

The 20 Best Hotels in the US

By *Jeremy Murphy*

LAST YEAR *SIMPLY THE BEST* BROUGHT YOU our rankings for the 12 best hotels, resorts and inns in the United States (some have even earned repeat honors and are now dubbed *STB* All Star Hotels). We looked for things beyond just a fancy locale and 300-thread count bed sheets. Most important to us was hospitality, a sense of history and imagination and, believe it or not, a storyline—a place where memories could be made and cherished. It was an exceedingly hard task, but the final list represented what we felt to be the country's very finest establishments, large and small.

Well, we've done it again, except this time we expanded our selection to 20. We scoured the country for hotels, resorts and inns that meet those criteria. From The Point, an ultra-exclusive 11-room cabin retreat in the Adirondacks so secret the locals won't give you directions, to the delightfully surprising Ritz-Carlton, Georgetown, housed in a building that was once an incinerator, our list runs the gambit from the inspired to the sublime.

The one thing they all have in common? We'd go back again, again and again.

THE RITTENHOUSE

Address: 210 West Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Penn. 19103

Phone: 800-635-1042

Its glass skyscraper hovering over Philadelphia's beautiful Rittenhouse Square belies the residential and luxurious atmosphere of the city's best hotel, The Rittenhouse, an independently owned and operated 98-room establishment. Since it opened in 1989, the property has become *the* place to stay for celebrities, dignitaries and royalty, as well as truly discriminating travelers, and rightfully so. When Bruce Willis requested a steam shower in his room while in town filming "The Sixth Sense" and "Unbreakable," The Rittenhouse's acclaimed general manager David Benton (he puts Hector Alizondo's character from "Pretty Woman" to shame) had one built in his room. Benton also filled Luciano Pavarotti's suite with custom-made furniture (his suite already has a full working kitchen), and ordered up custom-made dog biscuits and cookies for Oprah Winfrey's beloved cocker-spaniel Solomon when the talk show host was in town filming her 1998 movie "Beloved." And, when Tom Hanks needed to lose considerable weight for his role as an AIDS victim in the 1993 movie "Philadelphia," Benton had the kitchen staff prepare his diet, which was faxed each night to the hotel by Hanks' Los Angeles-based nutritionist.

The hotel's lobby is stunning, filled with wooden columns, inlaid marble, gilded walls, wide and comfortable chairs and sofas, over-flowing floral arrangements and priceless art, along with various clocks above the reception desk showing the time of cities across the globe, including Mecca (a gesture to the Saudi prince and his entourage, who are frequent guests). The rooms are tastefully decorated in blue and gold strokes, with comfortable, overstuffed couches and chairs, beautiful artwork by Philadelphia locals (unless you're Pavarotti, whose suite is filled with pictures of horses), a bedside CD player featuring classical piano tracks from the Curtis Institute (a local music school just across the square), pillow-top mattress, 310-thread count sheets, views of the Rittenhouse Square, and the city's biggest (and best!) bathrooms, which flaunt huge marble tubs.

The hotel's on-site restaurant, Lacroix, was recently named one of the world's best places to eat by *Conde Nast Traveler*, which placed it on its "2004 Hot Tables List." The French-American restaurant, created by one of America's greatest chefs, Chef Jean-Marie Lacroix, features a simple menu centered around beef, fish and fowl, accented by French techniques and local and seasonal produce. Whether it's the Peking duck, foie gras appetizer or Maine lobster, Lacroix has emerged one of Philadelphia—and the country's—hottest new restaurants. The hotel even has an in-house chocolatier who spends all day making scrumptious goodies for guests and VIPs.

The Rittenhouse, Philadelphia

