

The Hotel Rehearsal

Alex Schweder

Designed to speculate on the relationship between built and enacted architecture, as much as on the often over-subscribed architectural affinity to 'programme', the Hotel Rehearsal combines a generic white van with a hydraulic scissor lift and an inflatable hotel-room capsule. Through its use, it also synthesises the twin main transportation modes of the city and suburb – the elevator and the automobile – in offering a building capable of moving in two different directions. This unique and omni-Cartesian ability allows guests to change at will what they see from their hotel window, either by raising or lowering their vinyl shelter, or simply by driving to another location.

To rehearse a hotel, the van pulls into a parking space and levels itself by lowering hydraulic feet, relieving pressure on the vehicle's own suspension system while also preventing the scissor lift from toppling over. An extension cord then umbilically connects the hotel to the city's power grid, enabling blowers to transform the caged pile of deflated plastic into a habitable lodging. To enter, guests open the rear doors of the van and then unzip a small, second opening. Immediately, a rush of air tousles their hair, but the structure remains engorged because the entry – which is also the bathroom – serves as an air hatch very much like one you would find on a submarine. Re-fastening this rear opening and unzipping the full-height door between the two spaces balances the pressure again,

*It is a hotel when a hotel is here.
When a hotel is not here it is not a hotel.
Welcome to the hotel rehearsal.*

revealing a sink and shower to the left and a toilet and towels to the right. Walking out of this bathroom and into the hotel's main living area, guests can adjust the space and make themselves comfortable. They do this via a wall-mounted control panel, on which a switch toggles the pop-up furniture between a sofa and a bed, while a second panel combines a USB outlet, air-conditioning and switches to control floodlights on the hotel's underside and interior LED rope lights. Another set of controls allows the visitor to adjust the height of their room while occupying it.

When the sun is bright and high in the sky, a retractable reflective sunscreen covers the normally clear vinyl ceiling of the hotel, providing necessary shade, while at dusk, curtains similarly rise up from the underside of the three transparent walls, offering privacy when the van is parked in built-up urban areas. This in turn prompts the top shade to draw back again so that the guest can stargaze before drifting off to sleep on their air mattress. The following morning they wake, go to the bathroom, wash, dress and then lower and exit their room. The engorging fan is then turned off, the hotel unplugged and the stabilising feet retracted. All that is left for the guest to do is climb into the cab, start the engine and drive to the best coffee and eggs in town before thinking about the ideal site to park that evening.



The Hotel Rehearsal was commissioned by the Biennial of the Americas for the 'Draft Urbanism' exhibition, Denver Colorado, 16 July – 2 September 2013. It then moved to New Canaan, Connecticut and took up a short residency at the Glass House, designed by Philip Johnson, 2–16 October 2013, under the title 'Rehearsal Space'.

The Hotel Rehearsal at the Glass House,
designed by Philip Johnson, New Canaan, Connecticut, 2013
Photo Amanda Kirkpatrick



The Hotel Rehearsal in Denver, Colorado, 2013
Photos Cristobal Palma