

New York Report

The New York Times

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2003

YT

C23

Hotel Using Dewey System May Need a Law Library

By MICHAEL LUO

Who knew that someone owned the Dewey Decimal System?

Apparently not the owners of the Library Hotel, nestled in the shadow of the New York Public Library. Now the boutique hotel, which numbers its guest rooms and stocks them with books according to Melvil Dewey's century-old library classification system, is being sued for using it.

"The Dewey Decimal System is a product, a trademark, a brand name," said Joseph R. Dreitler, a lawyer for the Online Computer Library Center, a nonprofit library cooperative that filed the suit last week in Federal District Court in Ohio. "The idea here isn't to put the Library Hotel out of business. The idea is to protect Dewey and the Dewey Decimal System trademark."

The hotel opened three years ago at Madison Avenue and 41st Street. From its imitation card catalog in the lobby to its stately second-floor reading room, it is designed as a stren for book lovers. Each floor is devoted to one of the 10 main categories of knowledge in the Dewey system: Social Sciences, Languages, Mathematics and Science, Technology, the Arts, Literature, History and Geography, General Knowledge, Philosophy and Religion.

Hotel guests can request a specific floor or themed room, furnished with the corresponding books. History buffs might consider the ninth floor, with Biography (900.006) or Asian History (900.004). A technology aficionado might give Computers (600.005) a try.

The most popular rooms, by far? Erotic Literature (800.001) and Love (1100.006).

Hotel officials said yesterday that the owner, Henry Kallan, could not be reached in Prague, where he is opening a new music-themed hotel, the Aria. But the hotel's general manager, Craig Spitzer, issued a written statement saying that the Dewey Decimal theme was Mr. Kallan's "original idea," based on its proximity to the public library.

"We are not a library lending books, but rather we have created a unique hotel experience for book lovers to enjoy," Mr. Spitzer said. "We do not believe that our guests or other consumers are confused into thinking the Library Hotel's hospitality services and the O.C.L.C.'s information services come from the same source."

The Online Computer Library Center is seeking damages of three times the profits made by the hotel as made since it opened.

Dewey, a librarian, invented the Dewey Decimal Classification in 1874 and devoted his life to spreading it. Over time, it became the most widely employed cataloging system in the world, used today in 96 percent of public libraries in the United States. Before its emergence, libraries would dedicate space on their shelves for books according to their own systems. Adding new volumes, categories and sub-categories was often unwieldy, and because no two libraries used the same system, the method of finding books differed from one library to the next.

Dewey copyrighted his system early on and set up a company, Forest Press, to sell it, although he often donated his system to needy libraries. He never intended to get rich with his system, said Dr. Wayne Wiegand, a professor of library and informa-



At the Library Hotel in Midtown Manhattan, guest rooms are numbered according to the Dewey Decimal System. The rooms are also stocked with books using the century-old library classification system. The Love Room, at right, features books and a statement on the wall by Dr. Ruth. The hotel, which opened three years ago near the New York Public Library, is being sued for using the trademarked system.



Photographs by Angel Franco/The New York Times



tion studies at Florida State University and the author of a Dewey biography. Dewey's goal, instead, was to educate the masses. Dr. Wiegand said many smaller libraries, including prison libraries, use the system today without paying.

In 1988, the Online Computer Library Center, a group created to help libraries share resources and costs, bought Forest Press and the Dewey Decimal System trademark. Periodically, the group, based in Dublin, Ohio, issues updates to the system and sells them to libraries at \$375 for a full printed update. Currently, more than 200,000 libraries in 135 countries are licensed to use the system.

Officials at the library center said they discovered the hotel on the Internet soon after it opened. After writing two letters to Mr. Kallan, in 2000 and 2001, but getting no response, the group sent him a certified letter in October, said Mr. Dreitler, the organization's lawyer. "He basically said, 'Go away,'" Mr. Dreitler said.