

CHARLESTON'S FIRST ART HOTEL

This spring we stopped by The Vendue (formerly The Vendue Inn), a boutique hotel that, in 2014, completed a multimillion-dollar renovation.

The Vendue occupies two rows of warehouses in Charleston's French Quarter, just off fabulous East Bay Street, that date to the 1780s. It's the perfect location from which to explore the area's upscale boutiques, restaurants and galleries.

Once you check in, however, you might decide to linger, since there's plenty to do at the hotel. Every day, guests are invited to a late afternoon wine and hors d'oeuvres event, followed by a docent-led tour of the hotel's latest art exhibit. The shows, which change every six months, are curated by Robert Lange Studios, one of Charleston's top contemporary galleries. And, because the docent is on site all day, anyone can drop in for a quick look and a tour.

The hotel's updated interiors show off the art to good effect. At 19 Vendue (the main building) the gray walls, white moldings and gleaming marble floors provide a neutral backdrop for the paintings and sculpture.

The exhibit continues into the dining room (The Drawing Room), where executive chef Jon Cropf serves up creations that are as beautifully presented as the art on the walls. My beet salad—a trio of yellow, pink (candied) and deep red beets— was adorned with florets of whipped, smoked goat cheese and topped with thinly sliced duck “prosciutto.” Striped bass, perfectly seared, arrived with a medley of asparagus, baby carrots and zucchini. It's little wonder the restaurant is as popular with locals as hotel guests.

Adding to The Vendue's appeal is The Press, an informal coffee shop and The Rooftop, a popular bar with panoramic views of Charleston's harbor and Waterfront Park. For more information, visit thevendue.com or call 800-845-7900.

