



BACKSTORY: Imelda Marcos is more famous for her shoe collection, but it was she and dictator hubby Ferdinand who commissioned this mega-hotel back in 1976 to impress the delegates of an International Monetary Fund conference. The first hotel of the Peninsula chain outside Chinese territory, it gained further notoriety in 2007 when a military coup ended after an armored car crashed through the front of the hotel.



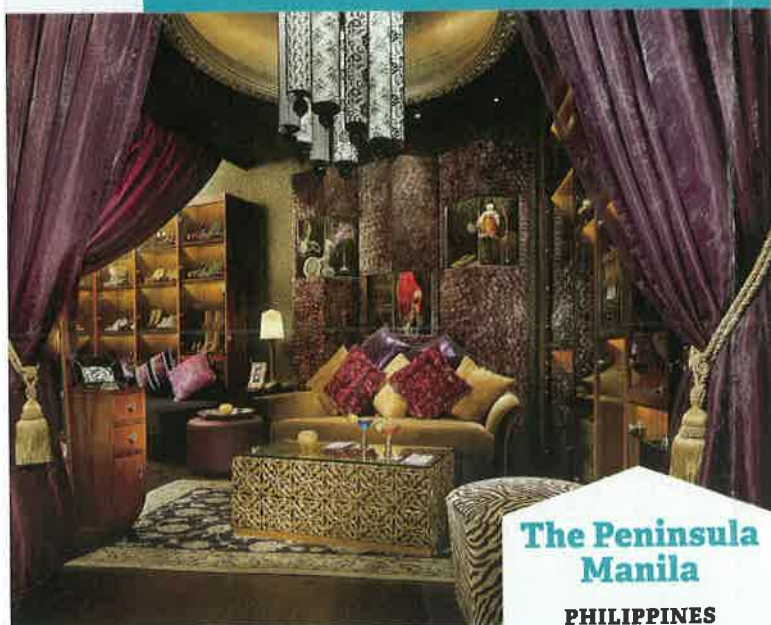
WHAT YOU'LL FIND JUST OUTSIDE: When the hotel opened, its location in the sterile business district of Makati City deterred many leisure travelers. However, in recent years Manila's nightlife scene has shifted away from the rough-and-ready bars of Malate and over to Makati's high-rolling nightclubs. There's also plenty of high-end shopping, a fine-art museum and an 18-hole golf course.



LOBBY DESIGN: A curious mix of eastern exoticism and European pomp, with neoclassical balustrades flanked by six towering palm trees. Take tea at one of the many substantial tables and soak up the eclectic atmosphere, as business deals are inked alongside quiet romantic liaisons and boisterous family reunions.



HOT PLATE: Of a bewildering eight dining options at the hotel, the pan-Asian restaurant Spices is a good bet. Filipino favorites—*inihaw na baboy* (spicy barbecue pork with chili vinegar) and *kilawing tangungue* (marinated mackerel)—are served alongside dishes from Thailand, India and Pakistan. The wine list, while not cheap by local standards, has some spicy gems to match an array of curries.

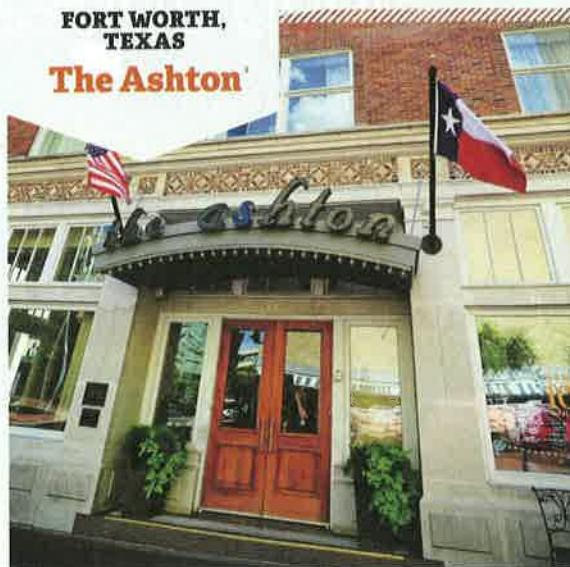


The Peninsula Manila

PHILIPPINES

FORT WORTH, TEXAS

The Ashton



BACKSTORY: Built in 1915, the Ashton's six-story Italianate building was originally the home of the Fort Worth Club, a society of local business bigwigs determined to bring cosmopolitan culture to "Cowtown." Over the years, even as Fort Worth flourished, the building fell into disrepair. When the Ashton opened as a boutique hotel in 2001, it restored the building to its early splendor.



WHAT YOU'LL FIND JUST OUTSIDE: The Ashton sits in the middle of Fort Worth's historic Sundance Square district, an immaculately restored stretch of turn-of-the-20th-century buildings and redbrick streets that hosts frequent outdoor events. The hotel is also only a block away from Fort Worth's crown jewel, the Bass Performance Hall, a 2,000-seat theater built in 1998 that boasts world-class acoustics and European opera-house ornamentation.



DESIGN NOTES: Billed as "The City's Only Small Luxury Hotel," the Ashton looks as if it belongs in downtown Paris rather than deepest Texas, with a sweeping awning, wrought-iron balconies and monarchical guest rooms with high ceilings, king-size beds and heavy curtains worthy of Louis XIV. During the evenings, post-bop jazz wafts through the halls.



HOT DISH: Not surprisingly, given Fort Worth's longtime status as a booming cattle town, the Ashton's Six 10 Grille serves up impressive cuts of beef, including a ribeye sourced from the renowned Niman Ranch. Oddly, in a landlocked frontier city, the best item on the menu might be the seafood risotto, packed with wharf-fresh lobster, red shrimp, sea bass and scallops.