea bass, buttery limestone Bibb lettuce salad, and a perfect white-chocolate mousse mingled with impeccable service. A complimentary candy cart ended the meal on the sweetest of notes.

I also enjoyed staying in one of the hotel's redecorated suites, outfitted with new linens and flat-panel TVs. But the other truly grand improvement lies in the Conservatory, which connects the hotel's two massive towers. Filled with aviaries, plants, inviting furniture, a 24-hour coffee shop and deli, and a popular aquarium bar, it teems with visitors at all hours.

And back to that killer view, I discovered I can achieve another rooftop scene from the other tower. Here, Club 360—the health and fitness center—affords exercisers the same blimp-high sights. But I believe I'll stick with the restaurant; there's no candy cart in the health club. —WANDA MCKINNEY

Galt House Hotel: 140 North Fourth Street, Louisville, KY 40202; www.galthouse.com or (502) 589-5200. **Rates:** Start at \$95.



THIS PAGE: The Galt House Hotel offers the tops in both dining and nightlife. After an evening meal complete with spectacular views at RIVUE, meet for drinks at the aquarium bar, ALJ's.

Hotel ZaZa—Houston, Texas

ZaZa. A snazzy, over-the-top, funky name can't be given to just any place. But this hotel wears it well. Zebra print and crimson velvet furniture. Alligator skin walls. Poolside cabanas overlooking the museum district. It's your chance to live like a celebrity—if only for a night.

The 11th floor boasts the Concept Suites. My fave: "Houston We Have a Problem" comes with a real space suit, a telescope, and stars on the ceiling. Another top pick of mine is the "Rock Star" Magnificent Seven Suite on the 12th floor. Step on your private elevator to get to this killer 2,160-square-foot place, where double-height windows, wraparound views of downtown, and walls lined with classic albums seduce. **Tip:** Most of us won't shell out the thousands to stay in one of these rooms, so roam the halls to see the artwork collection. The regular rooms feel