

Travel

Philadelphia artists
craft a cool cocoonWestin hands a horde of creative types
\$10,000 and the keys to Room 414By Gene Sloan
USA TODAY

PHILADELPHIA — Style-conscious hoteliers such as Ian Schrager and the late Bill Kimpton have led a revolution in big-city lodging over the past two decades, opening fun, funky and art-filled boutique hotels from New York to Chicago to San Francisco.

But somehow, Philadelphia, the nation's fifth-largest metro area, found itself bypassed by the trend.

No matter. As of earlier this summer, the City of Brotherly Love may have the coolest hotel room in the USA.

Room 414 at The Westin Philadelphia downtown is the handiwork of more than two dozen Philadelphia-area artists and designers who collectively created an environment that is as much museumlike art installation as lodging.

Led by local designers R.J. Thornburg and Eileen Tognini, the wide-ranging crew created a chocolate-colored cocoon layered with drawings, prints, sculptures, handmade furniture and textiles.

The centerpiece is a soaring wall-to-wall mural behind the bed by artist Meg Saligman. Playing off the room's function as a place to sleep, the mural offers a "dream

sequence" of images from some of her best-known work in the city. In an amusing twist, it also harbors portraits of Thornburg and noted lighting designer Warren Muller.

For his part, Muller cooked up three whimsical lights, including a floor-to-ceiling light-infused assemblage of reclaimed metal and ceramic objects that is as much a sculpture as a functional lighting source.

Equally sculptural is the room's dresser, a handmade montage of salvaged materials (the top component is a recycled wheatboard that resembles marble) designed by Thornburg and made by local cabinetmaker Sherman & Gosweller.

Drawings and photographs by local artists Jenny Lynn, Dolores Poacelli, Barbara Schaff and Robert Hakalski adorn the walls. And there are lots of little surprises, from the lifelike bronze fingers that serve as drawer pulls on the bedside tables (the work of sculptor Greg Nangle, who also made the cupped bronze hands that hold the toiletries in the bathroom) to the chess set that substitutes tiny tequila bottles and salt shakers for pawns.

The Westin, which was in the midst of a \$10 million makeover, gave the artists free rein with the room, dubbed the uwishunu



Photos by Jason Smith
for uwishunu.com

(pronounced "you wish you knew") room.

"The goal was to create an experience that illustrates what's happening in Philly's creative community," says project director Errin Cecil-Smith, who gave the artists just six weeks and \$10,000 to create something magical.

"We wanted to make a destination of a single room as a way to show the world our unconventional side."

For guests, she adds, one night in the room is "like making 30 (art) studio and boutique visits" in Philadelphia all at once.

Information: 215-563-1600; starwoodhotels.com/westin.



Before and after:
Room 414 at The Westin Philadelphia was stripped down and then completely remade by local artists.