



Lancaster Arts Hotel

By **Jim Winnerman**

SPECIAL TO THE POST-DISPATCH

05/27/2007

LANCASTER, PA. — The pastoral countryside of rural Pennsylvania is known for picturesque Amish farms, black horse-drawn carriages and country crafts. But nary a quilt nor a piece of Shaker-style furniture will be found in the Lancaster Arts Hotel.

THE BASICS: This small boutique property, which opened last November, offers a welcome alternative to the "cookie cutter" chain hotels dominating this popular tourist destination.

The property was once a tobacco leaf warehouse. The 1881 five-story building, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, has been revitalized as an upscale boutique hotel featuring the work of local artists.

THE UNIQUE: Surrounded by the Amish culture, which eschews stylish clothing and modern conveniences such as automobiles and electricity, the hotel exists as a paradox in its neighborhood. Outside, the hotel blends seamlessly with the community's colonial architecture. Inside, contemporary lighting and glass-and-steel accents meld with original brick and stone walls, exposed chestnut wood beams and wood floors.

It is the art work that is the basis for the hotel's name. More than 200 original pieces of art by painters, sculptors, weavers and carvers occupy every nook and cranny of the hotel.

THE GUESTS: According to Mara Sultan, director of sales, the hotel attracts business clientele during weekdays and tourists on the weekends.

THE ROOMS: The 63 rooms and suites are state of the art. All rooms contain flat-screen TVs, iPod docking stations, complimentary wireless Internet access, cable TV and video on demand.

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Additionally, all rooms offer free local calls on dual-line phones, plush Turkish bathrobes and towels and Kinu toiletries.

The suites make it impossible for any guest to view all the art the hotel has displayed. Several have been "adopted" by an artist, and it is only their art that hangs on the suite walls, giving the occupants the equivalent of a private art showing.

THE FOOD: The hotel's John J. Jeffries restaurant was named after a tobacco inspector who signed an inspection form that was found during renovation. It was dated November 1890.

If Jeffries was inspecting the fare at "his" restaurant today, he would probably be proud to be associated with the only fine-dining, organic restaurant in Lancaster. Chef Sean Cavanaugh, dedicated to using locally-grown produce, spent months visiting nearby family farms forging relationships in a quest for organic agricultural products.

As a result, the breakfast, lunch and dinner menus feature only local meats and poultry raised within a 25-mile radius, confinement-free in fresh green grass pastures. Menus change regularly to reflect the availability of seasonal products.

Sample dinner entrees include a "small plate" of cave-aged cheddar, herb goat cheese and roasting '40s blue with dried fruits and fresh bread (\$8). The "large plate" entrees include coffee-rubbed bison sirloin with chimichurri and herb french fries.

The restaurant also offers outside dining along a waterfall wall with seating facing Linear Park, a narrow two-block swath of green once the location of railroad tracks. Indoors there is a long, stylish, U-shaped bar that features local microbrews.

THE HIGH POINTS: The hotel is a short walk from the city center and several attractions, including Gallery Row on Prince Street, Lancaster's Central Market (the nation's oldest farmers market) and Fulton Theater (the oldest professional playhouse in the United States).

Don't like to walk? A free hotel shuttle will take guests anywhere within a five-mile radius. Or, guests can hop on one of the hotel bicycles. They come with a map of nearby (what else) art galleries.

Unusual amenities for a small hotel include free indoor parking and a complimentary fitness and business center with PC, copy and fax facilities.

Smokers beware. Just because this is a former tobacco warehouse, it does not mean smoking is permitted. The entire establishment is smoke-free.

THE LOW POINTS: Breakfast is not included in the room rate.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Room rates range from \$149 to \$349. The hotel website guarantees guests the best rate available. Visit www.lancasterartshotel.com or call 1-866-720-2787.

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[Top of page](#)

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