

PEEP SHOW

ANDRÉ BALAZS'S NEW HOTEL MAY BE CALLED QT, BUT WORD IS SPREADING FAST. HERBERT MUSCHAMP INVESTIGATES.

Photograph by

MATTHEW HRANEK

Things could be so much worse. I might have turned into one of those people who disapproves of trends. Can you imagine a gloomier fate? To be the kind of person who, when anything really great comes along, feels that they're supposed to say, "Well, it may look great now, but how do you think it's going to look five years from now?"

Hotel QT — André Balazs's new, no-frills hotel, at 125 West 45th Street in Times Square — looks terrific now, and in five years it will look even better. While a trendy hotel rules, an obsolete one is absolute. If a spot isn't hot, it can't cool down, and the heat can't come back to haunt us.

"QT" is Winchell-esque irony: in the land of the loudmouth gossipmonger, "quiet" meant "shhhout!" There was also a hot-shot tipsheet back then called *On the QT*. Styling itself "the Class Magazine in its Field," *On the QT* published such tony twists on the genre as "Lesbian Suitcase Girls of Greenwich Village" and "Buddy Hackett: New 'Rat' for the Ratpack?" A spicy collage of its pages papers QT's walls. We'll pretend we haven't read them.

Besides, there's too much else to look at. Looking — peeping, actually — is QT's design motif. Designed by the immensely talented New York architect Lindy Roy, the hotel does include one fabulous frill: a pool the size of a postage stamp, which graces the ground floor. Just big enough for making a splash, the pool area can be glimpsed through windows set into the walls that enclose it. For the seriously enthralled, one side of the pool is flanked by a rank of bleachers. Fashionable flesh as floor show: that's no-frills entertainment in the new Times Square.

Check-in at QT also appears to be inspired by the performing arts. The counter, just inside the front door, resembles an art-house ticket booth. A floor of concrete sidewalk paving amplifies the box-office effect. A long corridor to the rear serves as an elevator lobby. It leads past the pool area to a small bar. Upstairs, the rooms, of which there are 140, range in size from broom closet to ship's cabin. All are outfitted with nautical efficiency. Good Evening, Mr. and Mrs. America and everyone else

who feels completely at sea in these trendy times.

It's pleasing to see a hotel design that builds on Times Square's present strength as a magnet for media companies. With all the complaining that goes on about the area's Disney-fication, people tend to lose sight of the positive side of its redevelopment. Producers and consumers of popular culture and information have been brought together in an unprecedented concentration. In addition to Disney, the cast of media producers includes Condé Nast, Reuters and MTV, as well as the paper for which Times Square was named.

There's something for every sense around here — and now a place to sleep off sensory bombardment. In fact, QT would make an ideal weekend getaway for New Yorkers who want to escape the distractions of home and catch up on the distraction of movies. And if you're a person after my heart, you will duck across 45th Street and pay homage to one of the holiest sites in hot-spot heaven: the Peppermint Lounge, the place where the Twist got its start, and perhaps the 1960's along with it. It was located directly opposite the hotel. And though the lounge is gone, the spirit of Joey Dee lives on.

The Twist socialized the body. Suddenly, personal familiarity with the sacroiliac was no longer restricted to doctors, athletes and ecdysiasts like Virginia "Ding-Dong" Bell. Everybody had a spinal cord. City life descended to the lumbar region, and has more or less stayed there ever since. This is the physical genealogy from which QT's aesthetic descends.

Roy's design is body conscious. The lines are sinewy, the palette fleshy. In the bar, there are banquettes of pink leather and mohair, with additional seating on cork stools. The room is wrapped in panels of buff cedar.

In the hallways upstairs, the ceilings are imprinted with patterns of wavy hair. Will they change the wave, the color, the cut, as fashion demands? Vitruvian Man and Woman will feel right at home in the diminutive rooms. Everything is within reach of a well-toned arm. Except for a smart little table and a chair, the furniture is built-in. The table swivels. So will you.

But all this hotness is getting to me. Time to cool down. Fancy a dip? Let's swim tonight, like we did last summer 44 years ago. ■

AT HOTEL QT, LIQUID REFRESHMENT COMES IN MANY FORMS. AS GUESTS CAN TAKE A PLUNGE IN PLAIN SIGHT OF THE BAR, BLEACHERS FLANK THE OTHER SIDE.

