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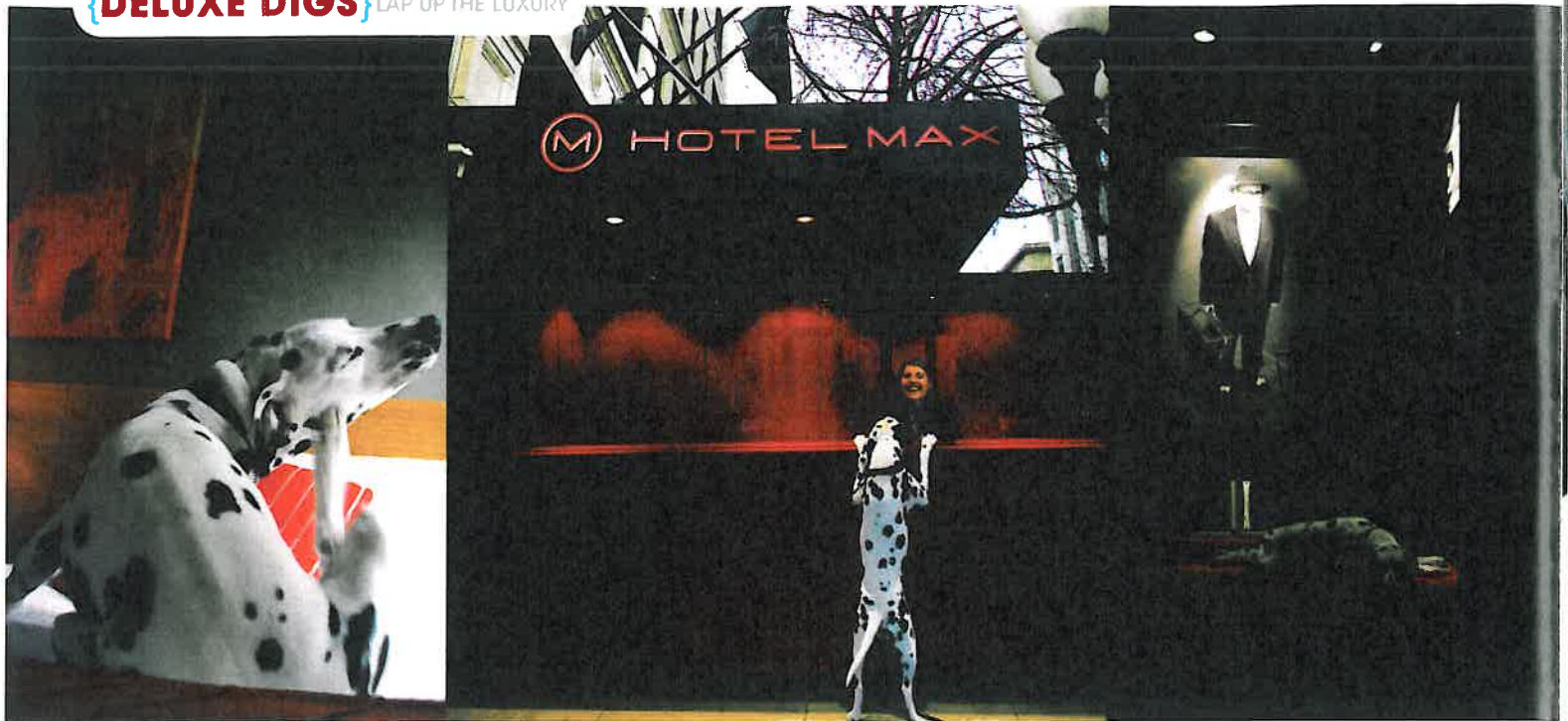
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Seattle's  
Swanky  
Hotel Max



## MAXIN' + RELAXIN'

SEATTLE'S HOTEL MAX HAS ARTISTIC FLARE TO SPARE  
WRITTEN + PHOTOGRAPHED BY J. NICHOLE SMITH

As we approached the Hotel Max on a blustery afternoon, amidst high-rise buildings, bare-branched trees and rush-hour traffic, I couldn't help but feel like I was stepping out of my car and into an identical scene in New York.

Max's flags fluttered, the valet hustled, the floor-to-ceiling doors yawned open as Olivia and I wandered into the vibrant world of the Hotel Max.

The massive mural on my left and the equally eye-catching glass reception desk to the right dominated my first observations.

Almost as if we'd rehearsed it, Olivia hopped her two front paws onto the shiny cherry-red counter. She was eagerly greeted by smiles, ooh's and aaaah's from the staff, who were far more concerned with deciphering what kind of dog she might be, than about the bear-sized paw prints she might leave behind.

All around us, an eclectic mix of loungers and sectionals, stools, benches and armchairs were scattered. After actually having sat in a few of them, I was surprised to discover that they were far more comfortable than the chic designs would suggest. Clearly Max doesn't feel obligated to sacrifice comfort for style.

Whimsical mixed-era details like stained-glass windows, modern art, crown molding, retro chairs and side-tables all blended together to create an unpredictable feast for the eyes.

Volumes of rock photography under a glass table-top, real-live orchids, textures of chrome, pony hair, gilded gold, alligator and suede all added to the collection of aesthetic treats that seem to define this newly restored hotel.

Check-in was a breeze. As we entered the tiny elevator I really started to take notice of the history of the Hotel Max: one of me, one

of Olivia and our respective bags were about all that could co-exist inside. Luckily, eye-level mirrors wrapping the interior have cleverly expanded the scant space.

After leaving the daylight lobby, it took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the low-lit hallways of the 4th floor. After exiting the elevator I was immediately drawn to the full-length, spotlight photographs on each guestroom door. Our room, #417, featured the tail end of a vintage Dodge with a mid-century piece of furniture tied down in the trunk, a cropped bit of an image by Seattle photographer Paul Sundberg. As a photographer myself, this was a very warm welcome. It is clear that Max has great taste in art.

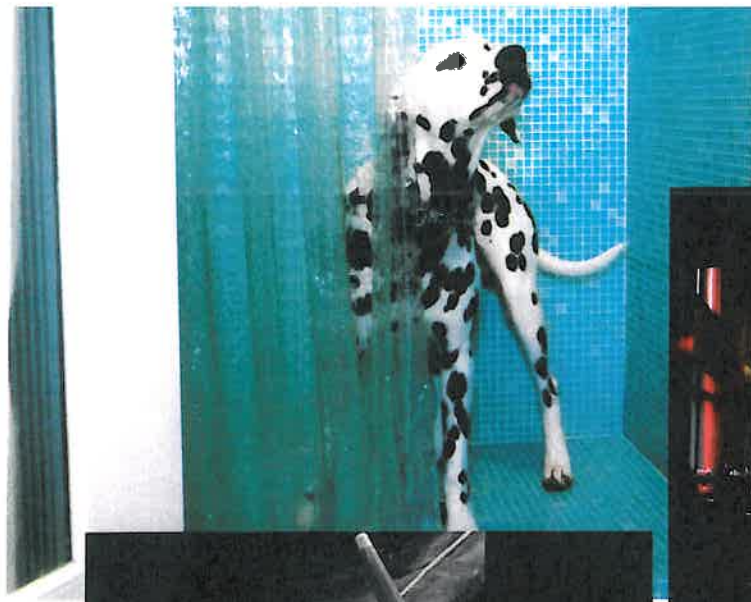


Olivia and I fumbled through the doorway into our bright corner room. With panoramic windows exposing the bellies of buildings all around, a window heater unit, and the sounds of the streets below, I once again momentarily felt transported to the Big Apple.

The décor of the room was modern and minimal: bright white bedding and stone colored walls seemed, like the rest of the hotel, to be a blank canvas for the original works of art and handpicked accents of color. In our room, an orangey-red striped throw and pillows spiced up the bed, and a mixed media piece featuring collaged sewing-pattern pieces and line drawing, titled "San Juans III," livened up the walls.

Olivia promptly took to sniffing the dog bed, bowls, treats, bottled water and squeaky toy that were provided for her enjoyment. In exaggerated motions she eagerly pushed around the

**Clockwise from top: Branimir gets comfortable in bed; the Hotel Max's eye-grabbing entrance; resting on the 4th floor where images by local photographer Paul Sundberg grace each door; Branimir checks-in. Middle: It's all in the details.**



**Clockwise from top left: Awaiting a shower in Max's signature water closet; Branimir stretches out, hoping to grab a sniff of something delicious near the entrance to Red Fin; the Max's version of "Do Not Disturb" sign on room #417.**

milk bones with her nose, indicating to me that I'd best remove them from the bag before she consumed the entire package. I complied.

Her next move was to sniff-test the human bed and then stare at me, awaiting an invitation to sleep-test it. After a few compulsive circles she was sufficiently settled and I could continue to investigate our digs.

The furnishings, sleek and functional were just as they should be: desk with flat-screen TV and coffee makings, armoire with all the essentials (robes, safe, hair dryer etc..) the bed, as demonstrated by my lovely assistant, was un-earthly comfortable and large enough to accommodate both a Dane and dame. Impressive.

With Olivia pleasantly snoozing and my belly not so pleasantly rumbling, I wandered down to the Max's restaurant to partake in a little "Asian Fusion" happy hour. With happy hour from 4-6 and from 10-11, there's really no excuse not to sample a myriad of bargain bites from this "Wasabi Bistro" sister spot. Luckily, despite prices starting at \$3, the fare is actually quite satisfying, both to behold and devour.

I highly recommend the "Grilled Mackerel" and the "Warm Almond-crusting Goat Cheese." If raw fish is your thing, order away, the sushi is not intimidating and is beautifully presented. Beware, the spicy tuna lives up to its name, it is very, very spicy.

If you happen to have a hankering for dining when it's not happy hour, have no fear, the menu is far more extensive and still won't break the bank. You might even have leftovers to doggy-bag back to your room.

If you're in the mood for food of another sort, you're in luck; Max's proximity to the heart of downtown makes it easy to satisfy just about any craving you might have.

Palace Kitchen, the crown jewel in the Tom Douglas Empire is only three blocks away and a must-taste if you're in the neighborhood. Don't leave without indulging in the "Goat Cheese and Lavender Fondue" served with grilled bread and apples or the "Enormous Garlic Crouton" salad; you will dream about these dishes for months to come.

If you're in the mood for some ultra-hip fine dining you have to hit Barolo, just on the other side of the 6th avenue block. This urban Italian "ristorante" comes complete with candelabras dripping with wax, glittering glass chandeliers, sheer room-dividing curtains and usually, a substantial wait-time so make reservations. I assure you, the warm atmosphere and consistently delightful menu make it worth the wait.

Go wild with dinner, any and all guilt can be sufficiently sweat-off in Max's 24-hour fitness room. I, however, opted to skip the late night workout in favor of late night TV. Olivia and I caught some comedy sketches and drifted off to sleep.

In the morning, it was time to stretch our legs a bit. For breakfast we decided on Starbucks, just up the block at the Plaza Building. With several tables available outside, I was able to enjoy my chai tea and breakfast sandwich in the company of my suddenly very attentive mutt.

For a romp, we proceeded down to Regrade Park, a rare downtown off-leash area. This tiny Belltown corner park is home to a basketball hoop, some picnic tables and even a bus stop. Best of all, it's usually got at least a few canines canoodling with their downtown people.

If your dog is in need of a longer romp, or you need to visit some not so dog-friendly attractions (the spa? Pike Place Market? A movie?) you can leave your pup in the capable hands of the Downtown Dog Lounge, located just across Third Avenue on Bell St. They even offer a "Happy Hour," Thursday-Sunday you can leave your pooch from 4pm to 1am for only \$15. And hey, if you get nervous about your romping Rover while you're out on the town, you can hop online and view the DDL web cams to check in.

If you want to keep on walking, head down towards the Pike Place Market and stop into Mud Bay on First Avenue, the newest location in this chain of healthy pet food stores. You can stock up on organic dog treats and lots of good information about the right food for your Fido. Right next door, you can stop into the Cherry Street Coffee House for some delicious human treats: have a bagel, a falafel or just a really good cup o' Joe. 🐾

**Hotel Max & Red Fin**  
620 Stewart St., 866.833.6299  
[www.hotelmqxseattle.com](http://www.hotelmqxseattle.com)  
[www.redfinsushi.com](http://www.redfinsushi.com)

Rates: from \$149 - \$269

Pet Fee: \$40  
WiFi: \$11.95/day  
Valet: \$30.00/night

**Palace Kitchen**  
2030 5th Ave., 206.448.2001

**Barolo**  
1940 Westlake Ave., 206.770.9000  
[www.baroloseattle.com](http://www.baroloseattle.com)

**Regrade Off-leash Park**  
2251 3rd Ave., 206.684.4075

**Downtown Dog Lounge**  
305 Bell St., 206.441.6160  
[www.downtowndoglounge.com](http://www.downtowndoglounge.com)

**Mud Bay**  
2119 1st Ave., 206.728.2405  
[www.mudbay.us](http://www.mudbay.us)

**Cherry Street Coffee House**  
2719 1st Ave., 206.441.5489  
[www.cherrystreetcoffeehouse.com](http://www.cherrystreetcoffeehouse.com)