

# This District in Dallas Is Full of Unknown Gems — Including a Brand-new Luxury Hotel

By [Mariah Tyler](#) | Published on September 9, 2023



PHOTO: COURTESY OF HARWOOD INTERNATIONAL

As a fourth-generation Dallasite on both sides, my recent visit home took me by surprise as I walked the new-to-me Harwood District. Driving past the Rolex building is a vibrant childhood memory, but until this year, I did not realize that area of the city was a pocket of hidden gems. The Harwood District's indisputably central location allows for easy walking access to the city's largest entertainment complex, its best museums, and its most popular trail.

There's one thing all visitors should know before traveling to Dallas-Ft. Worth.

You'll be in the car a lot. In these two sprawling cities, it's rare to happen upon one central area where you can avoid highway traffic and nightlife chaos completely.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF HARWOOD INTERNATIONAL

Harwood District is one of those rare places, and that was intentional. Its owner, Harwood International, is a family-owned realty and development firm that prides itself on the ability to create innovative experiences. The 19-block district is home to architecture from the likes of Kengo Kuma, office clients like Rolex, and a growing number of food and beverage offerings. The standout is La Rue Perdue, a European-inspired cobblestone street with dining outposts that include a pub, pizzeria, and small market just a few steps from each other. The charming little alley feels like a street of sidewalk cafes in Paris; it's like nothing else in Dallas.



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PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE ANN & GABRIEL BARBIER-MUELLER MUSEUM: THE SAMURAI COLLECTION

Harwood's [Saint Ann restaurant](#) occupies a historical landmark, [St. Ann's School](#), the first school for Hispanic children in Dallas. It was built in 1927, when the broader area was known as Little Mexico (Dallas's first Mexican barrio). Another Dallas rarity is finding preserved history, and having this building renovated was a smart move by Harwood. The restaurant's second

floor houses the [Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Museum: The Samurai Collection](#). The Barbier-Muellers are the wife-and-husband duo behind Harwood International and are also the owners of the largest private samurai collection outside of Japan. The collection is free to view with a timed entry pass and is a truly unexpected addition to the area. Within a half-mile walk from this museum sits the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#), [The Dallas Museum of Art](#), and the [Perot Museum of Nature and Science](#). As someone who studied, works in, and enjoys the arts, I was deeply familiar with these museums but had never stumbled upon The Samurai Collection — reminding me that it's always a good time to discover something new in familiar places.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF HARWOOD INTERNATIONAL

One of Dallas's more impressive attractions is [Klyde Warren Park](#), built over a highway and offering a walkable connection between uptown and downtown. But it turns out Harwood created a park above concrete back in the early 1990s, decades before Klyde Warren Park existed. [Marie Gabrielle Gardens](#) sits between two office buildings and above parking garage

whisking visitors away to the Parisian gardens of their dreams. Here, long

stretches of trees are perfectly lined along a gravel path and divided by quiet water features. Idyllic in every way, I'm not sure a more pristine manicured garden exists in the city with the exception of the [Dallas Arboretum](#). Visitors can wander the gardens for free during the day via stairs that provide street access, but it is not considered a public park.

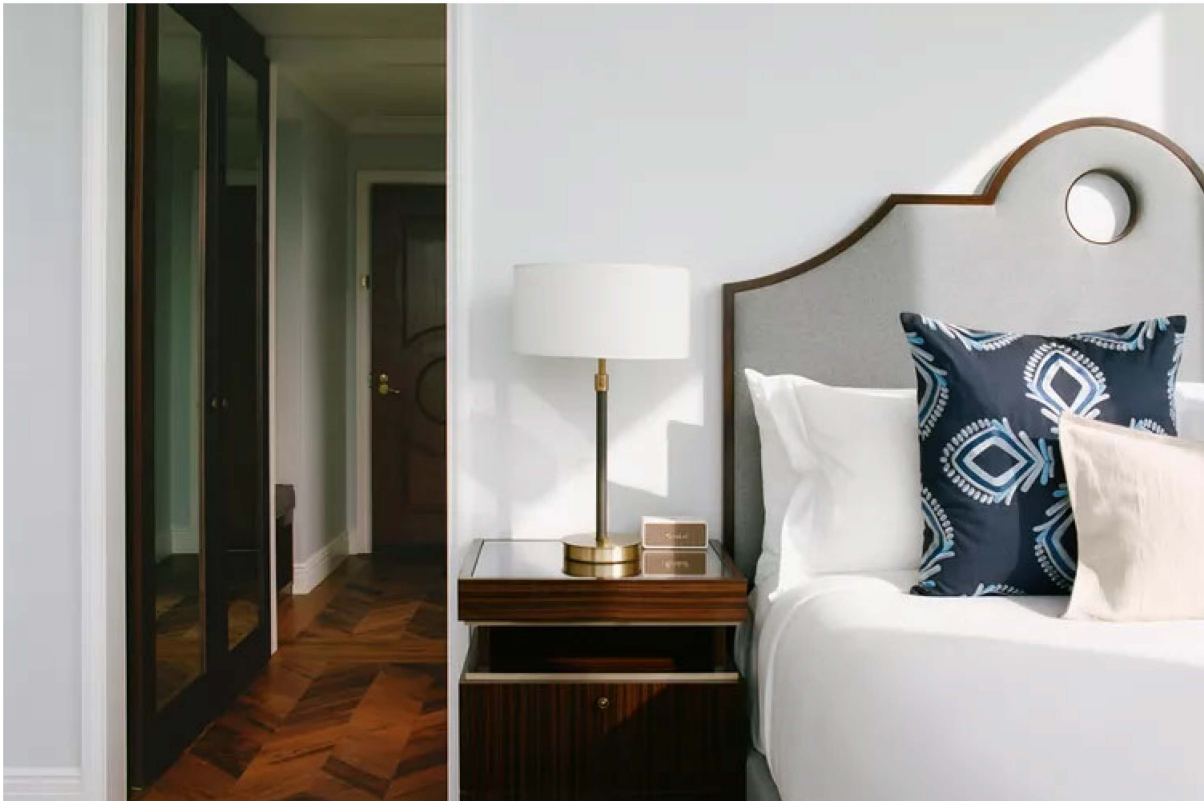


PHOTO: MARCO GALLOWAY

If Harwood is a district of hidden gems, the crown jewel is the newly opened [Hôtel Swexan](#). It combines elements of Swiss sensibility and Texan hospitality, inspired by Gabriel's Swiss heritage and Ann's Texas roots. The design-forward hotel draws from the couple's personal travels and is managed by top talent. General manager Julian Payne brings a passion for exceptional service and over 30 years of experience managing boutique and five-star hotels including The Ritz London, Hotel de Crillon in Paris, and Mandarin Oriental properties.





PHOTO: MARCO GALLOWAY

Upon entry, you're greeted with Texas-sized smiles and understated, European-style interiors. The 134-room, 20-floor hotel has a residential feel with spacious rooms containing floor-to-ceiling windows. Our room was full of sincere personal touches that made us feel welcome. The grand marble bathroom in our corner king was well-appointed with Le Labo products and an oversized bathtub overlooking the city with a water fill from the ceiling. The rooftop pool is the perfect place to replenish in the sun with plush lounge chairs and private cabanas. Another well planned amenity is the eighth-floor gym — a sprawling, earth-toned space with top-of-the-line equipment offering a cold plunge, steam rooms, saunas, and an outdoor terrace for yoga.



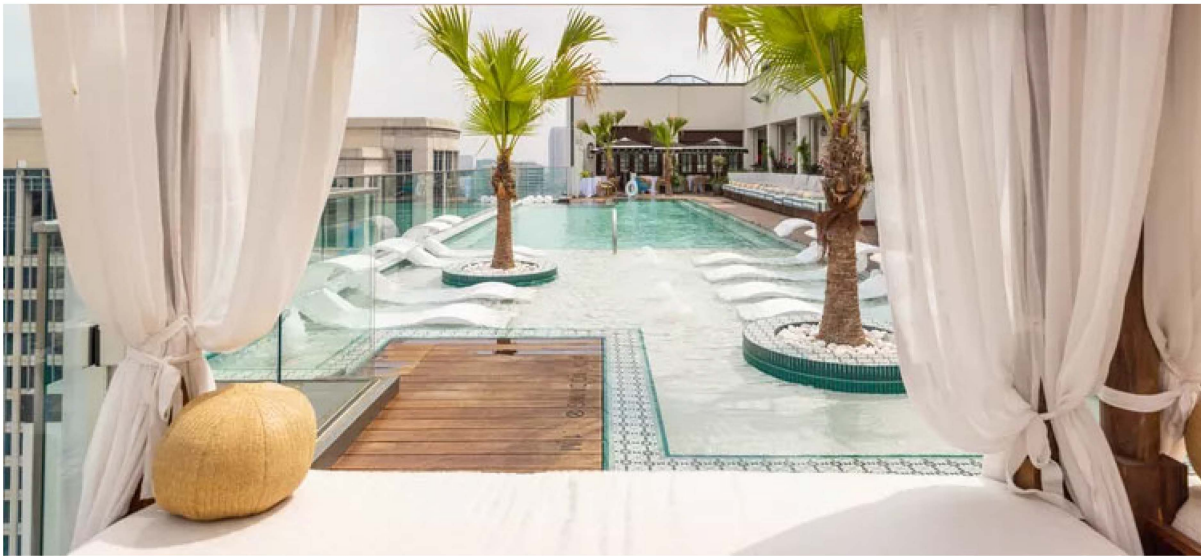


PHOTO: KATHY TRAN



PHOTO: MARIAH TYLER/TRAVEL + LEISURE



Hôtel Swexan has five different food and beverage experiences, giving guests a variety of options without ever really needing to step foot off property. The most notable is [Stillwell's](#), an homage to Texas ranching queen Hallie Stillwell and an impressive addition that shines among the well established steakhouse scene of Dallas. Stillwell's is a mid-century ranch-

style fever dream with cozy interiors and an exclusive beef program, HWD. Harwood's HWD beef is sourced from the family's Akaushi cattle ranch on the Texas-Oklahoma border. The Harwood program methodically embraces the use of every part of the animal to create leather goods and beef products. Stillwell's also has a stunning wine program curated by female Master Sommelier Barbara Werley.



PHOTO: MARIAH TYLER/TRAVEL + LEISURE

Hôtel Swexan was designed by Harwood favorite and world-renowned architect Kengo Kuma. Kuma likens the building's facade to the tailoring of a suit: "Precise and crisp in the Swiss approach and relaxed and robust in the Texan spirit... This suit should feel made for the spaces and the rich diversity within, welcoming, with surprising moments and movement throughout. This exterior coat sets the tone, and wears through the day with changing light, from morning to dusk and into the evening." I cannot help but consider his approach applicable to the greater vision of the Harwood District it calls home.