

Travel



In the bar-restaurant of Mama Shelter, a new hotel designed by Philippe Starck.

Check In, Check Out Hotel Review: Mama Shelter in Paris

THE BASICS

Three members of the Trignano family (which helped to build the Club Med chain) now hope to turn the St.-Blaise neighborhood of the 20th Arrondissement — a sleepy enclave on the eastern edge of Paris — into the French version of New York's meatpacking district. Already the owners of a nightclub catering to 20-somethings, the Trignanos recently opened a 172-room hotel where rooms start at 79 euros (\$101.90 at \$1.29 to the euro) a night. The designer: Philippe Starck, whose Royalton in New York, St. Martin's Lane in London and Delano in Miami Beach have never been surpassed. Mama Shelter, though far less grand than most of Mr. Starck's hotels, is as inventive and exciting as the best of them.

LOCATION

The hotel, which opened in September, is near the Père-Lachaise Cemetery, about four miles from the center of Paris. Luckily, the No. 76 bus stops in front of the hotel on its way to the Louvre. (The trip takes about 20 minutes and costs 1.60 euros. Taxis charge about 15 euros for the same journey.) For the more adventurous, there is a Vélib' (municipal bicycle) location around the corner from the hotel, on the Rue des Pyrénées. Directly across the street from the hotel is the Trignanos' indie rock venue, La Flèche d'Or.

Check In, Check Out

By FRED BERNSTEIN Published: March 22, 2009

Travel

THE ROOM

Mr. Starck's challenge was to make the most of tiny spaces (within a building that he didn't design). My room, No. 622, was barely 100 square feet. **But it had everything I needed, including silence, a super-comfortable bed and flawless electronics:** instead of a TV, there was an iMac with a 24-inch screen, programmed to work as a TV, CD/DVD player or computer (and controlled by both a wireless keyboard and handy remote). With black walls and gray ceiling, the room felt slightly cavelike. But Mr. Starck intended that effect, and he chose not to provide overhead lighting. (The bedside lamps are fluorescent tubes covered by Chewbacca masks.) The room has a minibar and microwave and, in lieu of a closet, open shelves, none of them big enough for a suitcase.

THE BATHROOM

Unlike the bedroom, which is eccentric and dark, the bathroom is straightforward (white tile everywhere) and bright.

AMENITIES

The focus of the hotel is the ground-floor restaurant and lounge, which is filled to the brim (actually, a vast chalkboard ceiling covered in graffiti) with Mr. Starck's inventiveness. There's a huge communal table with TV screens beneath its glass top, light fixtures made from bird cages and so on. **The terrific breakfast buffet is 20 euros.** A prix fixe lunch is 25 euros; at dinner, entrees cost about that much. Which creates a dilemma: the rooms are inexpensive, suggesting this is a budget hotel, but other costs can add up quickly. **The staff was friendly, and flexible:** though I had booked a room at the lowest rate — which stipulated no refunds or changes — the hotel didn't hesitate to switch my dates after my father died.

ROOM SERVICE

None, which is why there ought to be a coffeemaker in the room.

BOTTOM LINE

The location gives you a new perspective on Paris; the design gives you a new perspective on the world. **Mama Shelter is a fabulous place to stay**, especially if you nab a room for 79 euros. But unless you abstain from eating and drinking in the hotel, you may spend twice that much per day.

Mama Shelter, 109 Rue de Bagnolet; (33-1) 4348-4848; www.mamashelter.com.