

Check In / Check Out

CHICAGO

The Wit

THE BASICS

Even in a city filled with striking architecture, the Wit makes a powerful impression — a green-tinted glass box with an angled roof and a yellow lightning bolt shooting down its State Street facade. But there's much more to the Wit than its design. The hotel, which opened in May, has a superb location in downtown Chicago, bright rooms with mesmerizing views and an eager-to-please staff. During my recent visit, the hotel — the first in a new chain from Doubletree (itself a division of Hilton) — managed to be all things to all people; business travelers, vacationing families and trend-seeking 20-somethings all seemed to love the place.

THE LOCATION

On State Street, at the northern end of the Loop. That puts it just a few blocks from Millennium Park, the newly enlarged Art Institute of Chicago, the theater district and countless other attractions. Public transportation options abound; the Blue Line's Clark and Lake station, just a half hour (and \$2.25) from O'Hare airport, is right outside.

THE ROOM

The décor feels a bit corporate (with lots of textured wallpaper), and the furniture is trying too hard to be hip (a floor lamp with dangling crystals and an aqua sofa with hot-pink cushions). But those are quibbles. My standard double room was spacious and comfortable. And besides, I couldn't stop looking out the huge windows, which offered views of the Chicago River, Bertrand Goldberg's astonishing Marina City towers and the stately buildings of State Street, including the Chicago Theater with its ornate marquee.

THE BATHROOM

Grand and glamorous, a 9-by-9-foot square containing not only a large shower stall, but an extremely deep tub, which I was able to fill in just three minutes. The water-saving dual-flush toilet was a welcome feature, as were the Neutrogena toiletries. Suggestion box: Window shades that roll up from the floor, rather than down from the ceiling, would have made it

possible to enjoy the views while showering or bathing.

AMENITIES

A rooftop bar, called Roof, has become one of Chicago's hottest hangouts. The ground-floor restaurant, State and Lake, serves gastropub-style fare (striped bass with roasted artichoke and crispy prosciutto, \$25) and artisanal brews (Allagash White, \$6). There's also an upscale Italian restaurant, Cibo Matto. The fifth floor contains a nifty health club (with terrific views and Precor equipment) and a plush 40-seat screening room where movies are shown every Tuesday night.



SALLY RYAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The skyscraper known as the Jewelers Building is framed by a window in the Wit.

ROOM SERVICE

O.K., it isn't perfect. My breakfast order took 10 minutes longer than promised, and the toast was barely toasted. But the salad I ordered at lunch was terrific, even though the \$3 service charge and 18 percent gratuity were almost as much as the food itself. Still, I was able to eat it in front of those windows!

THE BOTTOM LINE

Countless nice touches — like the neighborhood map printed on your key card — make the Wit feel like the smartest new corporate hotel in ages. Doubles from \$179.

The Wit, 201 North State Street; (312) 467-0200; www.thewithotel.com.

FRED A. BERNSTEIN