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THE EXPERIENCE

The only hotel in the city to provide a taste of true loft living, the Mercer's lobby also offers some of the best celebrity-watching in New York. Yet despite its illustrious clientele, this Soho paean to minimalist chic knows that it's always better to feign modesty, so there's no sign on Mercer Street to announce it. Just look for the unfeasibly good-looking staff member standing beneath the clock.

THE ROOMS

The rooms feel more like the private quarters of a particularly stylish acquaintance than typical hotel accommodations. Everything is plain, chic and uncluttered: unadorned white walls, dark-wood tables and desks, fabric in shades of beige and sage, along with high ceilings. This gives rooms a sense of space and light, which is good since standards start at a Manhattan-size 250 square feet. Still, an upgrade to a studio is a must; not only do you get something few New Yorkers do—

an oversize, two-person tub—but you can request one with a particularly “downtown” touch: exposed brick walls.

THE SERVICE

From the door staff to the front desk, service is not only able and efficient but, surprisingly for such a chic hotel, attitude-free. Of course, Russell Crowe might disagree—this is where he was arrested here after flinging a telephone at a concierge several years ago.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

Relax in the lobby-library, which is stuffed with art books, then enjoy one of the Mercer's prime features: the Mercer Kitchen. If you come for Jean-Georges Vongerichten's American-Provencal food, it's best appreciated downstairs among the exposed-brick archways. If, however, you want fantastic people-watching with your meal, then set yourself at the more casual bar at street level as you enjoy the famous raw tuna and wasabi pizza.