

THE
*
OBVIOUS
SOLUTION

MEET US AT THE HOTEL BAR

WHAT MAKES THE HOTEL LOUNGE THE PERFECT OFFICE AWAY FROM THE OFFICE? JAMES COWAN SAYS IT'S THEIR ABILITY TO ADAPT PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN TESSLER

FREE SNACKS
We're not looking for mozzarella sticks. Nor anything fancy. A bowl of nuts is perfect

THE BARTENDER
Points for wearing a shirt and tie...and knowing that a can of Reddi-wip does not make a coffee "Irish"

THE SEAT
This is important: A hotel bar needs a quiet place where you can meet a client for coffee, but also a friendly stool where you can get some work done

THE DÉCOR
Luxe but not too hip. You're working, not nightclubbing

THE MENU
Any bar worth its salt does a club sandwich. The peeled shrimp and bacon one (\$19) at Vancouver's Bacchus is a cut above

The Bar: Bacchus Lounge at Vancouver's Wedgwood Hotel
Cherrywood? Check. Piano? Check. Twelve-year-old Cragganmore Scotch? We can see it from here. The Wedgwood Hotel is located on Hornby Street, probably only a short walk from most offices. But if not, they have valet parking. Afternoon tea—which includes a pot of “Thunderbolt Darjeeling” to go with your finger sandwiches—costs \$35 and is served at 2 p.m. 845 Hornby St., Vancouver; www.wedgwoodhotel.com

Let's say it's two in the afternoon, and you want to meet a client or a boss (or a potential boss) for a chat. The question falls to you: "Where should we meet?" Cue brain-bending calculus. Starbucks is convenient, though you'll spend 10 minutes hovering like vagabonds for a seat. Pubs are good, but the mid-afternoon clientele trend toward mangy. Food court? No. The solution to this scenario—and many other quandaries of corporate socializing—is straightforward, omnipresent and likely within walking distance. The hotel bar.

We dismiss hotel lounges as holding pens for out-of-towners. But they're not Hard Rock Cafés, watering holes justly ignored by the locals. Rudyard Kipling drank at the Raffles Hotel in Singapore. Ernest Hemingway favoured the Hotel Monteleeone in New Orleans. And Mordecai Richler referred to the rooftop bar of the Park Hyatt as "the only civilized place in Toronto."

And civility is exactly what's on offer. With travellers arriving at any time, in need of any thing, the hotel bar is infinitely adaptable but always respectful. The barkeeper's unlikely to be an undergrad hustling for quick tips. (Joe Goames has been at the Park Hyatt since 1959.) Guys like that know when to step back and let business folks chat. They also know when to hand a diner the newspaper tucked beneath the bar rail. And since travellers' nerves are frayed, the music is kept at a conversation-friendly volume.

If your appointment just wants a coffee, that's fine. But so is an Irish one. Or a beer before noon, a club sandwich at three or a three-course dinner just before close. Hotel bars know how to adapt.

The best ones have been around for a few decades, accruing endearing eccentricities. (The Tonga Room in San Francisco's Fairmont has an old swimming pool that's been converted into a tropical lagoon, complete with a boat.) But even a middling one guarantees a location that's comfy, quiet and well catered. Why wait until you're out of town to enjoy such peace of mind? You could probably use it today. ▶