

What happens in a secret wing of an unassuming Hilton in L.A.?

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Though you've probably never noticed it, chances are you drive past the Hilton Garden Inn LAX in El Segundo whenever you fly into Los Angeles. Tucked away on a side street between Sepulveda Boulevard and a Green Line rail station, the generic-looking building is almost a parody of a midprice, midmarket, middle-of-nowhere airport hotel.

You're not likely to find anything out of the ordinary inside the Hilton Garden Inn LAX, either. But if you know where you're going - or you're one of the guests handpicked by the hotel's managers - you'll eventually find a corridor guarded by double doors. Down the long passage, past a series of other doorways, is the future of the 3,000 hotels and 500,000 guest rooms in the worldwide Hilton Family of lodgings.

The secret wing, code-named University, is Hilton's "hotel laboratory," the place where the company tests and refines its next generation of rooms. A year or two from now, the ideas, concepts and furnishings that have been tried out in El Segundo will make their way into Hilton-brand hotels around the world, including Doubletree, Embassy Suites, Homewood, Hampton Inn and, of course, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn.

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