

**Bites** Thunderbird | INDIANAPOLISA.J. MAST FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES  
A grilled pimento cheese sandwich and Joke About Jamaica (the drink).**Artful Drinks, Southern Fare**

The Indianapolis dining scene has come a long way in a short time. Locals talk about how it's growing out of its generic roots, gaining a consciousness about non-chain businesses. Take, for example, Thunderbird. Situated in the up-and-coming Fountain Square neighborhood, the 80-seat restaurant, which opened in February, is housed in the former home of a rockabilly nightclub from the 1950s and '60s.

The décor evokes that history: Photos of past performers line the exposed brick walls, lit by Edison bulbs that hang from the original wood-beamed ceiling. The centerpiece of an art installation with various musical instruments is an old upright piano set up against the front wall. The island bar, framed by marquee lights on the ceiling, evokes a stage. But the owners, Joshua Gonzales and Ed Rudisell, had the good taste not to push the theme too far: The music emanating from speakers during a recent visit was a steady stream of more contemporary artists like Beck, Prince and Flaming Lips.

The cocktails served at that dramatic bar get as much attention as the cuisine. The list is separated into sections: "Refreshing," "Classics," "Boozy," "Classics" and "Experimental." A standout, from the "Boozy" section, was the Goddamn Rotterdam, a gin-heavy

concoction with Bols Genever, Ransom Old Tom Gin (an oaky barrel-aged gin from Oregon), honey and lemon bitters. I was wary of the "Experimental" side but the Minority Report, with coffee-infused Punt e Mes, pisco, mint and heavy cream, was bold and worthy on a chilly night.

The menu, devised by Carlos Salazar, a consulting chef from nearby Rook, is rib-sticking Southern fare. Creamy shrimp and grits are spiked with green salsa. The grilled pimento cheese triple-decker was stuffed with Cheddar cheese and tomatoes, like the classic grilled cheese on steroids. One slight nod to healthy eating, the kale salad, is also amped up, with smoky bacon and chunks of roasted sweet potato.

On the night I visited, Mr. Gonzales, was making the rounds. When he got to my table, I asked about the neighborhood. "It's taken a while, but Fountain Square is finally here. A lot of it is due to the Cultural Trail," he said, referring to the eight-mile biking and walking trail that meanders through the city connecting various culture districts, including Fountain Square. "And now," he added, "the neighborhood seems like the place to be." *DAVID FARLEY*

**Thunderbird**, 1127 Shelby Street; 317-974-9580; thunderbirdindy.com. An average meal for two, without drinks or tip, is about \$40.

**CHECK IN**

HOTEL UNIQUE, SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

**High Style, With a Hint of Quirky****Rates**

From about \$400 for a standard room — that's during non-World Cup days. The hotel is sold out for the tournament, mid-June to mid-July, according to its website.

**Basics**

São Paulo is an intimidating city, with traffic, crowds and crime mixing with a vibrant social and cultural scene. When it comes to hotels, there is a slew of standard business properties, but Hotel Unique, renovated in late 2012, stands apart primarily because of its innovative design. Known locally as the "Watermelon" for its striking crescent shape, Hotel Unique tries, and mostly succeeds, to be a combination of quirky and luxurious. The Brazilian architect Ruy Ohtake designed the 95-room hotel to look like the hull of a ship, and its porthole windows are a delightfully evocative touch. Inside, the décor is stylish and modern (high ceilings, dark elevators) with a hint of eccentricity, like the big, blue, circular cushion that serves as a sitting area in the lobby. At first glance, it resembled something a dog might sleep on; in reality it was remarkably comfortable.

**Location**

There is plenty of concrete in the sprawling city, but Hotel Unique is in the glorious Jardim Paulista, an area of gritty streets and idyllic green spaces like the lovely Ibirapuera Park, a short walk away.

**The Room**

Alas, my tiny standard room did not feature the famous curved walls of rooms on the side of the half-moon structure. Still, the room, all black and white, felt sleek in a generic Ikea-ish sort of way. The electronics were excellent: a DVD player, an iPod-docking alarm clock, speakers embedded in the headboard and a satellite-enabled TV with an abundance of channels.

**The Bathroom**

If I wanted to talk to someone who was in the bathroom (who doesn't want that?), I could have heaved open a garage-door-style divider separating the room's spaces. Another cool-but-less-functional bonus was the towel-warming rack, though my towel came out more tepid than toasty.

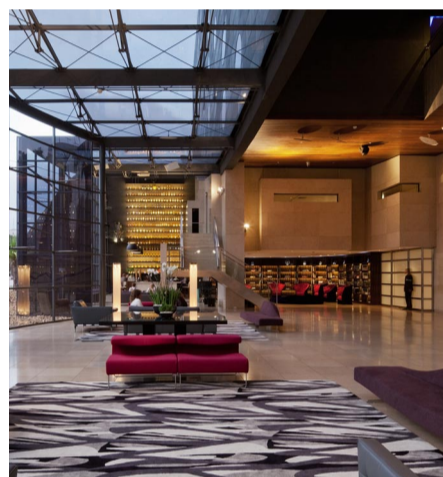
**Amenities**

Checking in was a pleasing experience, starting with the free Champagne I was of-



PHOTOGRAPHS FROM HOTEL UNIQUE

The hotel is known as the "Watermelon." Below, a bedroom, and the Wall, one of the hotel's bars.



fered at the desk and continuing on to the tour of the hotel's quirky interior offered by the receptionist, and the coconut water delivered to my room just minutes after I put down my suitcase. The gym is well stocked with modern basic equipment, if a bit cramped, but there are two side-by-side heated indoor pools bathed in colored lights and complete with massage-jetted loungers carved into the pool's stone walls.

**Dining**

Other than the hotel's shape and, well, the water slide (I couldn't resist), the most memorable aspect of Hotel Unique was its rooftop bar and restaurant, Skye, with stunning views of the city and a cavalcade of drink choices including many variations on the caipirinha. The menu has plenty of traditional Brazilian dishes as well as Continental cuisine. My room-service breakfast of eggs, pastries and jams arrived in 26 minutes (four minutes ahead of schedule) but was largely forgettable, save for the various types of fruit juice on offer.

**Bottom Line**

Hotel Unique offers a prime location and a pleasant and peculiar experience for guests looking for something out of the ordinary. *SAM BORDEN*

**Hotel Unique**, Avenida Brigadeiro Luis Antonio, 4700; São Paulo; 55-11-3055-4700; hotelunique.com.