

Yotel New York City

Words & Photography: Adrian Wilson

The opening of Yotel NYC is a quantum leap forward from the brand's early airport hotels, with designs by Softroom and Rockwell Group.



This is the biggest new hotel New York City has seen in a decade, with 23 floors, 20,000ft² of public space, the largest roof terrace in Manhattan, 669 rooms and a ‘Yobot’ to automatically store guest’s luggage. If there was a time when the Yo! brand really deserved the use of that famous exclamation mark, this was it. But its absence is just one of the many ways this development confounds expectations.

The location is listed as Times Square but the hotel seems to cock a snoot at the vulgarity of that famous intersection and proudly faces away from it. The hotel is closer to the Lincoln Tunnel and the thousands of residents of Hudson River tower blocks than it is to the Great White Way. The building is on 42nd Street but prefers the address ‘570 10th Avenue’, so what’s going on?

Yotel CEO Gerard Greene explains that there is no typical guest or segment that they are trying to attract to Yotel. “The proximity to

the Javits Convention Center is as important to us as Times Square. We haven’t officially opened yet and yet I have seen everyone here from curious locals, traditional American tourists, business people and obviously young kids wanting the Yo! experience. With this many rooms we do not have a demographic, we want to welcome everybody. We have everything from family rooms with bunk beds to executive suites.” While I was there DJ Louie Vega was already checking the place out but there really wasn’t that feeling that this is a hyped up hotel for the beautiful people.

A big part of that democratic feeling is a result of the design. Yotel already had some experience of creating hotels but they have been at airports – more a necessity stay than an aspirational choice and widely known to be based on an aircraft first class cabin. The challenge here was to take the Yotel concept and develop it into a place that guests would choose to be...in New York, where there’s a lot of choice already. ▶

OPPOSITE PAGE AND ABOVE: The entrance to the hotel faces away from Times Square while the brand’s signature soft purple glow can be seen in the elevator foyer and on the building’s fascia **ABOVE RIGHT:** Designers Softroom have collaborated with New York based Rockwell Group on the new design for Yotel’s ‘cabins’. Carpets are by Durkan, with Mission desks by Sloane, banquettes by Munrod, and desk chairs by DKDI, who also developed the alarm panel



ABOVE: The fourth floor DohYO restaurant by Ricgard Sabdoval offers a fusion of Mexican and Japanese food. OPPOSITE PAGE: Designs for Yotel have been influenced by the Ryokan inns of Japan. Some rooms feature outdoor terraces and hot tub baths.

► Oliver Salway of Softroom explains that in their collaboration with Rockwell Group, “the design team members each brought their own specialist knowledge to the mix – in particular Softroom’s experience of ergonomic spaces such as the Virgin Atlantic Upper Class Suite aircraft interior and Rockwell’s understanding of the US hotel market.” Yotel is not a hotel that has been ‘value engineered’ because of the economic downturn. Rather ‘value’ is one of its core propositions with ‘cabins’ starting at \$150 a night. However the rooms are not pods at all and in fact feel quite spacious. Some even have an outdoor terrace and jacuzzi – again, not something you would have expected at a Yotel.

David Rockwell explains, “In order to make the 10x17ft cabins feel more spacious, we put the bathroom on the window wall, and wrapped them in glass. This lets light stream into the room, while also making the space seem larger and more flowing. When not sleeping, the bed transforms into a lounging

position, leaving more space for guests to move around.”

Yotel is well known for its forward thinking use of technology. Here, guests experience airport style self check-in screens and the ‘Yobot’. Taller than the burliest Brooklyn bellhop but with impeccable manners, this 21st century automaton carefully takes guest’s luggage and places it in a storage locker for safekeeping. It’s a very impressive piece of engineering by MFG Automation, although I couldn’t help being reminded of Marvin the Paranoid Android – the robot from ‘Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy’ who constantly complained about having to do menial tasks while having “a brain the size of a planet”.

Despite the free WiFi, free internet screens, sockets, plugs and chargers, a lot of thought has also gone into good old fashioned comfort, as Salway explains, “The ‘Yo!’ brand also has a heritage with roots in Japanese thinking in terms of functionality and ►

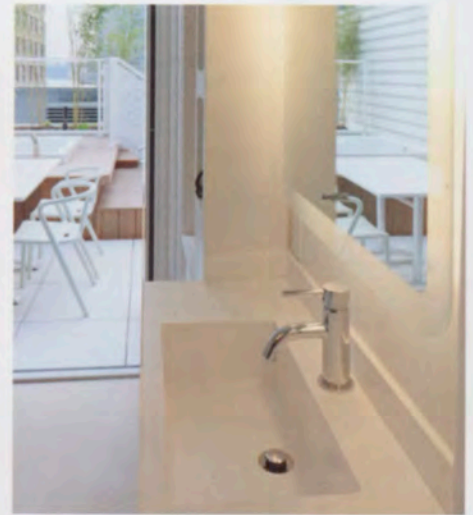
► innovation. Of course the technological aspect of contemporary Japan is an influence, but we were also inspired by the elegance and simplicity of traditional Japanese architecture, such as the beautiful ‘*Ryokan*’ inns with their sliding walls and paper screens. What we took from that is how, as simple as they are as spaces, there’s a real warmth there also that’s very human. So for as much as Yotel is airy and minimal, there’s also a feeling of welcome and friendliness in the materials palette of timbers, leathers and mood lighting.”

Unlike a Japanese capsule hotel, or even the Yotel airport cabins, which are optimised for short overnight stays, the city centre Yotel needed to take into account that people would be booking the rooms for much longer periods. “We imagined perhaps a couple visiting New York for a long weekend. So there had to be plenty of space for luggage storage, such as under the bed and we made sure there was place for shopping bags on top of the wardrobe unit.” Salway explains. The design is certainly very tactile and lessons have been learned more from the Apple retail experience than the clichéd “hip hotel” minimalist style. The soft purple glow is a calming aura that shrouds the hotel in calm, strings of beads with abstract Yotel lozenge graphics beg to be twizzled with and hard looking terrace seating is soft and rubbery to the touch.

All Yotel’s action takes place on one floor. From the lobby, there’s just one stop - ‘Four’. This is the 20,000ft² home to the aforementioned lounge, meeting rooms and terrace. Turn right at the terrace however and the booth style high backed sofas give way to an oval bar which straddles inside and out. From the bar, we are presented with DohYo, Richard Sandoval’s latest restaurant. It ►

OPPOSITE PAGE AND BELOW: All of Yotel NYC’s public areas are located on the fourth floor where designs feature soft, lounge style seating, and KriskaDECOR® decorative curtains composed of anodised aluminium strands by artist Shinpei Naito. One of the KriskaDECOR® curtains is installed in the Studiyo, an area for meetings, events, yoga, cinema etc., surrounding a leather bench. The other curtain separates the Mission Control Area from the lounge. Seating is by Quinze & Milan, SixInch and Extermis, with Tucci umbrellas





LEFT: Devon-based Naturalmat won the contract to manufacture all 686 mattresses for Yotel using natural fibre technology and innovative new raw materials such as an organic lambs wool that is antidust mite, anti-bed bug and anti-moth. Bedding is by Sobel Westex. RIGHT: Sanitaryware in the bathrooms is by Kohler, and Symonds. Each of the cabins is secured with a Kaba Solitaire 710-11 lock, and Kaba's Atlas system is integrated into the hotels property management software to provide greater control over the hotel.

► seems again that what you might expect is not what you get. There is no conveyor belt and the food is the fusion between Mexican and Asian which Sandoval has perfected in successful restaurants around the world, as well as ten blocks away at Zengo. Sandoval's empire, Modern Mexican is known for its decorative interiors and his cuisine can be found in Ritz Carltons and Four Seasons but here, he and Rockwell have come up with a truly novel concept.

The name DohYo is a typographic corruption of 'dohy' – the Japanese word for a Sumo wrestling ring, and it is that word which has inspired the design. Unlike Rockwell's traditional look for Nobu, this space draws more from his theatre experience as almost like a trap door – "during the day the tables disappear to make room for a seating pit with cushions, during the night the tables come up for seating, and later they again disappear to create a dance platform," explains Rockwell.

Sandoval was inspired by Yotel's vision for 'Four' when crafting menus for the DohYo, Terrace, Green Lounge and Club Lounge. "Around the world, socialising revolves around food and drink. Flavours and rituals

vary, but dining is ultimately what brings us together. At 'Four', Yotel created a dynamic series of gathering spaces, and we completed the experience with Latin-Asian menus of small plates and sharing dishes," he says.

Yotel seems to have pushed a lot of people in unexpected directions to create a hotel with modern solutions, without alienating comfort and still retaining the Yo! brand feel. "There will be people expecting tiny rooms and they will be surprised" smiles Greene.

Yotel is part of Related Company's 63-storey, high-end development MiMa, with an exterior designed by Arquitectonica and 44,000ft² of amenities including multiple theaters for the performing arts designed by Frank Gehry. Why buy a two bedroom apartment when you can put visiting relatives up in the Yotel next door? And who needs a balcony when New York's largest terrace is an elevator ride away?

The last word goes to Oliver Salway of Softroom who sums up the Yotel succinctly as: "like a giant piece of ergonomic product design, but one that has a real sense of playfulness and fun." ■

EXPRESS CHECKOUT

Yotel New York
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➤ 669 'cabins'
🍷 DohYo Restaurant & Bar
Y Green Lounge, Club Lounge & Bar, Club Lounge Cabins, Terrace
+ Mission Control, StudiYo

Developer (MiMa): Related Company
Developer / Operator: IFA Hotels / Yotel
Architect (MiMa): Arquitectonica
Interior Design: Rockwell Group / Softroom
Lighting Design: Focus Lighting