

Part Art School, Part Time Capsule: Inside The Radical Hotel's Fearless Design

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Photos above by David Mitchell & Matt Kisiday

The Radical Hotel is the rebellious art-school cousin who threw great parties and had impeccable taste. Dropping into the River Arts District (aka RAD, because, of course), this 70-key boutique hotel is what happens when a fearless design team with a deep respect for local culture transforms a 1920s warehouse. Spoiler alert: They do not play it safe.

Designed by [Suomi Design Works](#), The Radical is an adaptive re-use success story that shouts its history, with spray paint and all. Built in 1923 as the Kent Building, the warehouse has lived many lives since then: It's been an industrial hub, a Cold War bomb shelter, a structure that's weathered hurricanes, and now it's a hotel. Today, its exterior still wears those layers proudly.

The firm's founder, Michael Suomi, and his team worked with local firm [Rowhouse Architects](#) to imagine the space as an eccentric home with industrial bones and Southern charm. Exposed concrete and brick set the stage in the lobby, but the mood quickly shifts with bold rugs, plush circular booths, oversized chandeliers, and theatrical curtains. One of Michael's favorite unexpected elements, the curtains "were specifically designed to create an enhanced sense of mystery and encourage exploration," the interior designer notes. Additionally, the team carved out a secret grow room-inspired bar in the building's core, accessible only from a back-of-house staircase. "This is The Radical's hidden surprise that requires hunting to find," Suomi explains.



Photos above by David Mitchell

When beginning a new hotel project, Michael decides what story he wants the resulting project to tell. For The Radical, the original conceptual narrative was that of an Asheville family separated by World War II and reunited at the fall of the Berlin Wall. As such, design elements reference this storyline, and it was fitting for Michael to bring in movie set decorator Kris Moran (of *The Royal Tenenbaums*, *Moonrise Kingdom*, and *The Joker*—a casual résumé). He also enlisted the talents of a lineup of local artists, including Asheville-based muralist [Ian Wilkinson](#).

According to Michael, “Kris designed a DJ booth crafted from a ‘Ball of Death’ (typically used in circuses for motorcycle stunts) and suspended it from the ceiling of our coffee shop, Afterglow. We chose to have it fabricated in Ukraine shortly after the war began to support their local craftspeople, which coincidentally tied right back into our original narrative.” Michael wanted to include the “building’s scars, eccentricities, and history not as liabilities to be concealed, but instead as the story engine that drives every creative decision.”



Photos above by Megan Gielow

Every guestroom has its own personality, thanks to graffiti-inspired art painted directly on the walls, sculptural furniture nodding to imagined family heirlooms, and Cold War-era details like canopied beds, Bakelite accessories, and vintage USSR antiques. Somehow it all works—and feels surprisingly cozy.

The Radical's social scene is anchored in its food and beverage spaces with four distinct venues created in collaboration with chef [Jacob Sessoms](#). Afterglow morphs from daytime coffee bar to nighttime cocktail lounge. Golden Hour is the wood-fired chophouse, and upstairs, The Roof delivers river views, live music, and dancing under the stars. If you're feeling adventurous, there's Pretty Vacant Shelter Lounge, the hidden, green room-inspired bar.

The Radical isn't trying to be super polished. It's layered, loud, local, and thriving—just like the RAD itself.

—Louis Noha



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