

# THE BEST OF BOSTON'S HOTELS

BY JOHN SEDGWICK

## New, renewed and expanded

Built on a stubby peninsula thrust into the blustery Atlantic, Boston has long turned a cold shoulder to the outside world. Through the 19th century, Bostonians routinely referred to visitors from out of town as "strangers," and leading society figures had nothing to do with people to whom they had not properly been introduced. Although the city possesses innumerable charms—its revered symphony and charming Public Gardens, its tranquil Beacon Hill and bustling Quincy Market—it has been difficult for outsiders to appreciate them because the city offered so few places for nonresidents to stay. The Ritz-Carlton, the Copley Plaza and the Parker House until quite recently formed the bulk of Boston's hotels, and they were all built at the beginning of the century. Thus the city's many attractions have been lost to the rest of the country—hoarded by Bostonians like the precious stocks of a dowager.

But all that is changing. In an unprecedented building boom, Boston has recently erected a spate of hotels that have opened their doors not only to out-of-towners but also to a general spirit of luxury and high-living that the city's Puritan forefathers would have found unimaginable. Since 1981, no fewer than nine first-class hotels have gone up in the downtown area.

All clustered within a mile of the State House, the new hotels offer a wide diversity of styles, views and enticements. They include the graceful, European-like Bostonian, looking out on glittering Quincy Market; the massive 1,147-room Marriott Copley Place, adjoining a lively new shopping mall off Copley Square; the very correct Meridien, housed in the former Federal Reserve Bank Building downtown, and the newly expanded, Post-Modernist Royal Sonesta just across the Charles River. In all, they combine to contribute a bright, fresh mood to the city. Let's consider the hotels one by one.

### Hotel Meridien

A new treasure is secured in the handsome Renaissance-Revival Federal Reserve Bank Building in the heart of the downtown

business section: the Hotel Meridien. Built of granite and limestone to classical proportions in 1922, the Fed was renovated in 1981, bringing new life—and a French accent—to its stately quarters. Outside, the handsome facade now sports bright red awnings over its arched windows. Inside, the former bank vault serves as the hotel bakery. And the Members' Court, which once received the bank's board of governors, has become the Julien Lounge. There, under gilded and coffered ceilings, N.C. Wyeth's murals of Washington and Lincoln conferring with their respective secretaries of the treasury now look down on patrons sipping brandy Alexanders.

And, dramatically, filling the adjoining courtyard is the extremely high-toned Gallic restaurant Julien, named after Boston's first French restaurant. Although the courtyard is covered, it still has a wonderful *pleine aire* quality about it that stems from the high ceiling and the vines that grow up the trellised walls. You feel very Parisian sitting in the handsome wing chairs and dining on such nouvelle cuisine dishes as venison with black currants or sliced duck breast in a cider-vinegar-and-honey sauce. The spacious lobby has lots of marble, an assortment of modern sculpture, a pleasing array of couches and armchairs and little of



Guests enter the cozy Bostonian through a central courtyard.

the usual commerce—just a small newspaper stand and an attractive boutique called Fancies.

The bedrooms, 326 in all, are as soothing as any traveler could want. In all of them, besides the usual color TV and two telephones, there are numbered prints on the walls, modern furniture, a minibar, bathroom scales and a decor that is soft and inviting. In some of the 22 suites (all of them named after a French wine, chateau or vineyard), the room is arranged as a duplex, with the bedroom as a tucked-away loft above the sitting area. Other suites are single-level.

Because of its location in the canyons of downtown, the Meridien is most attractive to those who want to combine business with pleasure. The State House, Aquarium and Quincy Market/Faneuil Hall are just a few minutes' walk away. Rooms are

**The Best of Boston's Hotels** *continued*  
 on the expensive side, as is fitting for a luxury hotel, starting at \$160 for two. Special weekend rates are available. Dinner at Julien will run about \$150 for two, with wine. Meals at Café Fleuri, in the adjoining atrium, are considerably less costly. The weekend brunch is particularly recommended: quantities of fine meats, fish, crêpes, and cheeses as well as pastries served buffet style by chefs in toques. Address: 250 Franklin St., Boston, Mass. 02110; telephone 800-223-9918 or, in Boston, 617-451-1900.

## Lafayette Hotel

One of the latest additions to the fast-changing hotel scene, the Lafayette is located in the Downtown Crossing, near Jordan Marsh and Filene's. It adjoins the new Lafayette Place urban mall and soars 22 stories above the surrounding neighborhood. But despite its size, some aspects of the hotel remind you of a Back Bay town house. There is a grand staircase in the lobby that is constructed entirely of mahogany in Federalist style;

above it hang chandeliers of Waterford crystal. Antique bureaus and sideboards are set about the halls, and on the walls are English hunting scenes and portraits of various French noblemen.

The downstairs lounge is especially attractive, departing gently from the old New England look to embrace an Art Deco style reminiscent of New York City's Rainbow Room. Cylindrical columns rise up to the high ceiling, and ferns are lighted dramatically against a high wooden grill.

The upstairs floors are arranged in groups of four about a series of mini-atriums that add an element of intimacy to what is in fact a very large hotel. The blue-gray rooms are furnished with marble-topped night tables and delicately inlaid Chippendale reproductions.

The Marquis de Lafayette dining room was not in operation during my visit, but it plans to feature "cuisine creative" at the hands of French chef Louis Outhier, whose L'Oasis restaurant in La Napoule is given three stars by *Michelin*. The Café Suisse serves lighter fare in a cheerful setting, lined with paintings by six Swiss artists.

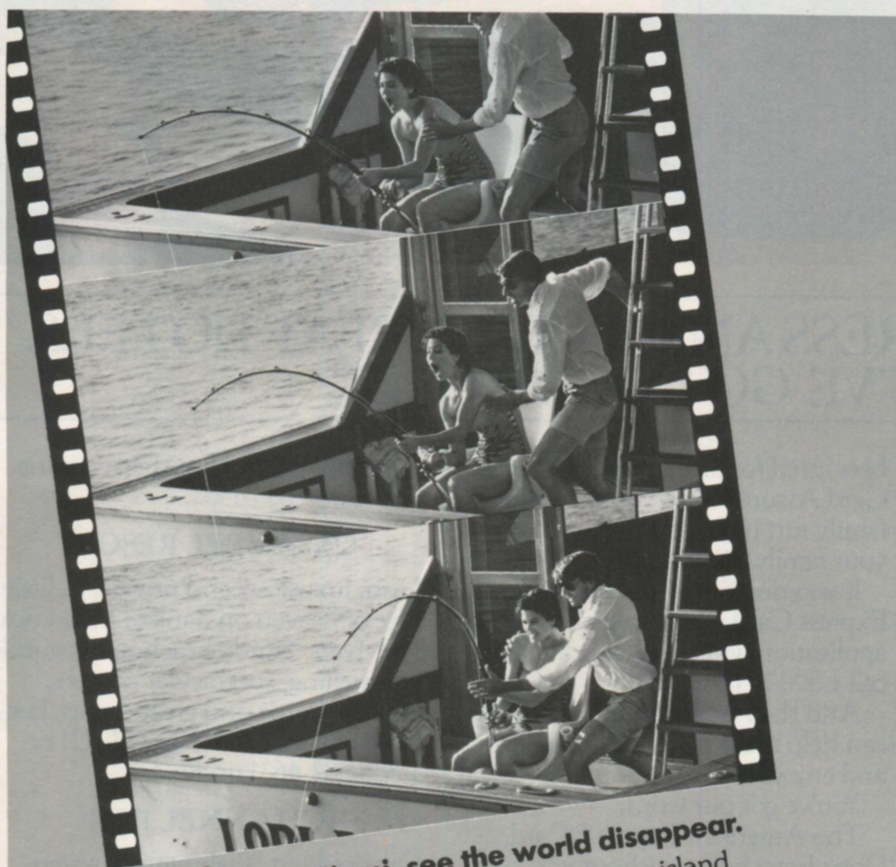
The rooms start at \$140 for two, and there is a range of suites culminating in the \$2,000-a-night Presidential Suite, which takes over the entire top floor and presents a sweeping view of the city from its terrace. Dinner at the Restaurant Le Marquis will cost about \$125 for two with wine. Address: 1 Ave. de Lafayette, 02111; 800-992-0124 or, in Massachusetts, 800-325-2531; in Boston, 451-2600.

## Royal Sonesta

Once a fairly timid, motel-style hotel, the Royal Sonesta has recently sprouted a Post-Modernist wing that so transforms the original building it seems to be an entirely new hotel. With several gabled roofs and a facade highlighted in green, the new brick wing stands out splendidly on the far side of the Charles River.

The Royal Sonesta allows you to escape the often hectic pace of Boston's downtown without exactly leaving it, for the hotel is just minutes away across the water in Cambridge. Yet a different atmosphere prevails. Here you can sit in the gray-and-peach-colored Art Deco bar, Toffs, and look out past Memorial Drive at the pleasure cruisers tied up at the marina docks on the Charles River. The granite Longfellow Bridge crosses the water in a gentle curve just upriver, and the ever-growing Boston skyline rises beyond.

For all the sights out the window, however, there are many more indoors, including outstanding works of art by the



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likes of Roy Lichtenstein, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and Frank Stella.

There are 400 rooms in the hotel, and they are about evenly split between the old and the new wings, or, as the hotel prefers to put it, the East Wing and the West. All the rooms are done in a combination of muted pink and sea green that could take some getting used to. All have river views, original art and the usual telephones and color TV, and most have individual refrigerators.

Besides Toffs, which provides lunches and light dinners as well as drinks, the Royal Sonesta serves rack of lamb and filet mignon with considerable flair in its Rib Room. Although the name conjures up a family restaurant, the place itself is quite stylish, done in shades of plum; a harpist strums in the background. The more casual Greenhouse Café serves breakfast, lunch and dinner in a cheery setting with hanging plants.

Rooms are priced from \$123 for two. Suites are available—they generally add a sitting room, better views and more exotic furnishings, such as stereo systems and canopy beds—starting at \$195. Weekend discounts are offered. Dinner at the Rib Room runs about \$80 for two, with wine. Address: 5 Cambridge Pkwy., Cambridge, 02142; 800-343-7170 or, in Boston, 491-3600.

## The Bostonian

With only 153 rooms, the Bostonian is far cozier than the stately Meridien. Built in a triangle around a central atrium, with window boxes adorning its red-brick exterior, the Bostonian is neatly wedged into a historic portion of the city that teems with nightlife. Across the street are Faneuil Hall, whose dome appears on the hotel's logo, and Quincy Market. Around the corner is the Haymarket, a venerable district that still comes alive on weekends when hundreds of fruit and vegetable sellers gather to hawk their produce on the cobblestoned street.

After entering the hotel through a circular porte cochere in the central courtyard, guests take a seat in a high-backed chair at a mahogany desk for special sit-down registration, a hotel trademark. An impressive six-foot-long model of the Canton Packet *Cobota*, which was a veteran of the East India trade, fills one corner of the small lobby. At the far end, there is a piano bar in the Atrium Lounge where a fine jazz duo of piano and bass plays nightly. The sitting area is lined with windows, the better to enjoy the action at Quincy Market across the street.

The rooms at the Bostonian are lo-

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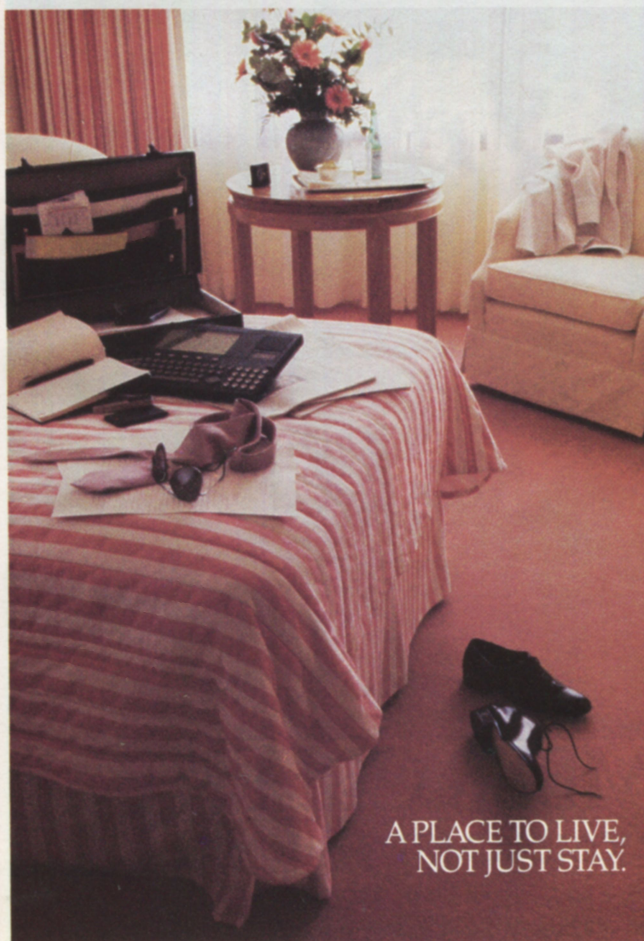
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**The Best of Boston's Hotels** *continued*

cated in two wings, a Bostonian wing that circles around the central courtyard, and the Harkness wing, which has taken over a neighboring brick building that dates to 1824. The two are linked by glass walkways. Some Harkness rooms have exposed beams and an unusual shape because of the building's original design. The Harkness furnishings are a touch more traditional than the Bostonian's contemporary style. Both are pleasingly decorated in muted earth tones. Most of the rooms have a separate dressing area,

with accompanying mirror and sink, next to the bathroom. Most also have French doors opening onto small balconies. All rooms include an especially wide bathtub, the usual color TV and telephones, and a few of the suites have Jacuzzis.

The Seasons restaurant is particularly recommended. Reached by a Hyatt-style glass elevator from the lobby, the restaurant provides memorable dining in an unusual setting under the glass roof of the top floor. Long cloth shades hang down from the angled windows supported by

stout wooden beams to give the restaurant the aspect of a clipper ship. As the name Seasons suggests, the menu changes regularly, and the dishes show great inventiveness and spirit. In the winter months, for example, there might be a ragout of lobster and mussels with Southern Comfort or a grilled black bass with anise and Pernod. The extensive wine list is drawn exclusively from American vineyards.

The Bostonian, in short, is small and tasteful—more a sophisticated inn than a standard city hotel. Rates for a double room start at \$150 per night. Suites, which generally have a parlor and working fireplace, start at \$295. Dinner at Seasons costs \$150 for two, with wine. Address: Faneuil Hall Marketplace, 02109; 800-343-0922 or, in Boston, 523-3600.

### Marriott Long Wharf

Picture an ocean liner made of brick, and you have the Marriott Long Wharf. Several hundred feet long, studded with porthole-like windows, ringed with decks and "docked" on Boston's waterfront next to the New England Aquarium, the Long Wharf lacks only smokestacks to complete the impression of a mammoth seagoing vessel. And, befitting an ocean liner, the Long Wharf offers its passengers just about everything they could want on board.

From street level, visitors reach the main floor up a long escalator "gangway" into a central atrium that is capped, strangely, by a mammoth pyramid of glass. All around are arched walkways leading to the guest rooms on the upper floors. On one side of the atrium is the lobby, on the other is the Palm Garden restaurant and lounge. It's a big, airy space with a checkerboard marble floor, ferns all around, and a high cylinder of glittering lights over the bar.

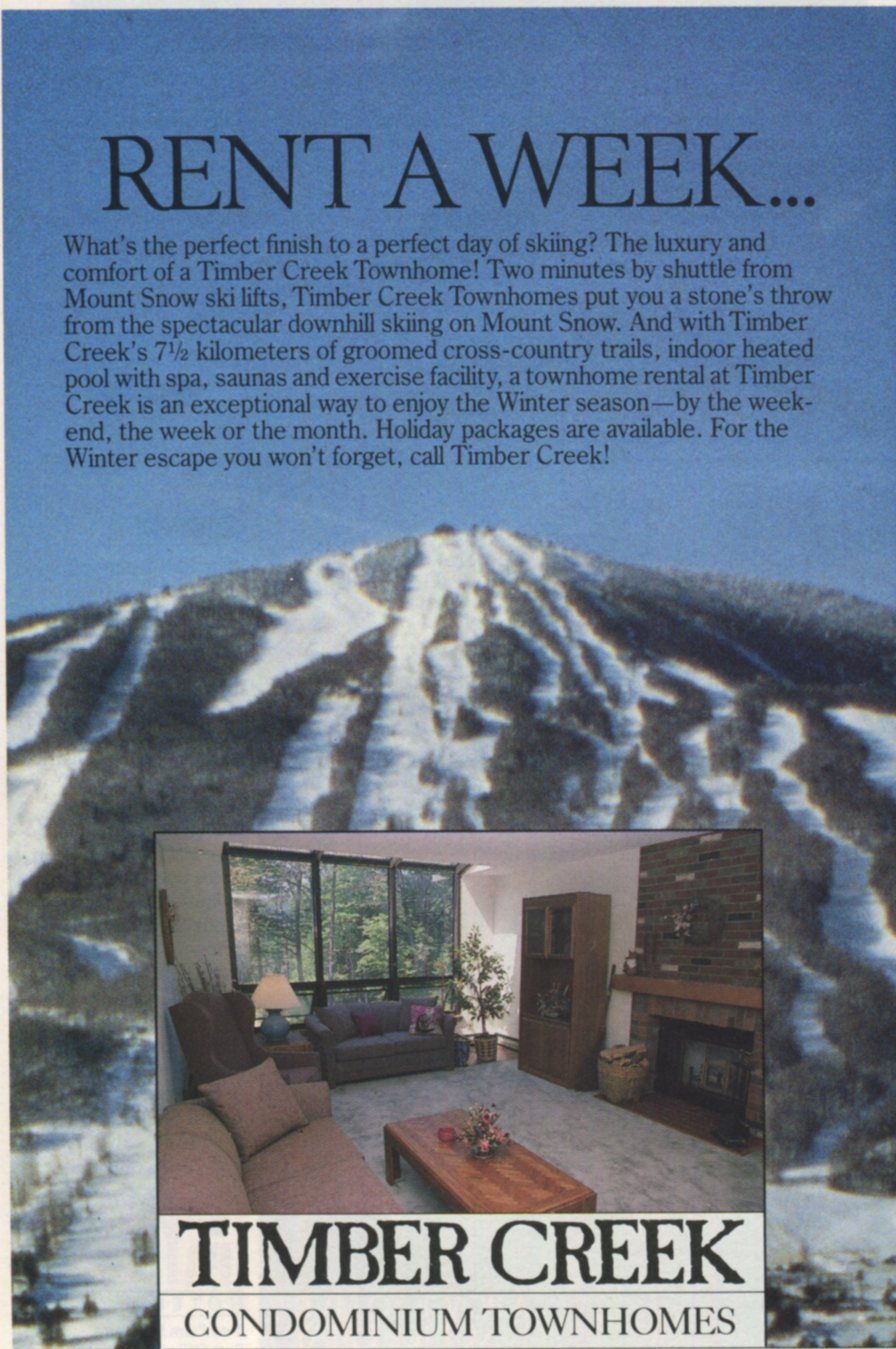
For serious drinking, however, guests should go below decks to the acclaimed Rachael's, which picks up the ocean-liner motif with some porthole-like interior windows and brass detailing. The bar adds dollops of New Wave glitz, with a disk jockey secreted at a console high above the action—a dance floor, and two screens for rock videos and other visual entertainment.

For proper dining, there is the Harbor Terrace Restaurant on the foredeck, which serves the catch of the day mesquite-grilled, among other delicacies, in a posh setting. In the summer months, tables are set out on the surrounding deck in the sea air. In winter, diners have to be satisfied with the harbor views through the window.

The 400 rooms are all done in peach

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and green, with mahogany furniture and original prints. Most rooms look out on the water. They have the usual telephones and television (HBO included). There are 22 suites, one of them, the Presidential, has a terrace, a grand piano and glassed-in fireplace. The Long Wharf has an indoor pool and exercise room.

Rooms start at \$170 for two; weekend discounts are available. Dinner at the Harbor Terrace Restaurant costs about \$80 for two, with wine. Address: 296 State St., Boston, Mass. 02109; 800-228-9290 or, in Boston, 227-0800.

### Marriott Copley Place

Not to be confused with its Marriott sister on the waterfront, the Marriott Copley Place rises 38 floors over Copley Square in the Back Bay. It adjoins Copley Place, the new shopping mall housing such well-known retailers as Tiffany and Neiman-Marcus.

A central corridor in Copley Place leads out to the Marriott's main floor, and the hotel's architecture continues the look of the mall with an exterior that features the same pinkish precast cement. The hotel is configured as an L-shaped high rise, while Copley Place is wide and low.

The Marriott's public floors are ringed around a four-story atrium, with a shower of tiny lights pouring down the interior. There is something sparkling about the whole place—the shiny brass railing, the reflective leaves of the fig trees, the wall of glass looking out on Huntington Avenue and the gleaming skywalk over it that leads to Copley Place.

Guests can have a drink at the Terrace Bar. Or they can dine at Speedwell's, a restaurant noted for its beef and seafood and its individual attention. There, at the beginning of the meal, diners are shown the various cuts of meat and portions of fish uncooked so they can better make their selections; many courses later, they can sample a fine array of distinguished brandies and liqueurs. For a more relaxing, casual meal, try Singleton's, which offers middle-range eating beneath pictures of swans swimming among lily pads. Or, finally, you can sample Gourmeli's, a sandwich-and-burger place in a market-like atmosphere.

There are 1,147 rooms at the Marriott, all done in a plum color, with dark wood furnishings. The views are terrific, as they extend to the Charles River on the north and the Atlantic on the south. There is an indoor pool and also an exercise club with great views of the city, too. Room rates start at \$160 for two; prices

for suites begin at \$400; weekend discounts are available. Dinner for two with wine at Speedwell's costs about \$80; a meal with wine at Singleton's runs about \$50. Address: 110 Huntington Ave., 02116; 800-228-9290 or, in Boston, 236-5800.

### Westin

Like the Marriott Copley Place, the Westin is joined to Copley Place and derives much of its architectural style, chiefly its beige, precast concrete exterior, from the

neighboring mall. It, too, is a high rise of 36 stories. The Westin, however, manages to maintain a little more character inside.

Guests enter from a corner of Copley Square and come up into the body of the hotel on a long escalator between a pair of waterfalls and amid a profusion of plants that give the interior a fresh, springlike feeling. At the top, visitors are immediately tempted by an elegant kiosk to their right selling perfume. Farther along, Mark Cross leather goods and Ciro jewelry beckon on the corridor that leads

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### The Best of Boston's Hotels continued

to Copley Place. There is an inviting lounge, where guests can have a drink to piano music in a forest of brushed brass columns that rise to a mirrored ceiling.

On the lower floor, at street level, a variety of dining experiences awaits. As its name implies, the Brasserie is a big, colorful, French-style restaurant that's open for all the meals of the day. Dishes are light and casual—quiches and sandwiches as well as heartier entrees of chicken and veal. Turner Fisheries, next door, provides fresh fish—Norwegian salmon, swordfish, scrod—in a more sophisticated atmosphere of brass and mahogany, with original pastels of fish above the booths around the room.

Back up on the lobby floor, however, is the most refined dining experience of them all, at Ten Huntington. There diners can sample such dishes as scallops with leeks and vermouth or roast pork tenderloin with basil and pine nuts while they sit on banquettes under subdued arc lights.

The Westin's 804 rooms are furnished in oak with an ash wash. The style is modern; the tones are muted. There are superb views through bay windows with operable sashes.

Prices for a double room start at \$165 per night; 48 suites are priced from \$320; weekend discounts are offered. Dinner at Ten Huntington is probably the best value to be found at any of the hotels: there is a four-course prix-fixe menu for \$29 per person. Address: 10 Huntington Ave., 02116; 800-228-3000 or, in Boston, 262-9600.

### Back Bay Hilton

The forgotten entry on the Boston hotel scene, the Back Bay Hilton can be found off Boylston Street on the out-of-town side of the Prudential Center. A tall, slender cement building in sheer Modernist style, the Hilton has an interior that seems to have been lost in a time warp. Stepping inside, you find a lobby from the Fifties, and you expect to see businessmen wearing fedoras and wide-lapeled gray suits sitting in the leather chairs under the spreading palms.

Yet for all that, the Hilton has a certain charm in the way that it declares itself so unabashedly to be a hotel, plain and simple, not a collection of trendy lounges and high-priced boutiques. And it does not stint on any of the expected comforts.

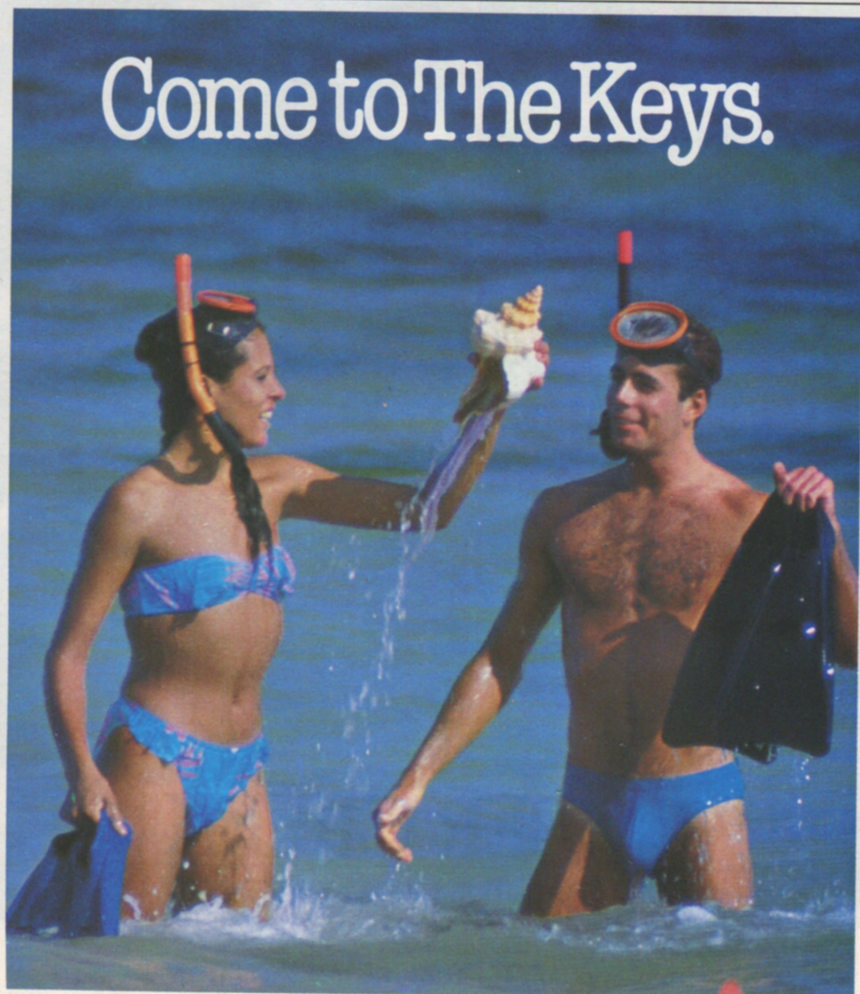
There's a piano bar off the lobby and a small but pleasant pine-paneled restaurant around the corner, past the newsstand. Called Boodle's, the restaurant features a grill for seafood, meat and poultry, where diners can select the wood (mesquite, hickory, sassafras) for the fire underneath and the sauce (Bordelaise, cold cucumber, garlic butter) to be served with the food. The decor is pleasantly Victorian (there are moose heads and pictures of hunting scenes on the walls).

The rooms, 367 in all, are done in earth tones alternating with beige. Lithographs of Boston on the walls lend a touch of history. Because the hotel is so high up in the Back Bay, the views are splendid on all sides.

Room prices start at \$135 for two; weekend discounts are provided. Dinners at Boodle's are moderately priced, about \$70 for two, with wine. Address: 40 Dalton St., 02115; telephone 236-1100.

### Four Seasons Hotel

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established a reputation for excellence in Washington and New York, and this latest link, completed last spring, is ideally situated—overlooking Boston's exquisite Public Gardens with its many statues and flower beds and its swan boats on the pond. Looking out from the upper floors of the hotel, you gaze across the garden's treetops, up majestic Beach Street to the glittering State House at the crest of Beacon Hill.

The building itself is solid and unpretentious. Fifteen stories tall, it is curved at one end and squared off at the other, its red brick and myriad windows the most distinctive features. Inside, the overwhelming impression is one of space. Blond-oak paneling and pink marble alternate on the walls; luxurious rugs are set into a marble framework on the floor. By the front desk there is a bowl of Waterford crystal, a splendidly Bostonian grandfather clock and two fine oil portraits.

In the rooms guests find all the pleasant little extras: fresh tulips in a splash of color; fully stocked minibars in the bedroom armoires; antique chests for linen storage in the halls so the maids don't have to push ungainly trolleys from room to room; room service offering

meals fresh from the stove around the clock, and a computerized check-in that keeps track of customers' favorite rooms and special needs from year to year.

The expected amenities are delivered with a memorable Four Seasons style. Its fine dining room, Aujourd'hui, located upstairs in a spacious room lined with dark oak paneling and potted palms, offers sumptuous French cuisine. Breast of duckling with pear and ginger and poached sea bass with cream of green peas are two typically intriguing dishes prepared by the chef. The menu even includes a special "alternative" cuisine for guests who would like to keep their two-course intake to less than 650 calories. The dessert pastries are enticing, and the wine list is long.

For more casual dining, you might try the Bristol Court downstairs for lunch. The dining area looks out on a terrace, where food is also served during the warmer months; the lounge side has views of the Public Garden. The food is appropriately light and pleasant, with a lunch menu that includes crabmeat salad and a smoked Scottish salmon.

Bedrooms have some of the feeling of a guest room in the Back Bay. The

armoires are mahogany, the armchairs chintz. Even the smallest rooms at the Four Seasons are sizable. Yet for those who seek a little more space, the hotel has 100 Four Seasons Rooms that open onto sitting rooms. Beyond that, one might try a deluxe suite decorated in a Post-Modernist style with a color scheme that might be called variations on a theme of mauve. Or you can sample life from the very height of luxury in the Presidential Suite, where the bathroom alone equals the size of many bedrooms and comes with a jungle of plantlife. Finally, there is an exercise room and a beautiful pool with views of the Public Garden.

At Aujourd'hui, the price for dinner for two is about \$120 with wine. A table d'hôte selection of three courses comes to \$40 per person. At the Bristol Court downstairs, the total should come to \$70 for two with wine. Room rates start at \$160 for a double; Four Seasons Rooms cost \$195; the one-bedroom deluxe suites cost \$425; the one-bedroom Presidential suite is priced at \$850 and the two-bedroom, \$950. Weekend packages are available. Address: 200 Boylston St., at Charles St., 02167; 800-268-6282 or, in Boston, 338-4400. ■