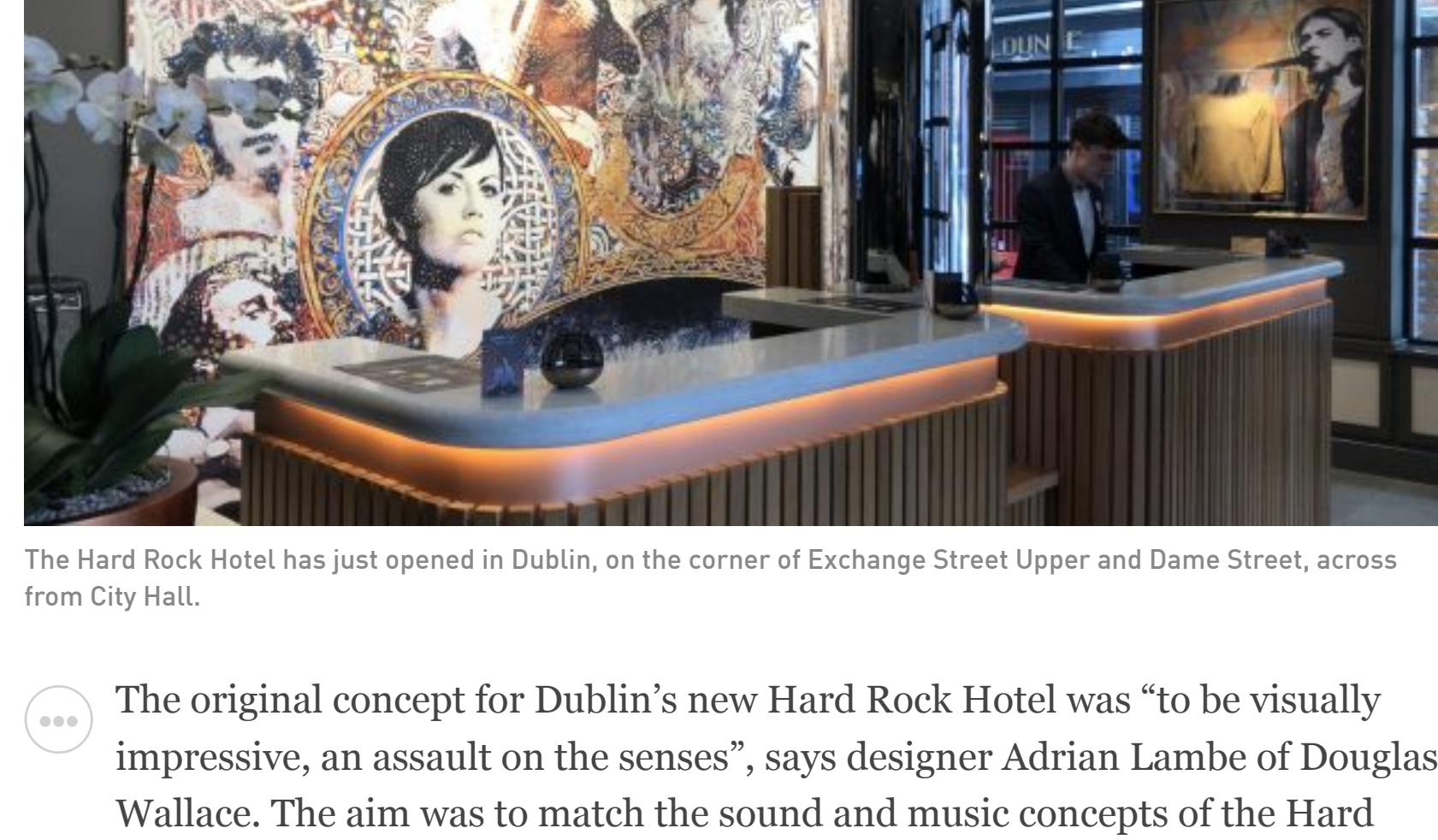


A peek inside Dublin's new €52m Hard Rock Hotel

Decor, original artwork and memorabilia centre on music with an Irish connection

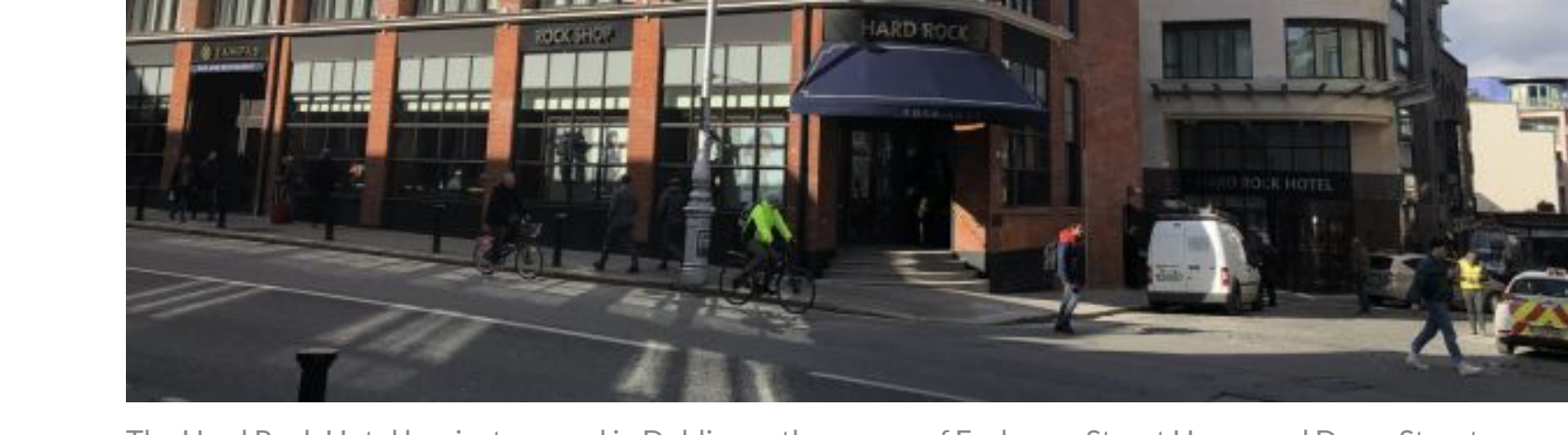
about 5 hours ago



The Hard Rock Hotel has just opened in Dublin, on the corner of Exchange Street Upper and Dame Street, across from City Hall.

The original concept for Dublin's new Hard Rock Hotel was "to be visually impressive, an assault on the senses", says designer Adrian Lambe of Douglas Wallace. The aim was to match the sound and music concepts of the Hard Rock brand with the interiors. They're aiming for upper four-star standards with a surprise at every turn, but the result is a surprisingly muted, tasteful aesthetic that isn't in your face.

The Hard Rock Hotel has just opened in Dublin, on the corner of Exchange Street Upper and Dame Street, across from City Hall. A franchise of the international brand, it's a distinct business from the Hard Rock Cafe and shop nearby in Temple Bar (which is owned by the EE Entertainment Group). The new, higher end hotel, on the other hand, is owned by the large Irish hotel group Tifco Ltd (who also run Clontarf Castle, the Crown Plazas, and Travelodges), backed by Goldman Sachs.

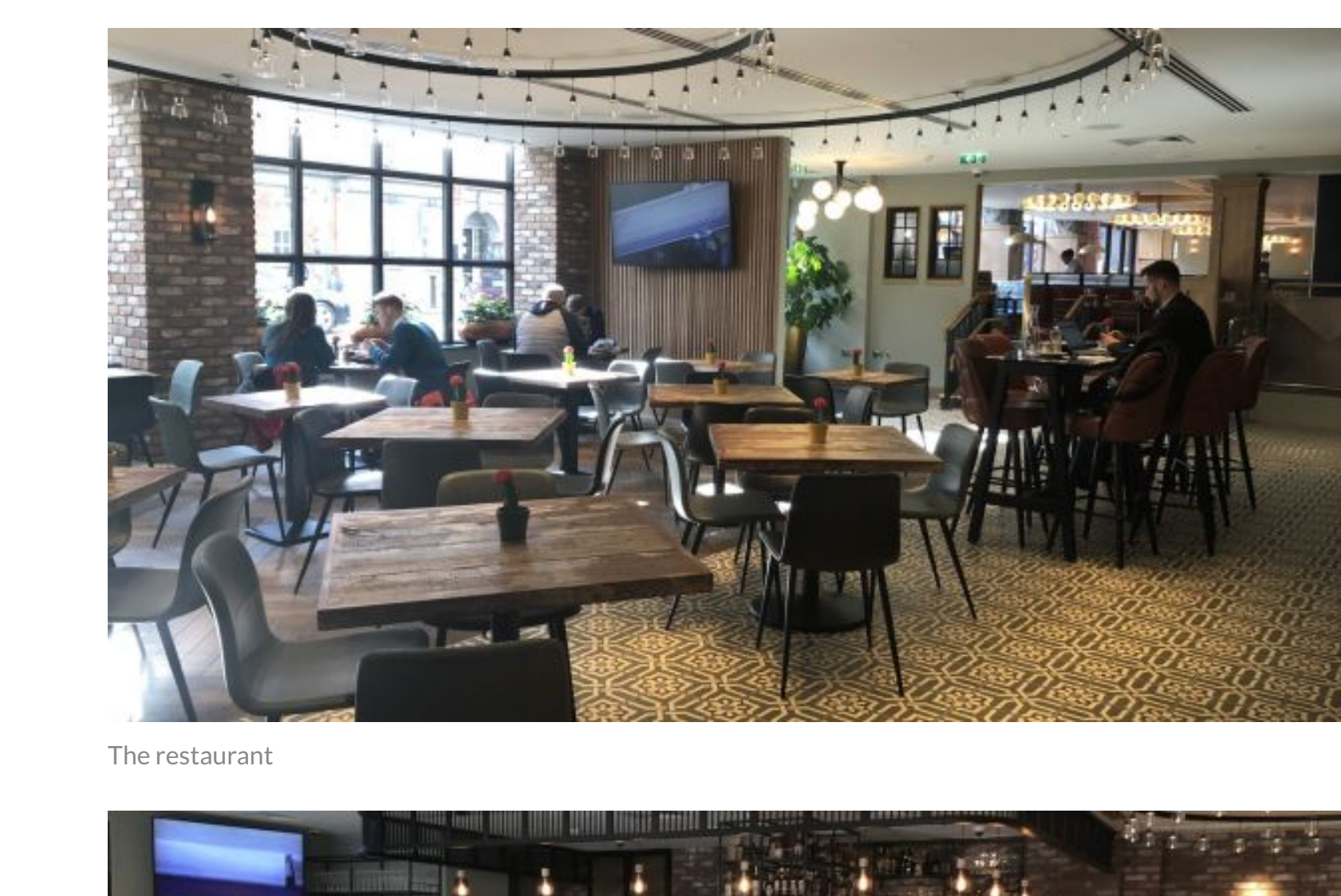


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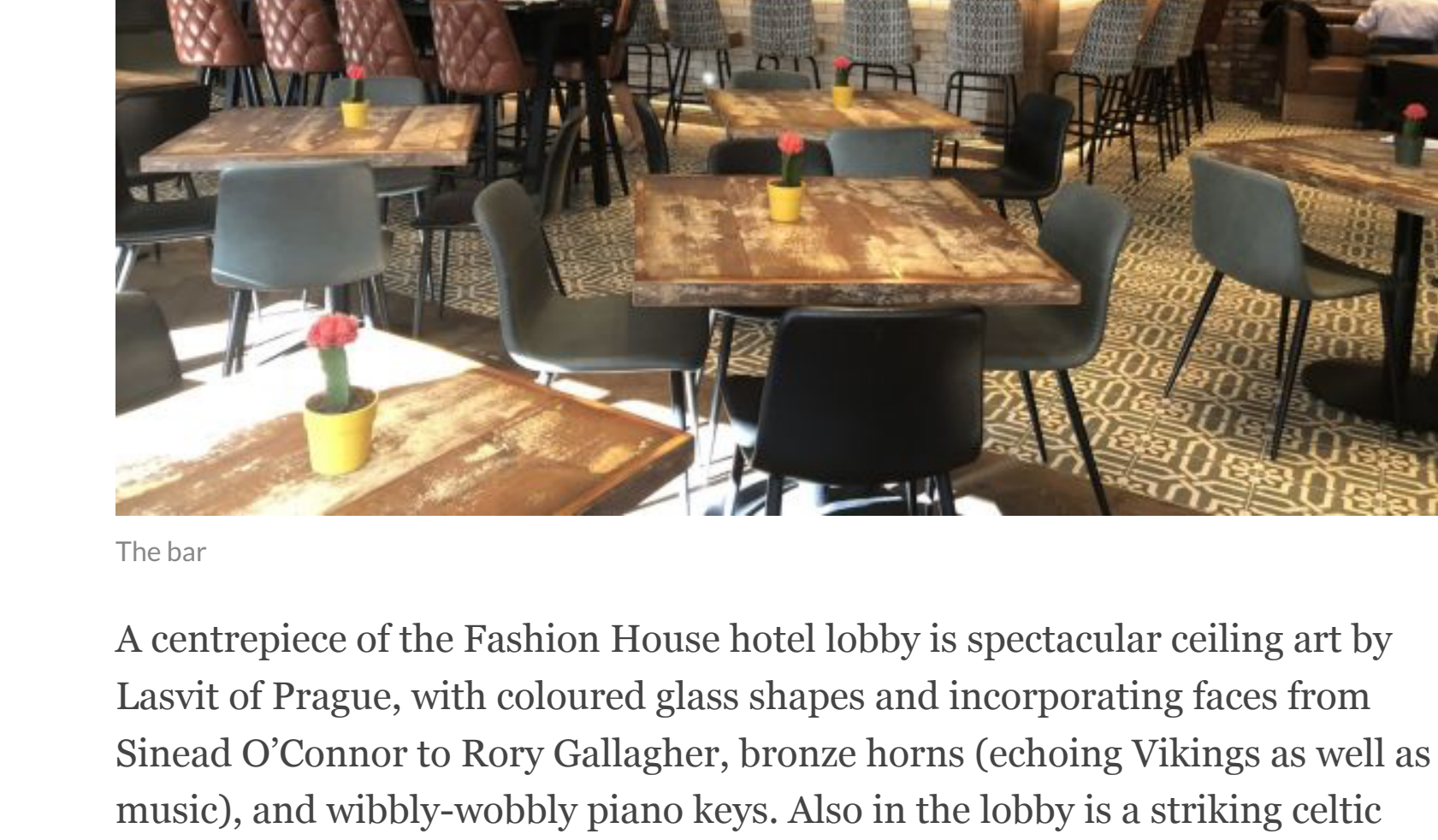
Tifco acquired both the 1911 protected structure Exchange House, and the Fashion House building a step behind it, in 2015. Architects are hotel specialists Consarc, and John Paul Construction started work in November 2018. Fashion House was knocked, and replaced by a new building, which now houses the hotel lobby with rooms overhead, with substantial conservation next door in Exchange Buildings, where there's now a bar/restaurant and merchandise shop with access from Dame Street, and more rooms upstairs.

The decor, original artwork and memorabilia from the Hard Rock franchise collection centres on music, unsurprisingly, mostly with an Irish connection, even if it's only that they played here (Bowie's orange boilersuit), or nearly did (Kurt Cobain's sweater). The Irish connection is not just to rock music, says sales and marketing director Stephanie Hayes, but a range of styles (the Dubliners feature on one of the bedroom floor's signature displays).

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The restaurant



The bar

A centrepiece of the Fashion House hotel lobby is spectacular ceiling art by Lasvit of Prague, with coloured glass shapes and incorporating faces from Sinead O'Connor to Rory Gallagher, bronze horns (echoing Vikings as well as music), and wibbly-wobbly piano keys. Also in the lobby is a striking celtic knot by artist Neill Powell, made of book bindings, some with Irish connections, from Joyce to Shackleton.

The art - commissioned by US consultants Kalisher - throughout the hotel, including all bedrooms, includes works by Irish artists David Duda (including "Don't Quit Your Daydream" cushions), Leah Hewson, Laura Buchanan, and quirky work by Helen O'Higgins (an ornithological Clancy brother with pipe and Brennan's bread under-arm). A fabulous Jim Fitzpatrick triptych (Vagabonds of the Western World) hangs over the couch in the Rock Star Suite (which also displays U2 lyrics to Please, and an affectionate, punctuation-free letter from Van Morrison to his bass player Mick Cox).

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Other memorabilia includes the guitar that Hozier learnt to play on in the bar restaurant, and another, signed by all the Cranberries, in the lobby.



Memorabilia includes a guitar played by Dolores O'Riordan of The Cranberries

With project costs of around €52million, one of the design and construction challenges was working with the two buildings (one a protected structure), and with limited site access. Attention to detail took a lot of time, says Lambe. There are recurring motifs of a soundwave, seen in carpets and small areas of wallpaper. Copper accents in public areas and in the bedrooms (gorgeous copper tile) echo the setting - with Copper Alley (where coins were minted) running between the two buildings. The buildings are linked at second floor level by a new glass link bridge.

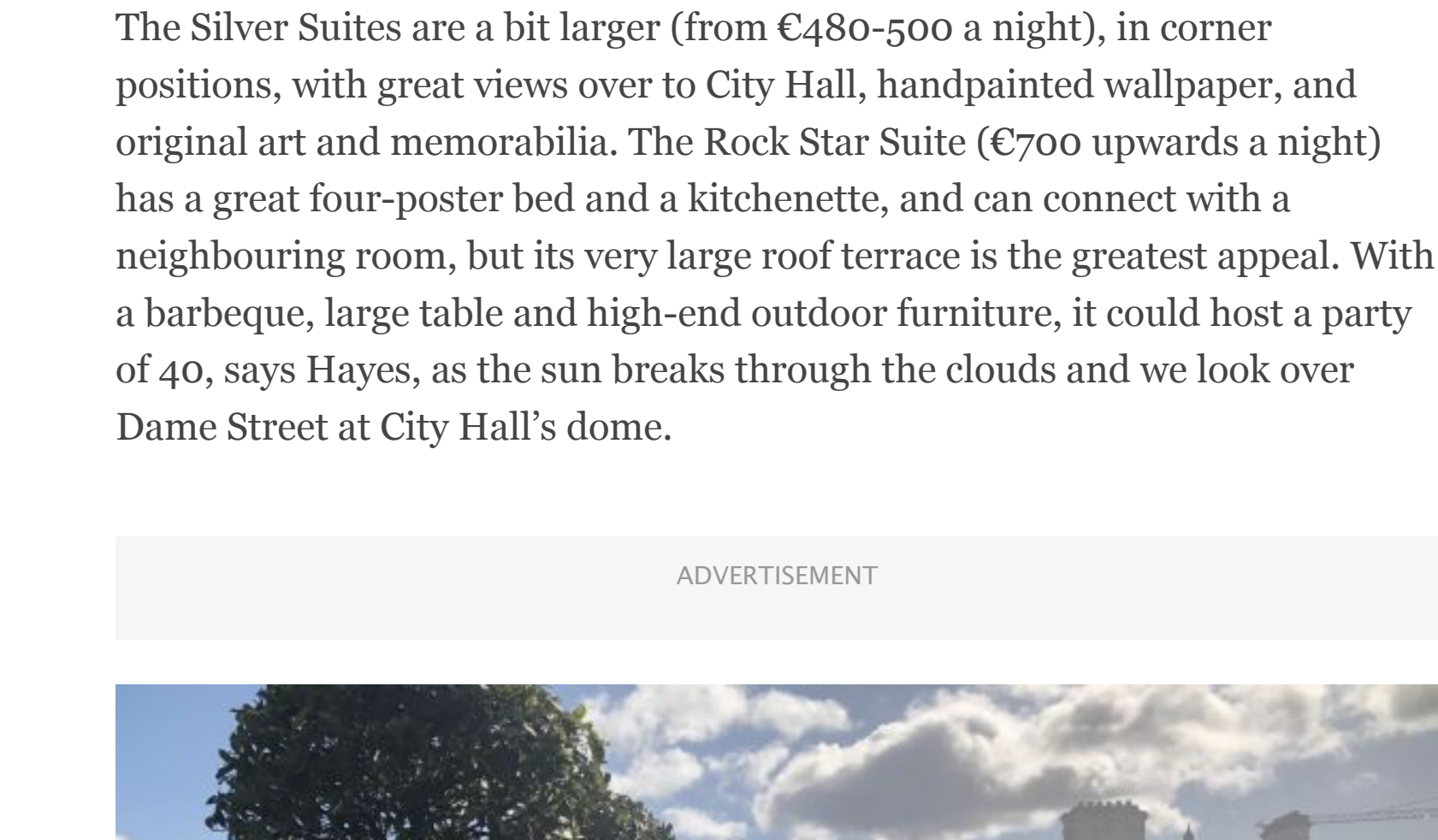
David Monks, Tifco's development director, has overseen the project. At this stage the job is almost done, and he is looking at the tiny details, including edging that needs to be perfected ("it's driving me bananas!"), and the fret-cut metal roof frieze in the glass bridge which doesn't yet perfectly mirror the carpet below; both are inspired by Windmill Lane graffiti.

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In the shop, Lauren Reilly is arranging the limited (to 500) edition Hard Rock Hotel Dublin pins, which are €23 a pop; collectors of the merchandise have been keen already - one person came in and bought 25 of them on Wednesday night. In the buzzy Zampas restaurant, people are dining already as restaurant manager Ricardo Saez looks on in the casual bar dining area, with distressed tables and an enormous and striking musical note-shaped lighting fixture overhead. The atmosphere is totally different at night, he says, with blinds drawn, candles, and live music four nights a week. In the restaurant area alongside, separate dining areas are delineated into nooks, beside an open kitchen area, with an emphasis on open-flame cooking inspired by Pan-American dishes, using quality Irish ingredients. Just off, there's plush private dining for up to 20.



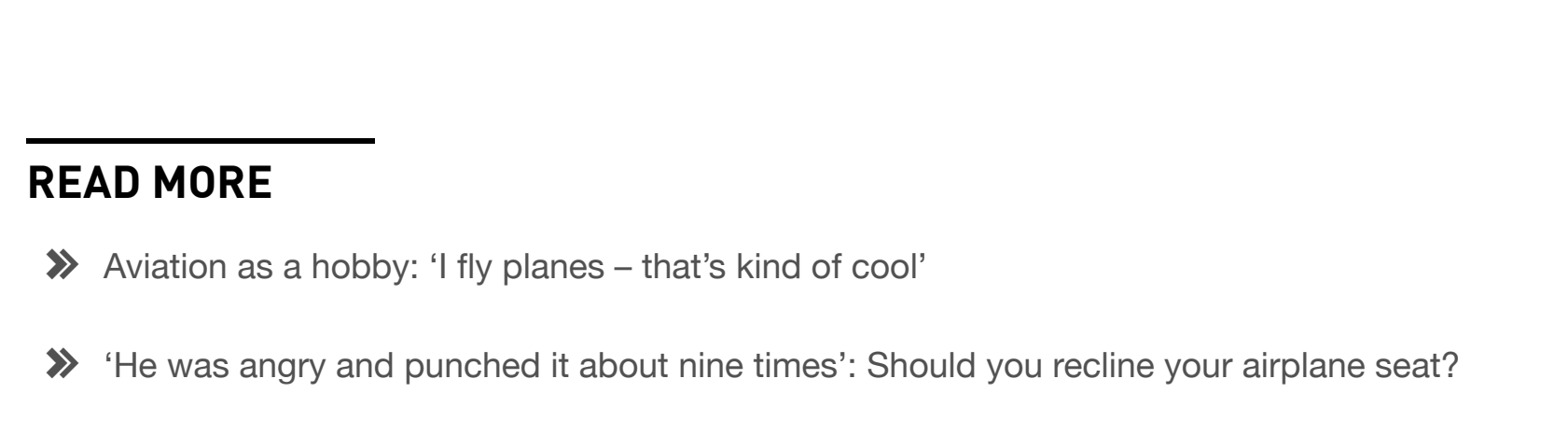
Standard rooms (from €270 per night upwards) are a good size at 26sq m



The 120 bedrooms and suites have a high quality finish, they describe the style as "bohemian and luxurious", using fumed woods, stone surfaces, Ulster carpets, bright fabrics and luxury bedding. Standard rooms (from €270 per night upwards) are a good size at 26 square metres, with in room basins, and statement circular mirrors above.

The Silver Suites are a bit larger (from €480-500 a night), in corner positions, with great views over to City Hall, handpainted wallpaper, and original art and memorabilia. The Rock Star Suite (€700 upwards a night) has a great four-poster bed and a kitchenette, and can connect with a neighbouring room, but its very large roof terrace is the greatest appeal. With a barbecue, large table and high-end outdoor furniture, it could host a party of 40, says Hayes, as the sun breaks through the clouds and we look over Dame Street at City Hall's dome.

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The Rock Star Suite has a large roof terrace that could host a party of 40.

There's also a wellness/yoga programme - Rock Om! - on the TV systems. Another of the international Hard Rock Hotel brand's signatures is a "Sound of Your Stay" - curated playlist, and the chance to book a Crosley vinyl turntables and records, or a Fender guitar and amp, for a jam in your room.

There is, thankfully, excellent sound insulation, if guests do want to indulge their inner rock star.

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