

# Philadelphia

## Best Hotels

Don't make reservations before reading our insider's guide!

PLUS:

### DREAM PALACES

(\$200 or more per night)

#### THE RITTENHOUSE HOTEL\*

(AAA 5-DIAMOND WINNER)

210 WEST RITTENHOUSE SQUARE 800-635-1042

**BROCHURE DESCRIPTION** "A landmark of Philadelphia style ... an urban hideaway." Intimate 98-room boutique-style hotel overlooking Rittenhouse Square Park; Adolf Biecker Fitness Club, Salon and Spa; concierge available 24 hours a day; laundry and dry cleaning service; mailing service; Evantine florist and gift shop in lobby; 24-hour room service; executive business center; high-speed T1 Internet access in guest rooms; traditional British tea; pets welcome. Restaurants: TreeTops, Boathouse Row Bar, Cassatt Lounge & Tea Room. Rate: \$230. Check-in: 3 p.m.; checkout: 1 p.m.

**REGISTRATION** Door held open by smiling doorman. Lobby is an extremely elegant array of golds, taupes, teals and creams, with ashwood millwork, pine Louis XV bergères, massive ceiling sconces, baby grand piano, majestic staircase, polished marble underfoot, lots of uniformed bellhops and the exquisite Evantine gift shop. Check-in was notably pleasant—I was greeted by name and asked my choice of morning newspaper, presented with an actual old-fashioned room key, and directed to elevators, all in about two minutes.

**ROOM** Scores a 10 on our 1-to-10 rating scale. It was huge—more like an apartment than a hotel room, with separate sitting area, dressing area, dining table and chairs, and large bedroom. Charming country French Laura Ashley chintz motif, two grand armoires (both concealing TVs), plush sofa, several reading chairs; wraparound windows overlooking indoor pool. Mum's the word as to outside noise.

**AMENITIES** Minibar (cheapest item: sourdough pretzels for \$1.25; most expensive item: half-bottle of Mumm Cuvée Napa champagne, \$37); full-length mirror; robe (and slippers); iron and ironing board; mint on pillow; hair dryer; choice of *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* or *USA Today*; VCR; fax; leather-bound *TV Guide*; copies of *Vogue*, *Travel & Leisure* and *Life* magazines; videos (including *The Wizard of Oz* and *My Best Friend's Wedding*) available from front desk; caviar menu; complimentary umbrella sleeves in the lobby. Absent: coffeemaker.

**BATHROOM** Cleanliness: 10. Sprawling (this hotel is rumored to have the biggest in the city) and lush marble bath with suspended TV(!); glass shower doors; oversize tub; scale; hair dryer; magnifying shaving mirror; fluffy white bath mat; ice bucket filled with fresh cubes; separate vanity area with large mirror; four bath towels, four hand towels; two bottles each of Neutrogena hand cream, shampoo and conditioner, plus soaps.

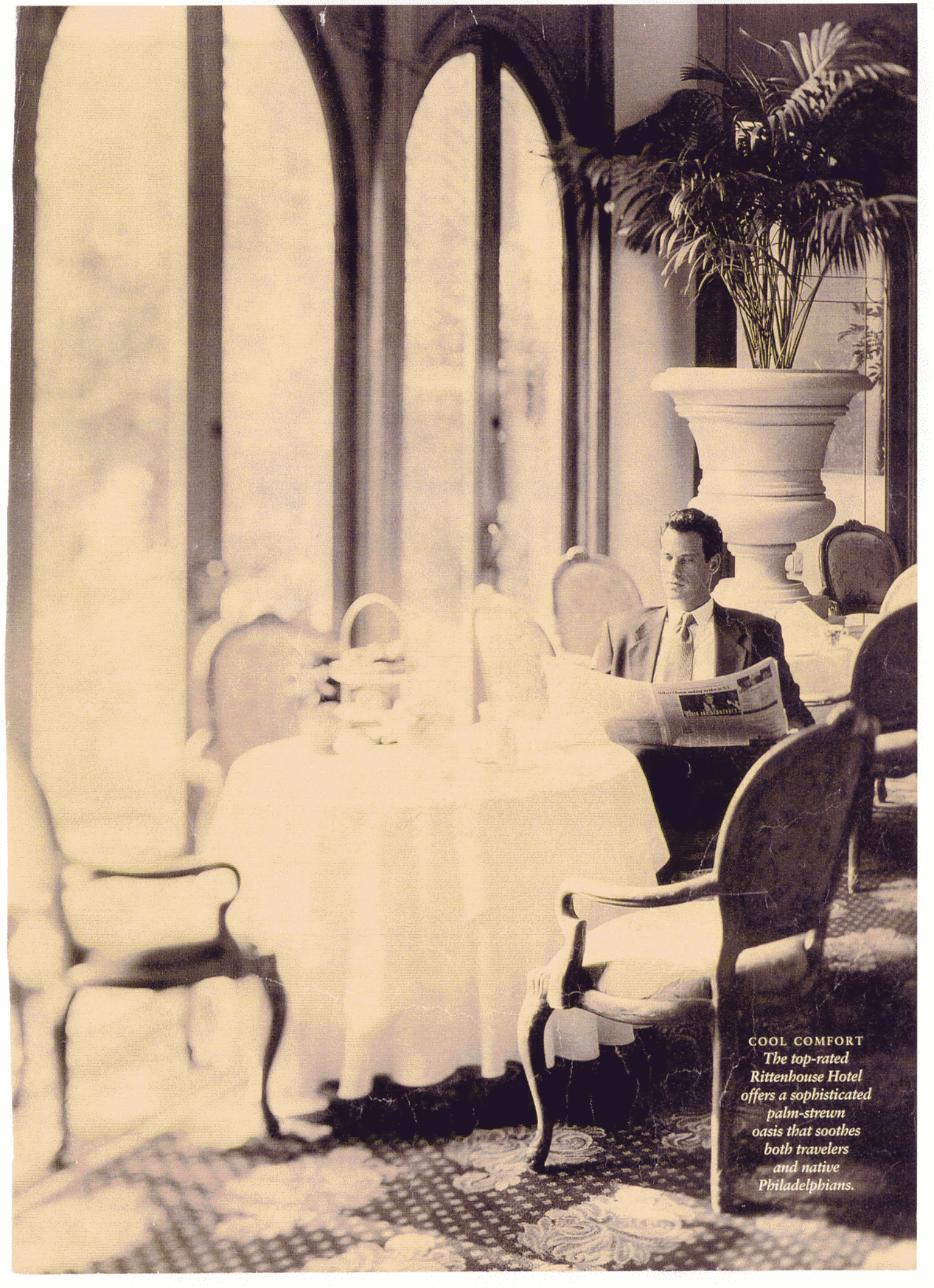
**BED** King-size, with an upholstered headboard. Four pillows; spotless blanket and comforter—the latter had been removed and stored in a closet by turndown service. Comfort level: 10.

**ROOM SERVICE** Ordered breakfast at 8 a.m.; received at 8:22, rolled in on its own table, just like in the movies, accompanied by flowers in a porcelain vase. Portions were huge; the kitchen got the order right and even provided a basket of assorted rolls. Checkout at front desk; bellhop immediately available to whistle for taxis, which were lined up on the curb outside the hotel.

**HIGH POINT** Three-way tie between the complimentary shoe-shine service (picked up by 1 a.m., returned by 6 a.m.), the bedside weather report and the gratis pair of slippers.

**LOW POINT** Wake-up call came 15 minutes early.

**OVERALL RATING (ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5)** A bed of roses; no wonder Oprah checks in. —★★★★



**COOL COMFORT**  
*The top-rated  
Rittenhouse Hotel  
offers a sophisticated  
palm-strewn  
oasis that soothes  
both travelers  
and native  
Philadelphians.*