

Beam me up, Bercy

The guestroom of the future has arrived at a village-like precinct of Paris

SUSAN KUROSAWA

WHAT will the hotel room of the future look like? Will it come with a personal robot to turn down the bedcovers, close the curtains and figure out the intricacies of the DVD player? Will there be a spa treatment salon attached instead of an ensuite; will we tinkle a temple bell or ping a Tibetan gong and a therapist will appear 24/7 to hot rock us to sleep?

Perhaps there will be no bed but a sleep capsule that looks like a flotation tank or one of those transformation chambers in *Avatar*. Maybe one's avatar will do the actual travel, which would be handy for your correspondent, who has often longed for a clone to go to a conference for her in Jakarta while she stays at home in front of *Midsomer Murders* on telly.

I have had a glimpse of the future and it looks like room 1014 at Pullman Paris Bercy, a very comfortable but otherwise unremarkable hotel in the village-like surroundings of Bercy on the Seine in the southeast of the capital.

This Pullman mostly attracts a Euro business clientele on short stays. These guests want comfort and functionality without too many frilleries, but they want a sense of style, too, a *soupcou* of

that fabled Parisian chic. The trial room is on the 10th floor, with good district views up the Seine to central Paris and, once I figure out how to get in the door, my hi-tech stay here goes well for such a lo-tech guest. There is no key or entry card but a radio frequency identification disc made of a felt-like material; swipe it and push the door.

The shower cubicle in the middle of the room is confronting but there is a function to switch from clear glass to opaque if you don't like the exhibitionism involved in lathering up in full view of one's partner. And you really would want to be on friendly terms; this compact room is for couples (or singles, of course), not twin-share.

The rain shower has adjustable spray settings and mood lighting options so it's all rather fun to perform one's ablutions in shades of mauve or orange, perhaps belting out a bit of Piaf.

There's no mini-bar, but bottled water is available in a small ice-bar and there's a petite Nespresso machine. There is space for suitcases and a proper closet but not much room to turn around.

Bedside tables have easy-to-reach controls for all known gadgetry, a surround-sound sys-



Pullman Paris Bercy in the 12th arrondissement, above; hi-tech guestroom with a sense of style, right

tem that would not be out of place in an IMAX theatre, and there's a touch-sensitive remote control for lighting, blinds and the video projector linked to a suspended glass screen. That is your telly; there is no vase of daffs or crocheted doily on top, and I am sure that Detective Chief Inspector Barnaby, chief corpse-botherer in the county of Midsomer, would have conniptions.

There's a sloped recliner chair, a la Mies Van Der Rohe or Le Corbusier, perhaps, with a pony-skin cover, by one of the full-length windows, above which sits

an odd shelf that echoes its curves. The toilet cubicle's light goes on and off according to a motion sensor and there has been "special soundproofing" built into the lid, which is a cheery thought; no evidence of the customary Japanese toilet tech stuff though, like musical flushes, auto-closing lids and a greeting as you approach. I have occasionally felt lonely enough in hotel rooms in Tokyo that I have had a conversation (admittedly limited) with a toilet.

Engineers from Accor Hotels' innovation and design unit have been working with furniture and

interior designers since 1997 on concept rooms. "Visionary spaces combining futuristic techniques and state-of-the-art design" is one of the stated aims.

By testing these chambers in laboratory environments, there's plenty of latitude for tweaks and redesign before guests get to try them out. The group has also launched the Etap Hotel budget cocoon concept in Europe, with small modular rooms, no-frills comfort, space-saving wizardry and affordable tariffs.

The Bercy precinct, in the 12th arrondissement, is quiet and resi-

dential and its one-time 19th-century riverfront wine warehouses have been transformed to galleries with trendy bare-brick walls, shops and cafes in an open area of cobblestoned squares and alleys linked by arcades. Winebarrels continue to be a favourite decorator prop here, and cute little stores sell lovely Provencal olive and lavender soaps and, of course, bottles of plonk.

Also in the area is Bercy Park, with its shady plane and chestnut trees and duck-filled pond, and the Cinematheque Francaise, designed by American Frank Gehry

(who has described the building's angular lines as "like a dancer raising her tutu"), which has an international archive, changing exhibitions and museum of cinema (audioguide tours in English).

It was opened by Martin Scorsese in 2005 and surrounding signposts, including rue Francois Truffaut, rue Joseph Kessel, rue Gabriel Lame, and the Simone de Beauvoir footbridge, strengthen the village's creative connections, as does UGB Cine Cite, one of the most popular multiplexes in Paris. But you'll need to go to the 13th arrondissement for the Josephine

Baker pool, actually a floating barge on the Seine.

There are street festivals of music and mime on Tuesday and Thursday evenings in summer in Bercy village, but if staying put doesn't appeal there's a high-speed driverless train from the nearby Metro stop, Cour Saint-Emilion, into Madeleine; it's another little glimpse of the future.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Accor.

• pullmanhotels.com
• accorhotels.com
• bercyvillage.com

