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Hello Yotel: New hotel brings life to 42nd St. and Tenth Ave.

Purple-lit building transforming a neighborhood known for relatively soulless rental buildings

BY JASON SHEFTELL



Yotel hotel entry at 42nd Street and Tenth Ave.

YOTEL

Yotel CEO and co-founder [Gerard Greene](#) still gets goose bumps every time he sees the purple colors when he rounds the corner of 10th Ave. and 42nd St.

That color has become synonymous with changing the game in the hotel industry and transforming a New York neighborhood normally known for relatively soulless rental buildings. Now, on any given night of the week, you can walk by Yotel's luggage robot on the ground floor, take the elevator to four for Mission Control (available to help 24/7), follow the funky graphic signs to the outdoor terrace, and on the way, hear about 10 languages and see people young and old from about as many countries.

The five to 10 times we were there we counted China, Singapore, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, Argentina, Brazil, America, Canada and Italy. Some had laptops open, others leaned back against the green row of leather seats drinking beer, coffee and cocktails in relaxed conversation. As dusk turned to night, the outdoor terrace grew more crowded, and the music quickened. The vibe was always the same — energetic, alive and fresh.



YOTEL

Views of the Yotel terrace.

“Yotel attracts the young at heart,” says Greene, who lived across the street at Atelier while he watched his hotel rise as part of the multimillion-dollar MiMA rental project from Related Companies. “The place is meant to be inspirational for anyone who walks in here. New York doesn’t have a futuristic hotel with this kind of design. It’s 1970s [James Bond](#), from the [Sean Connery](#) years.”

Bond minus the Aston Martin and Saville Row price points. Rooms at Yotel cost \$149 at the low end. For an outdoor terrace with a hot tub, add \$300. For a two-bedroom suite with a hot tub, add \$1,500. The equation is simple, the idea simpler. It’s the execution that’s hard.

“We’re inclusive, not exclusive,” says Greene, who gave up his job as a hotel analyst and sold his London flat to invest in the hotel concept.



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Gerard Greene, owner and founder of Yotel, in the VIP Suite on Tenth Ave & West 42nd St.

"We don't want velvet ropes here, and we'll always keep the price point affordable. It's kind of like we're sticking up two fingers at the big boys who run the hotel business. I don't see how anyone can wake up in the morning feeling good about himself after building a generic Holiday Inn. We want to be known for the same kind of innovation and integrity as Apple."

Conceived as a solution to boring and expensive hotels, Yotel puts design and people at the front of its plans. Greene, a hardworking middle-class kid from London, sold the idea to major investors he met by accident in a Dubai hotel lobby using a business plan stuffed in his back pocket. His chief designers hail from the aeronautic seat world. SoftRoom, who designed this hotel with [David Rockwell's](#) New York team, created the clubhouse lounge concept for Virgin Atlantic Airlines.

"Our rooms redefine affordable luxury," says Greene. "There's a desk, a bathroom, a very comfortable bed and mattress. The walls, windows, HVAC system, and doors allow no noise. And it looks cool. We have free WiFi and printing. With the laundry, I hated how other hotels charge like \$8 for a shirt to be cleaned but it's \$2 at a dry cleaner around the corner. We made our laundry the same price as those places. It's 'edited service,' we call it, but it's what guests want."



SCOTT FRANCES

Bedroom in one of the hotel's suites.

Yotel Times Square is the company's first city center property. At 669 rooms it's also the largest. They operate mostly at 80% full. Yotel has three airport hotels, at London's Gatwick and Heathrow and Amsterdam's Schiphol. Those hotels have short-term pod rooms for \$45. Greene is working with investors to raise \$500 million to launch six hotels in major U.S. and global cities. He makes sure, though, he's home every Friday afternoon in London to pick his young son up from school to spend the weekend together. He also makes sure to interview or meet face to face every Yotel employee, no matter what level.

Design is great and creates this big buzz, but it's the people who work here that make the brand," he says. "I visualized how this would look and feel for 20 years. It's hard to be inclusive and cool at the same time. We want people of all types to stay here, so the hard part was making this cool for someone and their mom at the same time. People have a lot to do with that."



JEFF BACHNER/FOR NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The bar and restaurant in Yotel.

Marketing director [Jo Berrington](#) has a few theories on cool. After working for British Airways to set up the London Eye for nearly six years, she joined Yotel because she believed in the company's vision and Greene's passion.

"I can't tell my customer what's cool," she says, sitting on Yotel's outdoor terrace eyeing guests. "I have to let them tell me. You can't push a brand. You have to let them come and decide what they think."

Berrington cracks a smile when she talks about the company's graphic signs that direct people where to go — lobby, restaurant, bathrooms, etc. Several have been stolen, especially the company's evacuation signs.

"I posted something on our Facebook page like 'who stole our sign?' and got the funniest responses," she says. "We're real people, too. We think it's grand they take the signs. The hotel industry used to separate their audience into leisure and business travelers. Well, you know what, in this day and age, they're one and the same and we treat them that way."

Greene, who bikes every morning in Central Park when in New York, scoffs at most things the hotel industry finds regular. He's committed to innovation, so much so he took a chance on placing his biggest hotel yet in a relatively unknown and less-traveled part of the city. Now, because of Yotel's popularity, cabs are constantly lined up in front, young fashionistas come and go, and the hotel has become an anchor for a night out in midtown.

"We're young and hungry and we want to redefine the hotel industry," he says. "Brand integrity, the right people and affordable luxury that stays relevant — that will bring longevity. People said we were crazy to open up here. That's a challenge. Look around. Doesn't look like crazy to me."