



## Luxury Hotel Goes 'Green'

**From Recycled Toilet Paper to Organic Shampoo, One San Francisco Hotel Stays Environmentally Aware**

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Luxury hotels aren't usually on environmental tours, but the Orchard Garden Hotel in San Francisco is. On the day that "Nightline" visited the hotel, Laura Rodormer of the San Francisco Department of the Environment brought with her a high-level delegation from China to take a look at the "green" building.

"There really is a big trend moving towards green due to the cost savings, the improved health, and it's where buildings are going these days," Rodormer told ABC's "Nightline."

**Watch the full story tonight on "Nightline" at 11:35 p.m. EDT**

The Orchard Garden Hotel is one of the country's first green hotels. The differences are subtle. It was built out of cement partially made from recycled ash from coal burning. The lobby is lined with paneling made from recycled particle board.

In the rooms, guests immediately encounter energy-saving devices. For example, the room key is inserted into a slot that activates the lights and the temperature control. When the guest leaves and removes the key, the lights turn off. One electrical outlet, however, remains "live," so it is possible to continue charging battery-powered devices such as computers and cell phones.

But that's just the beginning.

**When Safety Overrides 'Greenness'**

"The fabrics throughout this entire room, whether it's the bedspread right here, the curtains, the drapes, the sheets, the shower curtains, they all have recycled content in them. Anywhere between 10 and 50 percent," said Stefan Muhle, the hotel's general manager.

"The big reason why you can't take it much further than that is because there has to be fire retardant material in it. So it has to by law be chemically treated. Safety sometimes overrides greenness."

And for the wooden furniture? "All the furniture in the guest rooms, whether it's the chairs, the desks, the bed board, nightstands and so forth, that is all forest stewardship maple. It comes from sustainable grown forests and so this is not from virgin forests," said Muhle. "We initially wanted to go with bamboo. It's a grass -- it's a rapidly renewable material, it was our first choice. But it doesn't hold up as well as maple does over time."

**To Be Green Without Being 'Obvious'**

The rooms are lit with long-life fluorescent instead of incandescent lights and are carpeted using carpets backed with recycled material. Many of the ecologically friendly characteristics are not obvious.

"A lot of the things are not in your face," Muhle explained. "That's really truly the ideal of building this hotel. To be green without being too obvious about it." Guests are asked to do their part as well. There's a specially made recycle and trash bin in the corner for separating trash, paper and plastic.

In the bathroom, there's toilet tissue made from recycled paper, as well as low-flow showers and toilets. But guests will also find the traditional small bottles of shampoo and conditioner.

While the hotel uses organic products and donates the unused portions, critics might point to the use of those many bottles as being Earth-unfriendly. "It's a fine line that we are walking," admitted Muhle.

He said the hotel is testing bulk dispensers for shampoo and conditioner, but added, "We have several concerns. Hygiene is one of them. And safety."

Muhle estimates they're saving 15 to 25 percent on energy bills each month. He said the owner, an 83-year-old woman who lives in Australia, was concerned about chemicals in the environment after several family members died of cancer.

### **Housekeepers Dubious, Then Delighted**

The most difficult change for the housekeeping staff was taking away their Ajax and bleach, and replacing them with cleaning products made of organic and natural ingredients.

But the staff needed convincing&especially the housekeepers.

"They were not onboard at first," said Muhle. "In fact, housekeeping stood up and said, 'Stefan, we like the idea, but you really have to show us that if we take away the bleach and we substitute it with organic or natural products that our tile will still be shiny and our grout will still be clean.'"

After a three-month trial, Muhle said they were convinced. "They actually held up their hands and said look at this. They are no longer dry, I don't have teary eyes any more, I don't have any respiratory issues any more."

Also pleased were guests like Dora Preece. "The whole ambience of the place just has that green feeling. It's so comfortable."

Muhle does not consider himself an activist. "I think activist is a strong term." He continued, "We are trying to show people that you can be green and mainstream at the same time. You can have all the luxuries that you expect staying at a three, four or even five-star hotel and still do the right thing and be green."

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