



ZURICH, SWITZERLAND

## Hipster luxe awaits at Zurich's new B2 boutique hotel

Rochelle Lash

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Zurich's five-star palace hotels are prized for their ornate antique interiors, crystal chandeliers, starched and tuxedoed staff. But the B2 Boutique Hotel + Spa Hurlimann-Areal, which opened in March, represents a new zeitgeist. A stunning example of industrial chic, B2 is a four-star, 60-room boutique hotel with an uber-trendy style, sweeping open spaces and a fabulous rooftop soaking pool. Here, the fresh-faced young staff wear dark denim uniforms and the enormous ceiling fixtures have been ingeniously fashioned from recycled beer bottles, a creative play on the building's history as a brewery.

Adjacent to Google Europe's head office and in the heart of a private banking district, B2 is home to business clients from two worlds: young and happening. There are the casual jean-clad techies and slick money managers. Sharp suits, yes, but no stuffy pinstripes.

Leisure travellers to Zurich flock to B2's exceptional spa, and soak in views of the skyline and mountains from the hotel's hilltop setting. Better yet, the hotel is one kilometre from the famed shopping thoroughfare, Bahnhofstrasse.

**Design**

B2 is spare, but not stark. Once a 150-year-old brewery, the hotel has employed the aged stone walls and refurbished valves and bolts as clever decor elements. Its white interiors and straight lines are warmed up with honey-coloured oak floors, cushy sofas of rich leather and splashy orange carpets in the corridors.

The hotel's centrepiece is a dramatic, four-storey library with more than 30,000 vintage books (mostly in German). It's an all-purpose agora that serves as lobby, breakfast room, bar-lounge, reading space and Internet café. Jean company Diesel crafted the club chairs in beige denim and the coffee tables are adorable stacks of – what else? – coffee-table books.

## **Amenities**

The Thermal Bath & Spa is a sensation. Hotel guests pay \$27 (25 Swiss francs) to enter two impressive spa spaces, connected by an elevator. Lounging in the rooftop soaking pool was my favourite with its natural thermal waters; the view is especially seductive at night when Zurich twinkles. The second spa area is an underground grotto encased by the brewery's stone walls. Here I could pad around the circuit of 10 pools (temperatures range from hypnotic to refreshing) made with larch wood and built to resemble oversized beer barrels – an odd-sounding but oddly intriguing design feature. After a few hours here, submitting to massage jets, underwater loungers and meditation music, I feel like a new person.

B2 has no gym, but if you arrived on the tram, the challenging 600-metre walk uphill from Bahnhof- Enge station is solid cardio exercise. I envied the people coming and going by taxi. I suggest the hotel add a golf cart, at least for guests arriving with luggage.

## **Rooms**

With its industrial-scale architecture, B2's spectacular rooms are oversized with soaring ceilings. Mine was swathed in white walls with billowing linen drapes and a downy king bed – it was the perfect oasis for a tired traveller. I loved the user-friendly buttons on both sides of the bed to control the lighting and the generous 42-inch flat-screen TV. The sleek design included a glass work desk and a glass shower in the bedroom, which caused a few titters. I also never forgot I was in Switzerland with a view of the woodsy Zurich Berg (mountain) from my window, coffee from a Swiss Nespresso machine and, at night, a Ricola herbal lozenge on my pillow that took the edge off my jet-lagged sore throat.

## **Service**

When you arrive, B2's excellent team of young and keen guest ambassadors offer welcome relief from the usual gauntlet of valet staff, bellmen, concierges and front-desk receptionists. The ambassadors handle those duties interchangeably and each guest's requests are recorded on a computer. During my two-day stay, I was power-shopping for a particular brand of Swiss lotion and several staffers made calls and surfed the Net to help me find it.

## **Food**

This is the hotel's weak link. Committed to a youthful vibe, B2 has eschewed the old-school concept of a formal dining room, opting for a hip wine and tapas lounge in the Library. This works, unless you are hungry. I arrived famished enough to attack a lunch-time "hamburger tapas," but I was crushed to find a little croissant-style bun atop a chewy meat patty that had been pre-cooked offsite and warmed up by a server. For an intimidating \$32, it came with a Hurlimann beer which barely softened the blow.

Breakfast is better, and included with your stay. B2 lays out a tiny but superior Swiss-style buffet with charcuterie, cheeses, baked goods, muesli, juices and cooked-to-order boiled eggs.

## **Verdict**

B2 is a refreshing, revolutionary change in a city that prides itself on its medieval history. The outstanding aesthetics, moderate prices (for central Zurich), extraordinary thermal baths, attentive multilingual service and legendary high standards of Swiss hotellerie all guarantee a highly comfortable stay. But plan to take your meals outside the hotel.

*B2 Boutique Hotel, Brandschenkestrasse 152; 60 rooms and suites starting at \$320 for two, including continental breakfast; [b2boutiquehotels.com](http://b2boutiquehotels.com); 41-44-567-67-67.*

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