

Newest hotel is an Absolute winner

by Rose Rushe

LIMERICK's latest in a line up of new hotels is the Absolute Hotel, the first to open in Ireland in what is expected to be a chain of urban launches.

Located at Sir Harry's Mall, by the Grove Island Canal, it opened its doors for St Patrick's Weekend.

It cost 25mn euro to build the hotel, which has 99 bedrooms.

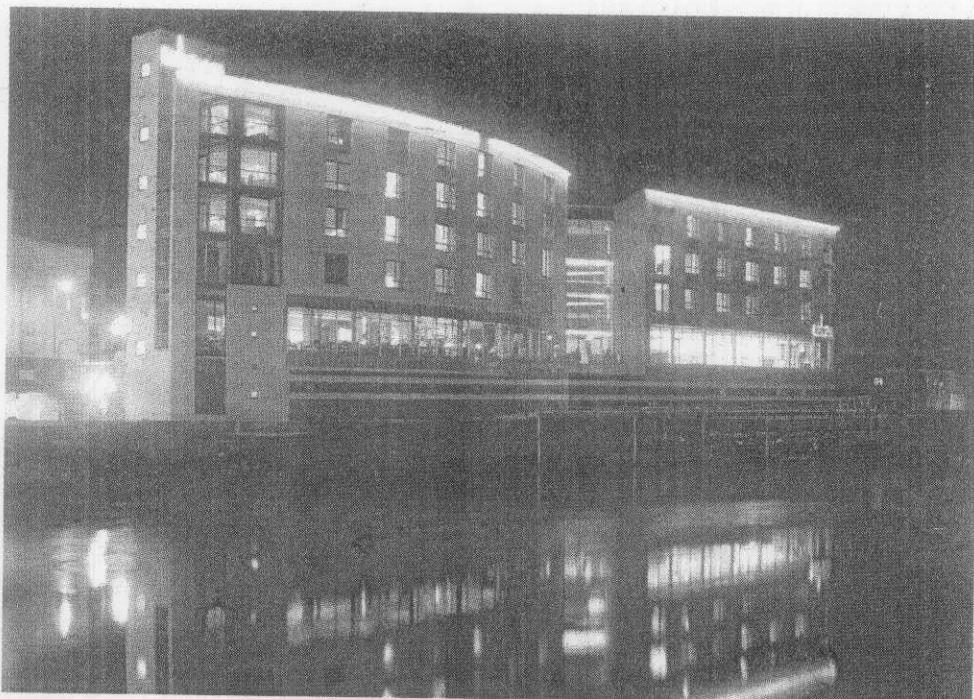
A surprise location perhaps, in the heart of old Limerick but just off the N7, this modern loft-style five storey has views of the canal, Abbey Bridge, city and neighbouring Grove Island's greenery.

There's a spa with Canadian hot tub and adjacent carparking, with a further arrangement with the adjacent carpark in the case of overspill.

According to managing partner Michael de Haast, Absolutehotel.com Limerick is the second in a joint venture by himself and Irish development magnate Jerry O'Reilly.

"It's our second hotel after The House Hotel, which we opened in Galway last year," De Haast told the Limerick Post at a press tour last week.

"We are developing two brands, one being the boutique style of The House Hotel, which has just 40 rooms and a price band of 160euro to 200euro. AbsoluteHotel.com is our second line of which this Limerick



The 25 million euro development that is the Absolute Hotel opened its doors on St Patrick's weekend displaying all its facilities together with its 99 bedrooms.

hotel is the first - we hope to open one in every Irish city within six to eight years. It's positioned as a price point, with rooms from 89euro.

Although a "completely different product" to House Hotel echelon, he's hopeful there will be room for the two brands in the larger cities, at least.

The modest cost of a

room - even the 20 suites are only 129euro a night until July season - belies the luxury evident. Think four star, and although De Haast has no inclination to opt for the formal 'star' categorisation, this South African hotelier (ex Galway's Radisson) reckons that "it's our locality and style that make us".

Even the standard rooms are fitted with a 32" plasma TV, free wi-fi Internet access, rain-dance shower, quality waffle bathrobes, even slippers. Opt for a superior room and the kingsize bed is accompanied by more space and table room, all for 99euro.

Suites have a decent balcony, two plasma screens and enormous

marble bathroom with stand-alone shower. Art works, lift ladders for vending snack and spacious, colourful reception areas define the look and guest service.

Managed by Dooradoyle woman Grace Kelliher, who trained at Cathal Brugha Street - her sales team of Brenda Murphy and Ruth

Vaughan had booked conferences even this first week in business - there are three business suites, preceded by a bar area for private receptions and product launches.

This same layout and 360 degree views of the city can host a wedding in the largest Abbey Suite for 160 people and seat 200 theatre-style for a seminar; the Board Room provides for 14 seated at the oblong table.

Some 50 staff tiered over the five floors will run the Riverbank Bar and Restaurant, serving both casual and formal meals on a day-long basis. A floor to ceiling glass wall that runs the length of this 90-seater complements the light and stone effect of design, inspired by a South African lodge; serving until 11pm at weekends. James Whelan is head chef to the team at visibly at work through the open hatch kitchen.

For weddings and dinner dances, the Abbey Suite has its own terrace and a roof garden is too open this year. Day pampering packages with the Barbor brand and spa

weekends will be a serious sales point for Absolutehotel.com Limerick, given the

advantages of city parking, centrality and its price point.

Food for thought

THE Students Affairs Office at the University of Limerick and the UL Health Promotion working Group, have just launched a Healthy Eating booklet at the university. The booklet, which promotes positive attitudes towards healthy diet and lifestyle among students, will be available, free of charge at the university.

The university's Students' Union welfare officer, Sinead Hickey, stressed the importance for students to maintain a healthy diet to provide energy during such stressful times as examinations and when assignments are due. "This booklet will give the opportunity to read about what's healthy to eat and easy to cook - it doesn't need to be a gourmet meal for it to be healthy, full of nutrients and energy," she said. Elaine Kiely, UL student affairs officer, points out that funding from the UL/UB Enablement Fund has made it possible to promote healthy initiatives for busy students on restricted budgets.

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