

A STAY TO REMEMBER

written by **CHRISTINA NIFONG**

Roanoke-area boutique hotels are on the rise.

If you ask the folks at Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge, 2022 was the year that area boutique hotels came into their own. That spring, The Liberty Trust invited guests into its Beaux Arts banking hall; by fall, Fire Station One Boutique Hotel began bunking travelers in light-filled luxury digs, and the Rowland Hotel transformed a historic theater into luxurious suites in Salem.

And the unique lodging opportunities keep on coming. In 2025, Colony House Motor Lodge invited road trippers to step back in time with its retro vibe and The Promissory Hotel splashed onto the scene with a rocking New Year's Eve concert with award-winning musician Grace Potter.

All told, there are close to a dozen Roanoke Valley properties that could be considered boutique hotels. They are small-scale, often family-owned, offering a distinctive stay, and providing top-of-the-line service.

"Boutique hotels are very design-forward and really rooted in the character and history of their location," said Erin O'Hara, director of sales and revenue with Savara Hospitality, the group that owns The Liberty Trust. Guests are looking for "that personal service and a curated experience that feels authentic rather than generic."

Nationwide, the number of boutique hotels has boomed since COVID, with guests hungry

for stand-out lodging and new booking platforms making it easier to find and reserve one-of-a-kind rooms.

Locally, upscale restaurants are an added feature that draws crowds to these destination stars, said VBR's Director of Public Relations Kathryn Lucas. "They've all got fantastic dining concepts attached to them," she said. "They're really putting that full experience together."

Lucas doesn't see the boutique hotel trend reversing anytime soon. "I think that seeing the success of these hotels is encouraging to investors...considering doing something similar." Each offering adds to Roanoke's appeal as a tourist destination, she said.

Wondering what's out there? Read on for a peek inside four memorable lodgings in and around the Star City.

★ HISTORIC ELEGANCE ★

When First National Bank was built in 1910, it was the tallest structure in Roanoke and boasted the city's first elevator—so novel, people popped in just to ride it up seven floors and back down. Its stately lobby shimmered with brass and marble. An imposing vault stood at one end, telegraphing wealth and modernity.

It's that same era The Liberty Trust hotel invokes today. The lobby is now an upscale restaurant (the bar was originally the teller counter); the vault is a tucked away dining space (its



table, a refashioned vault door). A glass shaft "letter box" is still serviced by the postman. In many of its 54 rooms, the door is framed in copper. Bankers lamps and rotary phones grace bedside tables.

The Liberty Trust embraces its history at every turn. A mezzanine-level board room (for business meetings or small-scale events) overlooks the lobby; it was the bank president's office back in the day.

The result? A gem of a time capsule that speaks to travelers in search of a memorable stay and business travelers looking for a break from the grind.

"We also resonate with history enthusiasts, food and beverage lovers, and all those visitors who prefer a locally rooted experience over something more chain," said Savara Hospitality's O'Hara.



"We touched everything," Brooke Farrell said. "We're so thrilled with the way it has turned out."

In its heyday, Colony House was known as the bedroom of South Roanoke, with locals booking rooms for out-of-town guests. Farrell says they hope to fill that role again. Indeed, Thanksgiving was their busiest week since reopening, she said.

The property is also looking to serve adventurers (there's a bike wash station and an adjacent grassy lawn); families (Colony House offers adjoining rooms and a renovated pool); and pet owners. Its location (near the Blue Ridge Parkway and Interstate 81) is also a plus.

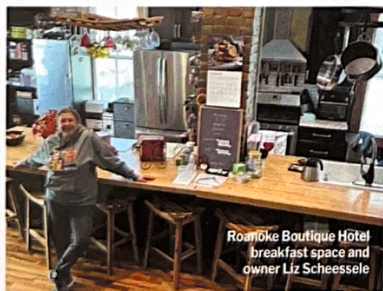
"We really believe the road trip

GROOVY 1960S VIBE

To arrive at the Colony House Motor Lodge, guests drive under a peaked porte cochere, topped with a sign in distinctive Jetsons font. They might as well be traveling through time.

Globe lights ring the parking lot. A parking space sits outside each forest green louvered door. Inside, mid-century geometric wallpaper brightens the 67 rooms, decorated with photos of 1950s classic cars and furnishings authentic to the era.

When the Farrell family purchased Colony House in 2018 from its original owners, it had been operating continuously since 1959 and was in need of a huge overhaul. They shuttered it while they figured out what came next. By 2021, Brooke Farrell, brother Michael, and mother Lucy had registered the property with the National Register of Historic Places and applied for tax credits. Their renovation replaced windows, updated plumbing, and gutted bathrooms, bringing the property into the 21st century while keeping the '60s vibe alive.



Roanoke Boutique Hotel
breakfast space and
owner Liz Scheessele



Roanoke Boutique Hotel

is here to stay," Farrell said. "We want to ride that wave."

★ ACTIVE—WITH A DASH OF DELICIOUS

When guests enter the Roanoke Boutique Hotel, they step into a high-ceilinged kitchen, anchored by an enormous island with bar stools all around.

That suits owner Liz Scheessele just fine. She offers guests an ample made-to-order breakfast: fresh baked sourdough bread, ginger pecan scones, from-scratch curry turkey

COURTESY OF THE ROWLAND HOTEL

ROANOKE AREA BOUTIQUE HOTELS

Colony House Motor Lodge
Fire Station One Boutique Hotel

The Liberty Trust

The Lofts at Downtown Salem

The Maridor

The Promissory Hotel

Roanoke Boutique Hotel

The Rowland Hotel

The Stone House at Black Dog Salvage



The Rowland Hotel

sausage, eggs, and more.

"I love making people happy with food," she said.

Though Roanoke Boutique Hotel embodies many boutique hotel traits, it also acts as a traditional bed and breakfast. One distinction: its modern design, with rooms decorated with bold colors and sleek ceiling fans rather than lace and antiques.

Martin Erbele and his husband stayed at RBH for one night on their way from Georgia to Maryland. He said they chose Roanoke Boutique Hotel because it was close to downtown, affordable, and something special. "She was such a generous host from the moment we walked in," Erbele said of Scheessele.

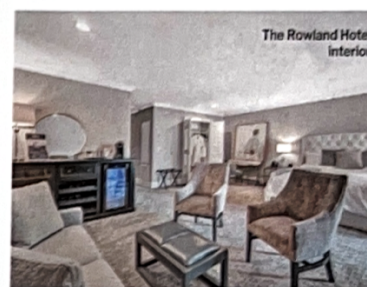
One way the Roanoke Boutique Hotel sets itself apart is by highlighting Roanoke's outdoor activities. It offers indoor bike parking, lots of porches and decks, and recommendations for nearby hiking and biking trails.

The idea, Scheessele said, is to "play hard during the day and have a cozy space to lay your head at night."

★ A TASTE OF OPULENCE ★

At the Rowland Hotel on Main Street in Salem, crystal droplets sparkle from a ceiling chandelier, jewel-colored loveseats cozy up to lobby windows, and the check-in counter is a glass table with a vase of roses on top.

The first floor of what was once the Salem Theatre—and still sports a playhouse marquee—is now a Frankie Rowland's Steakhouse. The second and third floors of the 1930s-era building host 16 sumptuous rooms with top-of-the-line bedding. Some rooms are



The Rowland Hotel interior

suite-style, others boast Juliet balconies, local art, or deep bathtubs for soaking.

But what guests appreciate most is the hotel's commitment to customer service, said General Manager Tara Rigatti. Rigatti regularly sells out all rooms for weddings, reunions, funerals, or local business board meetings.

The Rowland Hotel is owned by the Jefferson Street Management Group, the corporate entity for Roger Neel Jr., which also controls Roanoke's Frankie Rowland's Steakhouse, Corned Beef & Co., Billy's, and 419 West, and Christiansburg's The Farmhouse.

Rigatti said many guests are local couples who eat dinner at the steakhouse and spend the night, treating their stay as a mini staycation. Others have a connection to Roanoke College.

"I go out of my way to give people Southern hospitality," Rigatti said. ☆

DO NOT disturb

