



Serendipity with the sights. **Senior Traveler, N2**



In control with a travel set of leggings, top. **Gadget Guru, N5**

Sunday, March 4, 2012 ★ Section N



The cloister at the Jesuit Center in the hills of Berks County.

Personal Journey

Pa. retreat offers peace on a budget

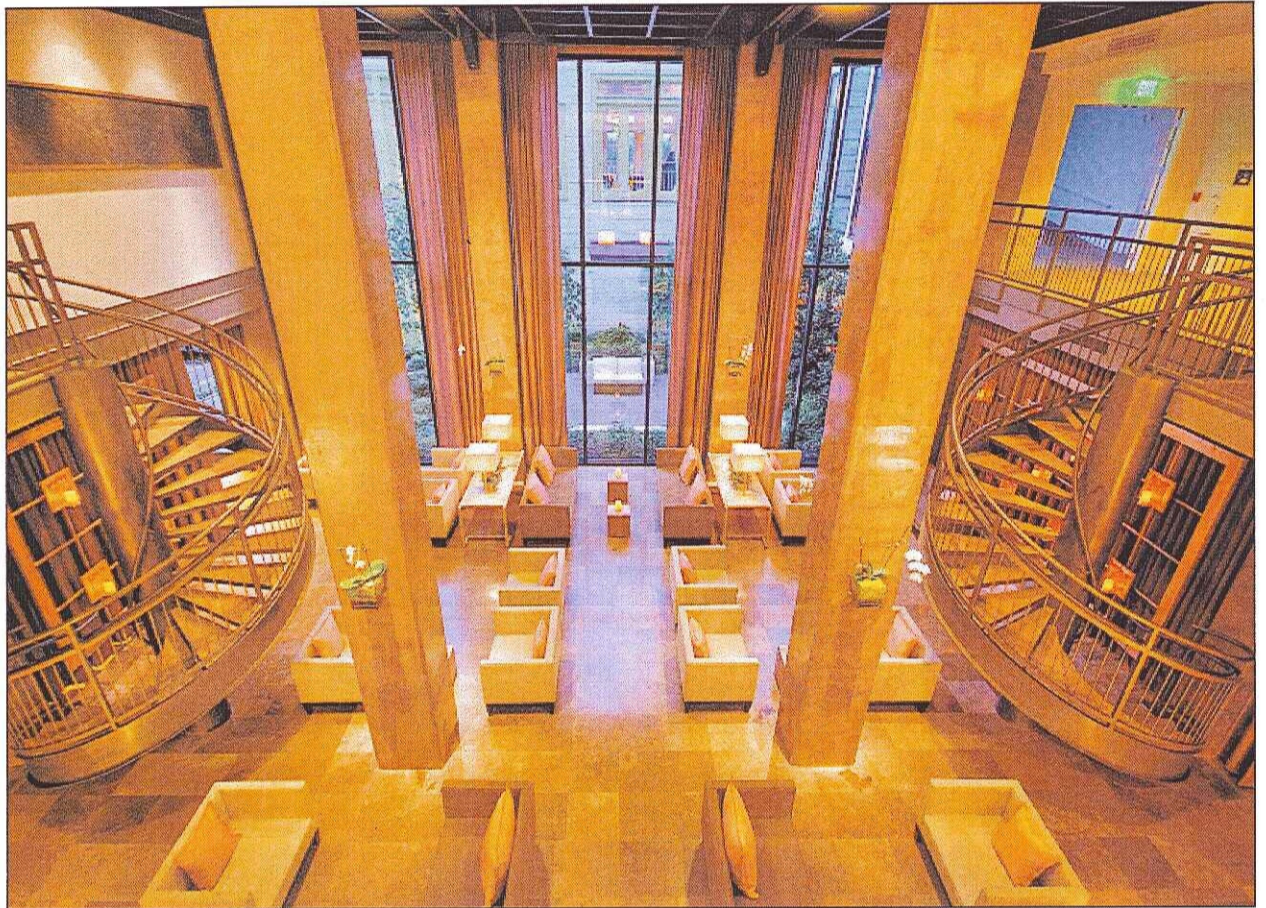
By Susan Gregory Thomas
NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

WERNERSVILLE, Pa. — Late in November I arrived at the Jesuit Center in the hills of this Berks County community on a blindingly dark and stormy night to begin a silent five-day retreat. Such a scenario might have compelled someone more *compos mentis* to turn around. But that was the point. As a 43-year-old mother of three wrung out from three years of panic attacks triggered by the specter of financial ruin, I needed a solid period of quiet to recombo- lute. Cheaply.

I am neither Catholic nor anything in particular, but I yearned for a snippet of no-frills spiritual solitude. The Jesuits, I'd read, were the guys to go to concerning such matters. Indeed, to engage in periods of quiet contemplation with a full-stop break from everyday life was central to the philosophy of Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556). It still is. Today, about 200 Jesuits are engaged full time in directing spiritual retreats at more than 20 centers in the United States.

But there were other reasons I'd opted for the Jesuit Center in Wernersville over, say, a spa vacation, yoga retreat, or vision quest. For one thing, the center advertised an Arcadian setting and drivable proximity from my home. For another, the cost was \$560 for seven days, including room, board, and a daily hourlong conversation with a spiritual director, who would escort me through Scripture-based prayer and meditation. I could only stay for five days.

The more luxe-sounding excursions I'd considered often seemed to involve a time commitment of a week or more, along with New Age locution that somehow did not sit
See **RETREAT** on N4



The Proximity Hotel in Greensboro, N.C., is one of only two U.S. hotels rated "platinum" by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council.

ECO-LODGING How will you know?

Travelers stalk that rare and confounding species — the green hotel. Here are some tips on practices, standards, certification.

By Stephen P. Nash
FOR THE INQUIRER

Maybe for one reason or another you've thought about staying in "eco-friendly" hotels when you travel, but you're not eager to join the League of Environmental Hairsplitters to figure out a conscientious choice.

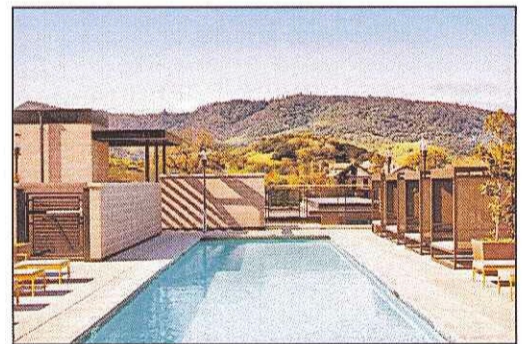
You're not unusual. The most recent industry survey of U.S. travelers — not at all intended to promote the idea — concluded just the same that "green is mainstream." More than four in 10 considered environmental impact to be im-

portant when planning travel.

To find out about environmental impact, there are a few useful shortcuts to consider. But first some context, in the person of Rachel Muir.

She's a science adviser for the U.S. Geological Survey, and "because I'm an ecologist, these things are part of the culture I'm immersed in," she says. She finds it pretty frustrating to think through green lodging, though.

"A thoughtful life is not a simple one," Muir says. In Atlanta recently for a meeting on global warming impacts,
See **ECO-LODGING** on N4



Bardessono, a Napa Valley boutique hotel in Yountville, Calif., is the other LEED certified "platinum" lodging.



Havana's Central Park and the National Capitol Building, seat of government until the revolution in 1959, when the legislature was disbanded.
HARRIET MONSHAW

Our neighbor, so long a stranger

Cuba charms a visitor with its architecture and natural beauty and a past quaintly preserved.

By Harriet Monshaw
FOR THE INQUIRER

HAVANA — Why Cuba? Blame fate. In January, a friend told me she had just returned from Cuba on a Jewish humanitarian mission. In February, Mr. "I Don't Want to Be Just Your Friend" asked me if I wanted to go to Cuba with him. Two weeks later, I received a letter about a Catholic humanitarian effort to Cuba. Those three mythological gals that

compose "fate" were working overtime — I sent in the application to Bringing Hope Inc., of Miami. The trip required participants to bring at least 15 pounds of over-the-counter drugs and school supplies. I met with my group and was on my way in May.

On our tour, we stopped at a church and a school to deliver our goods and practice English with the students. We had a Cuban government
See **CUBA** on N3



Enjoying a carriage ride (from left) Betts Phifer, Corinth Miliikin, the author, and Khamisi Mwaniki.