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TOP: Named for the Proximity Cotton Mill, a Greensboro icon for nearly a century, the Proximity Hotel subtly reflects its predecessor's industrial design. **ABOVE:** Print Works Bistro serves European fare made with fresh, local ingredients.

Greensboro Deluxe

The Proximity Hotel wins our nod for its keen Green conscience. You don't feel the message; you just feel the comfort. By **Lauren Simpson**

You could be excused for not recognizing the Proximity Hotel as one of the South's most talked-about new boutique properties. It initially appears as just a massive gray building set off from the road, another addition to the Greensboro, North Carolina, skyline. Then you notice the billowing white curtains around the porte cochere, and the experience begins.

Designed To Impress Chic and ultra-modern, the Proximity Hotel's design is dramatic, from the cantilevered reception desk, a steel beam that juts from the wall in seeming defiance of physics, to the 22-foot-tall windows pouring light into the lobby. Its bland concrete walls could be off-putting, but attractive elements, such as the rows of couches inviting guests to

linger in the Social Lobby, soften the potential austerity into refined elegance. Orchids bend from glass boxes high on the walls, reflecting the Bluebell Garden just outside and, in the distance, a restored stream. Natural spaces are key to this hotel's aesthetic; you can glimpse the outdoors from more than 97% of guest areas.

Sleeping Well Take your pick of the Proximity's 147 rooms and suites—all feature 50-square-foot windows, soft lighting, flat-panel televisions, and original artwork. **Tip:** For the best lighting, try for a corner room, which offers double windows. The hotel's signature Magi Bed is topped with Italian-woven linens of Egyptian cotton, plus plenty of pillows. To ensure guests get a quiet night's sleep, the rooms are constructed with noise-dampening sandwich insulation in



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: Guest rooms and other spaces use low-emitting volatile organic compound paints and carpets to keep the air clean. Orchids add to the decor. Proximity owner Dennis Quaintance. The Social Lobby offers a comfortable space to relax.



STYLE WITH SUBSTANCE

Who said being Green meant sacrificing comfort? As the first hotel in the country to earn Platinum LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certification by the U.S. Green Building Council, the Proximity Hotel has been turning heads with its eco-friendly building practices and creative modifications.

- During construction, the builders recycled 87% of their waste. Walnut SkyBlend, a particleboard made from 100% post-industrial recycled wood pulp, forms the guest room shelving.
- One hundred solar panels on the roof store energy to heat water. All told, the Proximity uses about 41% less energy than a conventional hotel.
- High-efficiency Kohler plumbing fixtures reduce water usage by 33%. Hotel president and designer Dennis Quaintance tested the fixtures in his own home prior to their installation.
- For a neat technical feature, look no farther than the Otis Gen2 elevator. The electricity generated by its descent provides power for the next trip up.

the walls. One intriguing feature is the hotel's filtration system, which pumps 60 cubic feet of fresh air per minute through each room. You're not actively aware of the process, but isn't it good to know?

Dining In When hunger strikes, head downstairs to the adjoining Print Works Bistro. Chef Bart Ortiz puts his spin on European classics with local ingredients. Try the bacon-onion-cheese flatbread, reminiscent of *tarte flambée*, an Alsatian dish seldom seen outside of Strasbourg. Cold starters such as the charcuterie plate and country-style pâté grant a taste of Continental dining, but the heirloom tomatoes, served with olive oil and sea salt, are a refined version of a Southern staple. Even cheeseburgers get an upgrade—choose from cheddar, Emmenthaler, or Roquefort.

For a social hour, stop at the bistro's "honest drinking bar." The smoke-free lounge offers tapas-style plates and more than 45 wines by the glass. Linger with friends, or retire to one of the communal "living rooms" on each floor of the hotel. **Tip:** These lobbies also provide complimentary Internet access and an honor bar for your late-night soda craving.

Proximity Hotel proves that comfort can be stylish. ●

Proximity Hotel: 704 Green Valley Road, Greensboro, NC 27408; www.proximityhotel.com, (336) 379-8200, or 1-800-379-8200. Rooms begin at \$239.

HOME-GROWN ART

No packaging materials or crates were wasted in transporting the Proximity Hotel's collection of charcoal-on-canvas sketches, as all were created by local artist-in-residence Chip Holton. Dennis Quaintance, already a fan of his work, commissioned Chip to draw an original piece for each guest room and larger works for the lobby.