

EASY STREETS

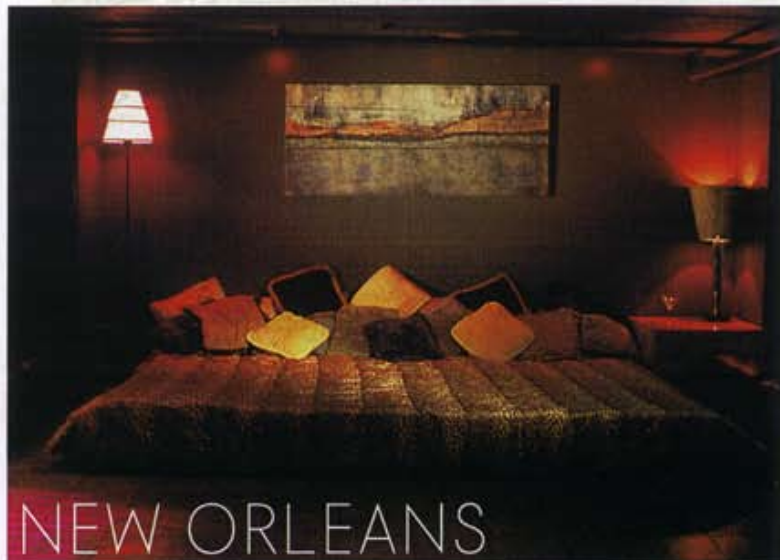
Most visitors to New Orleans make a beeline for the enchanting yet tourist-clogged French Quarter. Nawlins residents know better, and cross Canal Street to sample the vibe in the CBD, or Central Business District.

HOT BEDS: From the penthouses at the International House, the vistas sweep from the spires of St. Louis Cathedral in Jackson Square to the curve of the muddy Mississippi. The 119 guest rooms are equipped with ceiling fans, black-and-white photos of jazz greats, and a selection of jazz CDs, reminding guests where they are. Plus there are nods to the city's Creole roots: The packed bar is named *Loa*, or "divine spirit," and the hotel can arrange for a voodoo priestess to come to your room to perform a love ceremony. Christina Aguilera has stayed at the CBD's new W; guests should pack a roll of nickels for the Red Hots machine by each bed.

HOT TABLES: It's hard to have a bad meal in New Orleans, and the restaurants getting the buzz these days are in the CBD. Susan Spicer is the foodies' favorite (sorry, Emeril)—the chocolate beignets at her unassuming Herbsaint Bar & Restaurant outshine those the crowds line up for at the Café du Monde. Down the street at Gerard's Downtown, Gerard Maras does amazing things with the herbs, vegetables, and flowers he grows on his farm outside the city. At Maison Bleu Bar & Bistrot, the tile floor is straight out of the Left Bank, while the chefs bear the imprint of Le Cordon Bleu.

HOT SHOPS: Design boutiques are moving into the neighboring Warehouse District near the Contemporary Arts Center. The smell of varnish points the way to the sleek, angular furniture of Christopher Maier, while Ariodante Contemporary Craft Gallery offers artsy jewelry and ceramics.

HOT BOÎTE: Ampersand, located in a former bank, is the one N.Y./Miami-style club in this town of smoky music joints and dark bars. Gold flecks the bar, banquettes, and leather couches, and it's open till dawn, like just about everything else in the Big Easy. □



NEW ORLEANS

After midnight (top to bottom): The Ampersand club is open till dawn, but the beds are not for sleeping; the International House's decor is an homage to jazz and Creole culture; Maison Bleu Bar & Bistrot, where the French continue to shape the local food scene

