

It's back to the future at Lone Star Court

Retro-inspired hotel revives motor court concept

BY [NANCY FLORES](#) - AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

In a sea of high-end retailers and restaurants sits an unexpected nod to nostalgia.

Lone Star Court, a recently opened retro-inspired boutique hotel at the Domain, revives roadside motor court design and updates it with contemporary style.



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Boutique hotel Lone Star Court opened on Christmas Eve 2013 and features 123 retro-inspired rooms.

Roadside motor courts, like those found on the often-romanticized Route 66, rose to popularity in the mid-1940s when Americans hit the road and looked for tidy and comfortable places to stay along the way. These simple but

charming motor courts, which at first had a cabin-like feel, slowly began to disappear after the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 cleared the way for the construction of a highway system that bypassed these motels.

Bringing back that charm in the middle of an urban shopping district created unique design challenges. Lone Star Court designer Lauren Rottet of the Houston-based Rottet Studio had to walk “the fine line between being kitsch without being gimmicky or tacky,” she says. “We wanted it to be charming in its ‘campiness,’ but Austin is a city in which locals and visitors are always on the lookout for what is new and different, so I think that helps our cause.”

Lone Star Court, a project from Houston-based Valencia Group, known for its luxury independent hotels, has 123 rooms that face a courtyard, which features a pavilion for dancing and barbecuing, a swimming pool and a fire pit. All of this was created to encourage guests to enjoy each other's company just as once happened at the old-fashioned motor courts.

Rooms, which start around \$169, showcase sliding barn doors that open into the bathroom as well as mid-century modern-inspired furniture, mostly custom designed by Rottet Studio. Adding some retro charm in the guest rooms are 1950s-style Smeg refrigerators. A stroll

inside the Water Trough, the boutique hotel's restaurant and bar, feels reminiscent of Texas Hill Country dance halls with its high ceilings and rustic-chic wood paneled walls. The orange, brown and seafoam green color scheme throughout the hotel references colors "from the heyday of motor court hotels during late 1950s and early 1960s, but with a cleaner, more modern feel," Rottet says.

Lone Star Court also features live music every Wednesday through Saturday and an on-site food trailer court that houses its own food truck, the Feed Store, as well and other local favorite trailers on a rotating basis. Domain shoppers can also enjoy the shows and food court eats.

The nostalgic-meets-modern concept came from a stroll down memory lane for Valencia Group CEO and president Doyle Graham Jr., who was taking his family on a road trip and reminisced with colleagues about the roadside motels of yesteryear. The group recalled the joy of motel pools, lugging coolers and enjoying the outside areas more than the room itself, says Roy Kretschmer, executive vice president of operations at Valencia Group.



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A neon sign outside Lone Star Court captures the nostalgia of Route 66 motels.

When the group decided to reinterpret this concept, they looked at locations across Austin including the city's east side until they found the four-acre property at the Domain. Kretschmer says the shopping district's owners embraced the

Americana-inspired motel idea and thought it would help bring an authentic Austin feel to the modern mixed-use development.

Lone Star Court, which Valencia Group plans to expand to other Texas cities, aims to reflect each city's unique personality, especially with its first project and flagship location in Austin. Kretschmer says the company drew inspiration by diving deep into Austin's offbeat culture and doing everything from food trailer tasting to dancing at the Broken Spoke.

For Rottet, who has designed hotels from Hong Kong to Miami Beach, working on Lone Star Court "was a very experimental experience," she says. "My favorite aspect of the design is the feeling of freedom and rampancy you feel while on the property as a result of the social layout ... encouraging guests to enjoy each other's company."



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Lone Star Court's swimming pools were created to be reminiscent of Hill Country swimming holes.

To find out more about Lone Star Court, visit lonestarcourt.com or call 512-836-3030. Prices start at \$169.