



Westin/Starwood

WHITE LOOKS CLEANER: Westin's Heavenly Bed has a pillow-top mattress, a white duvet and goose down pillows.

The bedding battle starts with the sheets

Luxurious linens are the weapon of choice for hotels looking to attract guests, keep them happy.

By **SUSAN SPANO**
Times Staff Writer

IT'S Frette at the Ritz Paris and the London Savoy, Pratesi at the St. Regis in San Francisco, Fili D'oro at the Plaza Athénée in New York and Anichini at the Signature at MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

We're not talking designer cocktails. We're talking sheets — an increasingly important amenity at hotels.

Even workaday Holiday Inn Express recently spent \$53 million upgrading linens, adding duvets and 200-thread-count sheets on beds in the chain's 1,400 North American hotels.

"Sheets are critical," says Chaz Stevens, an L.A.-based design consultant who created the bed and bath linen for the Angelino, a new boutique hotel in Brentwood.

Experts like Stevens credit the popularity of hotel linen to the Heavenly Bed, which made its appearance in rooms at Westin hotels and resorts in 1999. Guests slept so sweetly on the beds that the chain began offering the components — comforters, blankets, sheets and even mattresses — in hotel boutiques.

After that, other high-end hotel chains, including Hilton and Marriott, joined the bedding battle.

Staying in a hotel these days is a lifestyle experience, and linen is a part of it, says Chip Conley, who about 20 years ago started Joie de Vivre Hospitality, a 30-member, California-based boutique hotel chain.

Hotel guests test products they might like to have at home or luxuriate in the sort of sheets they could never afford.

What goes into a dreamy sheet? Egyptian cotton, Italian weaving and high thread count, a feature formerly known only to connoisseurs, designating the number of threads in a square inch of fabric.

But Stevens says that thread count alone is an unreliable indicator of linen quality: "You can get a whole set of 1,000-thread-count sheets at a linen discount store for \$99, but they will be horrid."

Equally important are where the cotton is grown and how the sheets are woven. Experts agree that Egypt is the premier source of cotton for linens and that Italian weavers like Quagliotti make the world's best sheets.

And then there's the finish. Mary Ella Gabler, president of Peacock Alley in Dallas, a linen company that supplies sheets to the InterContinental Hotels Group, says the public is evenly divided in its taste for soft sateen and crisp percale finishes.

But, apparently, all good sheets need to be mercerized, a process that plumps up the fibers.

"It's like collagen for the lips," Stevens says.

susan.spano@latimes.com