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## Trendy hotels add beehives and chicken coops

### On the Portland-ification of American hotels



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**Beehives on the roof, chicken coops out back. Nope, you're not on a farm — you're at one of the growing number of trendy hotels adding to their roster of hipster-friendly amenities.**

“Green” hotels have served produce from their own gardens for years, but some are taking it a step further. Across the nation, hotels are cultivating beehives and chicken coops to offer guests fresh — and (hipsters rejoice!) locally sourced — honey and eggs, as well as opportunities to interact with the wildlife (yes, even the bees). Fairmont hotels now have beehives installed on 21 of their rooftops, including those in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Vancouver, Dallas and San Jose, housing more than 2 million bees and producing roughly 5,000 pounds of honey each year. The Waldorf Astoria in New York has six hives abuzz with roughly 300,000 bees, and The Brown Palace Hotel & Spa near Denver has five hives and 150,000 bees.

Recently, chickens have joined in the trendy hotel offerings, as two California-based resorts installed coops on their grounds this year. Calistoga Ranch in Napa Valley now has 12 chickens living in its reclaimed-wood coop (which also has chandeliers and framed artwork). Carmel Valley Ranch in Carmel Valley installed a chicken coop on its land last month “as a natural evolution of its growing farmstead experience that already includes Italian honeybees.” They also plan to compost the chicken manure.

While such offerings may cater to the foodie obsession with provenance that the IFC comedy series “Portlandia” pokes fun at, hotels say they’re offering these perks to help the environment. Fairmont says it “has been committed to protecting the environment for over 20 years” and that its hives were installed to help with dwindling bee populations. Carmel Valley Ranch says the chicken coop “contributes to the resort’s philosophy of honoring and being of the land.”

But, of course, pleasing locavores can also be a money-making proposition. “The hotel market is increasingly competitive, especially with the competition from Airbnb and non-hotels,” says Andy Brennan, an industry analyst with IbisWorld. In turn, hotels are looking to differentiate themselves from one another, and one way they’re doing this, he says, is with local, organic offerings. “Providing more gourmet, high-end products will impact the bottom line,” he says.

Enter the bees and chickens, which, relatively speaking, tend to be fairly inexpensive to board, as the hotels already have the real estate (lawn or the rooftop) and can train existing staff to care for them. Setting up and maintaining a colony of bees can sometimes cost under \$600 the first year, including clothing and equipment for the beekeeper, hives and the bees themselves, says Rick Reault, founder of New England Beekeeping Supplies. After that, it’s even cheaper: Ian Bens, the executive sous chef at the Fairmont Washington, D.C., who also cares for the bees, says that it costs “way less” than \$1,000 a year to maintain the hives.

What’s more, the buzz won’t go unnoticed by guests — and many will pay for the bee products featured on hotel menus. At the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa, you’ll find Caneles on the menu, which the hotel describes as a “custardy treat baked in a traditional fluted mold coated with beeswax.” At the Fairmont Waterfront in Vancouver, there are honey truffles (a.k.a. “Bee’s Knees”) and a Honey Lager; at the Fairmont in Dallas, you’ll find honey incorporated into such dishes as the cheese plate, Greek yogurt parfait and the crème brûlée; and the Fairmont in D.C. has a bee-tini (a martini-like drink made with honey), as well as honey butter and seasonal honey desserts. The Brown Palace Hotel & Spa offers a special afternoon tea featuring its honey. The chicken’s eggs will pop up on the resorts’ menus as well: The chef at Carmel Valley Ranch plans to use the fresh eggs in his dishes once the chickens are full grown, and the chef at Calistoga Ranch plans to set up a special omelet station.

Furthermore, the hotels market their coops and beehives in ways that aren’t food-related. For example, the Waldorf Astoria offers a tour of its beehive-filled rooftop. And Carmel Valley Ranch plans to launch educational programs around its chickens, such as how to start and maintain your own backyard chicken coop and how to handle fresh eggs safely.