

# ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Southern elegance, charm make you want to stay forever



The lobby of the Madison Hotel, a luxury boutique hotel, in downtown Memphis. It was built 1905 as the Tennessee Trust Bank. (By Jackie Hutcherson/P-D)

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**MEMPHIS, TENN.** — If the Peabody Hotel is the "place to be seen," then the Madison Hotel is "the place not to be seen" and owner Mohamad Hakimian likes that just fine. This luxury boutique hotel celebrates Memphis and the blues in a more sophisticated way. The Madison opened in 2002 with Hakimian, who previously was general manager of the Peabody, and two business partners. They wanted a downtown hotel that catered to a different group of travelers, a place to stay that combined European elegance with a big helping of Southern hospitality.

**THE BASICS:** Built in 1905 as the Tennessee Trust Bank, the building was renovated six years ago into a hotel with 110 rooms. But the bank offers one reminder. The fitness room in the basement is not only home to treadmills and free weights, but the old vault door. The Madison is a member of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World, and is a current recipient of the AAA's 4-diamond award.

**THE UNIQUE:** As soon as you walk through the entrance, you will notice how the décor celebrates the music of Memphis. Even the "M" on the brass handles of the front doors is created to resemble musical notes. In the lobby, there is a baby grand piano ready for playing.

But take a moment to look up and see the rows of names etched into two glass windows. Isaac Hayes, Sam & Dave, Luther Ingram, Ann Peebles, Brownie McGee. If there are names you don't quite recognize, a trip to Stax, Sun Studio or the Rock 'n Soul Museum is a must for your Memphis music education.

And not to namedrop, but Nicole, daughter of Isaac Hayes, is the Madison's concierge.

**THE ROOMS:** High-backed couches and curtains that sweep away from the window give the guest rooms a well-lighted, dramatic flair. In the evening the turn-down service unhooks the curtains for the night.

As for the bedding, the softness of the Italian linens will make you wish the wake-up call never happens. But if you have to get up, a coffee maker in the room — and newspaper delivery, USA Today or the Memphis Commercial Appeal — will help start the day.

The ceramic-tile bathrooms include separate tub and shower, thick towels, a plush robe, and plenty of room. The scale tucked under the sink was most forgiving when I attempted to weigh myself. That's Southern hospitality for you. Pass the biscuits, please.

Rooms have Internet access, wet bars and minibars in some rooms. Guest rooms for the disabled are available.

**THE GUESTS:** Executive business travelers, a wedding party, older couples and a few families made up the guest list during my stay.

**THE FOOD:** The Madison has 24-hour room service, a complimentary continental breakfast and Grill 83. The restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, and has an upscale menu created by its chef Chris Windsor. For brunch, the banana and almond stuffed french toast (\$11) was so good I ate only half.

At dinner, the jumbo shrimp honey-chipotle glazed, served on sweet corn pudding (\$12) was a perfect portion served in a tiny cast-iron skillet.

And because the bathroom scale was on my side, I had to try a few desserts, made fresh daily in the Madison's bakery. The banana white chocolate spring roll with macadamia nuts and caramel sauce (\$7) was an unexpected treat, but I had inside information on the chocolate toffee cheesecake with warm chocolate sauce (\$8) that did not let me down. It was warm and

decadent.

**THE HIGH POINTS:** An unobstructed view of the Mississippi River greets visitors to the rooftop, which is perfect for receptions and special events. The Madison's location is located around the corner from the trolley line, and it's only a short walk down the bluff to the riverfront.

**THE LOW POINTS:** That I had to leave. And that I ran out of time to swim in the heated lap pool in the basement.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Deluxe room rates range from \$240 to \$280; one bedroom suites, \$350; VIP suite, \$1,000; and Presidential suite, \$1,350. Madison Hotel, 79 Madison Avenue, Memphis, Tenn. Call 1-901-333-1200 or visit [www.madisonhotelmemo.com](http://www.madisonhotelmemo.com).

**[jhutcherson@post-dispatch.com](mailto:jhutcherson@post-dispatch.com) | 314-340-8231**