A NEW KIND OF SOUTHERN COMFORT

After a $27 million renovation and expansion, the Restoration hotel, in Charleston, South Carolina, redefines heritage in a contemporary way.

The Restoration, a boutique hotel that opened earlier this year in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, owes its existence to a curious fact: that the line for the 2013 Carri$er exhibition at Pari's Grand Palais was too long.

The story goes that Darlene Anderson — wife of Jeffrey Anderson, of the Cincinnati-based development firm behind the hotel, Jeffrey R. Anderson Real Estate — having been thwarted from seeing Carrier, returned to the Pali$'s restaurant. There she bumped into Cory Ingram, of the branding firm Identity Atelier. As it happened, the Andersons were thinking of their small (16-room) hotel, the Restoration on King. They had bought a neighboring industrial building and imagined joining the spaces to create a more ambitious, 54-room property. From that unlikely meeting, Ingram, whose clients have ranged from W Hotels to Mandarin Oriental, became the designer.

Ingram says he wanted the hotel to "abstract culture, heritage, and history, redefine it in a fresh, modern way for the contemporary elite traveler." Instead of the traditional trappings of antebellum gentility — the sepia-tinged photographs of steamboats, or sweet tea — there's rosemary-infused coffee.

The hotel is now a set of connected buildings that house the Port Mercantile shop (in the old hotel's former lobby) and the Rise Coffee Bar, accessed via a discreet door from the hotel's library. The aesthetic is raw yet refined: wood beams and brick, vintage typewriters resting on Amish furniture.

The Restoration occupies a middle ground between the more packaged sense of style embodied by the W and the beguiling eccentricity of a spot like the Yard in Milan. In Charleston, it works as sheer novelty; in other more saturated markets, it might have to push for a stronger sense of character. But it is on the right track with its rotating art exhibits and events like a class on biscuit baking with local sensation Carrie Morey (of Callie's Charleston Biscuits). The Andersons are renovating the old wing room by room, so for a taste of the new, lighter direction, book in the taller property. A quibble: The breakfast basket delivered each morning would be enlivened by a glass of fresh-squeezed juice in place of the carton of Tropicana. Rooms from $299. 75 Wentworth St. / 877-221-7202. —Tom Vanderbilt