

SPORTS SCORES

NASCAR field heads to Martinsville, 6C



Fish out of water at 0-6



Carrie takes the wheel Country star charts a new course as

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Life SECTION D

Destinations & Diversions



Chefs offer a sample of dining trends

charcoal briques

(grilling in parking lot)



there are some things mo

2D · FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2007 USA TODAY

Friday, Oct

Loudness 'does cost hotels money in the long run'



Continued from 1D

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Loud fellow guests have always been irksome. But construction and party noise are growing complaints as a record number of hotels build or renovate and more attract the nightlife set with trendy, music-blasting watering holes.

Cover story

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During its \$40 million upgrading, the Aruba Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino in the Caribbean is informing guests of the renovation timeline in a special area on its website. It even created a "construction concierge" to handle guest concerns.

The full-time staffer, who works from a desk in the lobby, "was put in place to answer questions for guests prior to their arrival or, if necessary and possible, help a guest switch rooms if they are having any problems," says hotel spokeswoman Kara Rosner. The goal is "making sure guests are aware of what is happening at the resort and there are no surprises."

Marriott's Camelback Inn in the Scottsdale, Ariz., resort area has a stand-alone website, thelegendgrows.com, that chronicles the progress of its \$40 million renovation. It has "before" and "during construction" photos that tell prospective guests what to expect.

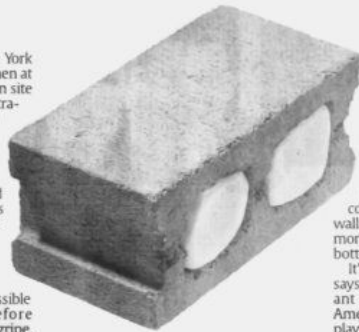
Another modern-day hotel challenge is the success of hip hotel bars that get louder as the martinis and mojitos flow.

The Shore Club in Florida's South Beach party mecca is infamous for the din from its popular Skybar that keeps non-partners from sleeping and for its concrete hallways that amplify every footstep.

The Tribeca Grand Hotel's Church Lounge atrium bar in Manhattan — also a celeb magnet — was so successful that wannabe-sleepers had difficulty drifting off. So the hotel carpeted the wood floor and had decorative but sound-absorbing panels put up, says Tony Fant, president of Grand Hospitality, Tribeca's parent company.

Rooms also come with a sound-masking system, similar to a white-noise machine on a grand scale, that guests can adjust to create a haven, Fant says. "We like to create an exciting environment... but when you step into your guestroom, you don't want to be part of the party experience."

Shepherd's Beach Resort in Clearwater Beach, Fla., logged complaints from those



Blocking out noise: Americinn uses foam-stuffed cement blocks such as this during the construction of its properties.

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The Americinn chain, with 213 properties in 22 states and two dozen more under construction, uses serenity as a selling point. It markets itself as "built quiet from the ground up" using a "SoundGuard" process. A spokesman says Americinns are constructed with concrete blocks that have foam inside their holes to further deaden sound. Floors also are concrete (covered by carpet), the dry-wall is thicker than standard, and doors are more solid and have a "door sweep" on the bottom to seal off corridor noise.

It's more expensive to build a quiet hotel, says Minneapolis-based acoustical consultant David Braslau, who has advised Americinn and other lodgings. "Economies plays a big part in design. But in general, hotels probably are getting quieter because people complain and there is more awareness in the industry (of noise problems)."

Luxury hotels, such as Ritz-Carltons and Four Seasons, tend to be quieter because they spend money on extra insulation, thicker windows and cushier carpeting.

The soundproofing at the new luxe Thompson Beverly Hills, which plans to start checking in guests next month, includes padded leather walls and TVs that can't be turned up past a certain volume (a feature of all Thompson hotels, including 60 Thompson in New York and the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, says a chain spokeswoman).

Braslau says that thin walls still are a problem at many lodgings but that replacing them and other sources of noise tends to be expensive "and generally is not a thing that older hotels do."

His checklist of potential hotel-room noise sources includes:

- ▶ Windows that aren't thick or soundproofed and let in sounds of pool frolicking, street noise and planes landing or taking off.
- ▶ Wall-mounted TVs and speakers that are ever more common — and more apt to send noise into another room unless the hotel limits TV volume.

▶ Doors that don't extend all the way to the floor. "You shouldn't be able to slide a hotel bill under it," he says. Corridors are a big source of noise, from yelling guests to housekeepers trundling heavy carts or vacuuming.

▶ Window or floor air conditioning units or loud bathroom plumbing.

But so far, no one has yet figured out how to muffle all hotel noise — such as a way to keep drunken bachelor partiers from going on a toot in the halls or teens from banging on doors at midnight for kicks. Braslau himself had to change hotels at 2 a.m. on a prom night at an otherwise comfortable Holiday Inn.

"You can be in a great place and hear noise," he says. "Or you can be in a lousy place and hear none."

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Quiet, please

Americinn's YourNoisyNeighbor.com offers some tips for avoiding racket.

- ▶ Before check-in, request a room away from the street on a high floor that's not near vending machines, ice dispensers or elevators.
- ▶ If the hotel isn't full, ask for a room that does not have guests next door.
- ▶ Don't unpack until you are sure your room is in a quiet location. If not, request another.
- ▶ Bring earplugs and a "white noise" machine that cancels out background sounds. Or pack a music player with earphones and soothing tunes.
- ▶ Use a bath mat to block cracks under doors that let in hallway sounds.

in lower-floor rooms near its popular two-level nightclub until it redid soundproofing in 2006 using rolls of heavy, rubbery Acoustiblok. It "transforms the energy (of sound waves) into inaudible friction," says Acoustiblok president Lahnne Johnson, who says the company's product is in dozens of hotels, including the Grand Hyatt in Manhattan and the soon-to-open Trump International hotels in Chicago and Las Vegas.

Often when a hotel is built, "as the budget gets tighter, they'll cut soundproofing," he says. "But now hotel people are realizing that noise is the biggest cause of complaint, and it does cost hotels money in the long run."

Paying to muffle noise "was an excellent investment," says Shepherd's Beach general manager Paul Andrews. "Because once

Hip, cool, trendy — and quieter: The Church Lounge at the Tribeca Grand Hotel in New York installed sound-absorbing wooden panels and thick carpeting to quiet the racket. The hotel's guestrooms also come with a special sound-masking system.

The new JW Marriott in Grand Rapids, Mich., is serving up a sweet version of sushi — rice cereal and marshmallow roll with fruit wrapper and candy fish. Its restaurant six.one.six has a children's six-course tasting menu (\$21) to introduce youngsters to delicacies such as silver-dollar-size flatbread with smoked salmon and lemon crème fraiche.

The Portobello Yacht Club in Orlando introduced a grape juice menu. Healthier alternatives to soda include non-alcoholic chardonnay and merlot juices.

— Kitty Bean Yancey

Best of USA TODAY's travel blogs

Sovereign sails into the sunset

Each week, USA TODAY highlights a posting from

Quiet!

By Kitty Bean Yancey

and construction banging have ticked off

SPREADS IN 2007: 1 67,000 cases in Michigan Dengue is nicknamed "fever" for symptoms excruciating pain behind the eyes. About 100 million people are reported to have dengue is often misdiagnosed because of its symptoms. Although recovery within a few days, a small percentage develop severe complications sometimes fatal for children. Dengue-infected people like those carrying in urban and rural biting periods are before daybreak and

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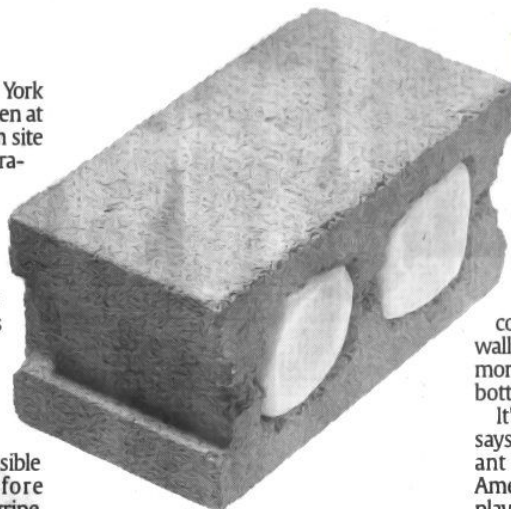
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