

# Setting the Standard

*Well before its official opening, The Standard is already attracting the young and trendy.*

PHOTOS BY LISA ROMEREIN

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**O**ne glance in the minibars at the Sunset Strip's new hotel, The Standard, and you realize the place is anything but. Packed into the tiny spaces are boxes of Animal Crackers, licorice whips, Go Go Bliss and Frenzy soft drinks, Devil Girl Hot Kiss candies and jars of Vaseline. Dropped into the hotel rooms' retro ashtrays are Hollywood Bail Bonds matchbooks, their slogan: "Freedom Is a Phone Call Away."

"It's a generation thing. It's for a young group who gets it," explains New York-based hotelier André Balazs, best known for his Chateau Marmont Hotel. A short walk from The Standard, it drips with bougainvillea and reeks of Hollywood history. With The Standard's Sixties/Seventies pop sensibility, the pair is as wildly different from each other as they are from Balazs' luxurious Mercer Hotel that opened last summer in New York's SoHo.

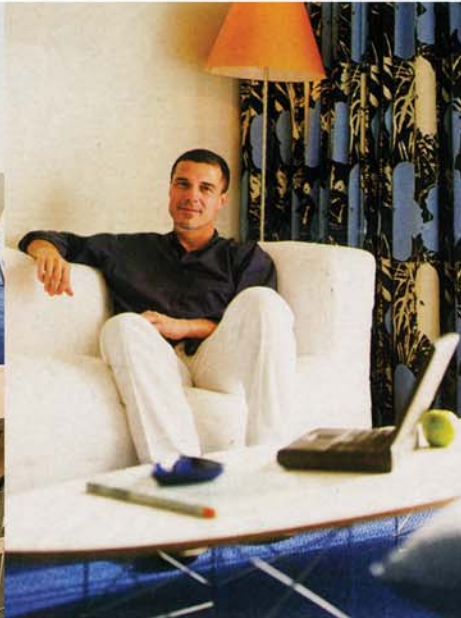
The Standard was built in 1962 as the Thunderbird Motel, and by the time Balazs bought it over a year ago, it had become a run-down retire-

All rooms at The Standard come equipped with such high-speed data transmission lines. The hotel, designed by Shaun Haussman of New York's Area nightclub fame, may have Andy Warhol print curtains and inflatable sofas from the French branch of Ikea, but it also has extra-long floating workspaces, sleek oversize Samsung televisions and top-of-the-line Sony mini-component stereos.

Even though the place is still under construction, it's been attracting a crowd ranging from New York models and curious hoteliers to a sprinkling of celebrities and young social types. By late April it should be in full operation.

"It has elements of a club. It's a fun place to hang out," says Balazs, who's clearly gone all out to make it that way.

The coffee shop, with its banquettes and wood counters, will stay open 24 hours, serving more than coffee-shop food (the chef hasn't yet been chosen). The hotel bar will have a fireplace and smoking room, and a conference room will convert to a screening room. But there will also be a deejay spin-



Clockwise from above: André Balazs in his newest hotel; lounge chairs on the pool's Astroturf deck; The Standard's no-nonsense awning; one of its guest rooms. Inset: The waved balconies.

**"For the young crowd, it's more important to have a T-1 computer line than an armoire."**

ment home. He glances up at the endless vistas of cottage-cheese-style ceiling he chose not to remove.

"I think it may be coming back," he says hopefully. Then he laughs. "You have to choose where to put your money."

Which is one of the points behind The Standard, where room rates start at \$95. From the beginning, Balazs had younger travelers and their budgets in mind. But they were looking for a place to stay that reflected their youthful sophistication.

"What makes a hotel goes beyond the room or the service or the mini-bar," says Balazs. "It takes you out of your own environment and liberates you. At the same time, it makes you feel safe. But for the young crowd, it's more important to have a T-1 computer line than an armoire."

ning platters in a booth in the white terrazzo-tiled lobby, and Seattle-based Rudy's Barber Shop will open a small branch where guest artists will show up for tattoos and piercings. In another amusing move, Balazs is installing a glass vitrine behind the front desk as a setting for performance art.

"There might just be a woman sleeping," he explains.

Balazs' goal is to create more Standard Hotels across the country. Already he's looking in New York, Portland and Chicago. A "no attitude" attitude will be standard, insists Balazs, who's still fine-tuning the service on the Sunset Strip.

"Housekeeping was vacuuming the halls at 7 a.m.," he says. "I told them, 'That's not the way these guests live. You can start at noon.'"

—LOUISE FARR