

Meet Yotel, the newest hotel brand coming to D.C.



By **Rebecca Cooper** – Senior Staff Reporter, Washington Business Journal

Yotel, an ultramodern hotel chain out of the United Kingdom, is coming to the District.

The company, which opened its first U.S. hotel in New York in 2011 and now has four properties here, will take over the Liaison Capitol Hill, the hotel property **bought last month** by BLDG Management and MetroInvest Equities of New York. It will be Yotel's first property in Greater Washington.

Converting the 343-room hotel at 415 New Jersey Ave. NW will require a substantial renovation, and the property will maintain its Liaison name until that project is complete, Yotel CEO **Hubert Viriot** told me in an interview this week.

In addition to marking a new start for the Liaison, which is more than 40 years old and hasn't been renovated in a decade, it will be a first for Yotel. The company recently converted a former office building in San Francisco into its first Yotel there but has never done a hotel-to-hotel conversion.

Yotel's rooms, which it refers to as cabins, average 180 square feet for a basic level, 300 square feet for a "first-class" cabin and up to 800 square feet for suites.

With Liaison's rooms averaging 240 square feet and featuring roughly equal footprints, the new owners can adjust room count and size. One renovation scenario includes upping the count to 391, Viriot said. It isn't yet clear how many of those will be basic cabins versus suites.

The current cost estimates for the renovation range from \$27.4 million to \$44.6 million, or \$80,000 to \$130,000 per room. The owner has not yet selected an architect or a contractor, and it's not clear whether the hotel will have to close for a short period or will remain open through the project.

The renovation will add wiring to accommodate up-to-date technology and bring the rooms and bathrooms up to Yotel's brand standard. The plan is for the hotel to be a bit more luxurious than the New York hotel, where rates for March start at \$143 a night.

Yotel rooms in some cases feature modular furniture, built-ins and beds that adjust to create a place to sit up and conserve space when not in use. They also all offer a "smart wall," including a screen for streaming, adjustable mood lighting and high-end acoustic technology to reduce noise.

The project will modernize the common areas — some Yotels feature the Yobot, a luggage storage robot — and add a food and beverage outlet on the rooftop, which already houses a pool and basic service for pool goers.

The company also plans to upgrade Art & Soul, the hotel's popular Southern restaurant from chef Art Smith. Viriot would like to keep it, possibly with more private dining rooms and a bigger bar.

"The idea would be to redesign, to a certain extent, the restaurant to meet the requirements of the many people working in this District," Viriot said. "We want to modernize Art & Soul, to bring it to today's level and also match the Yotel DNA."

That DNA includes minimalist, Asian-inspired design, as well as a mod aesthetic with lots of white, rounded edges and pops of color. The company, from the entrepreneur behind the wildly successful Yo! Sushi chain out of London, launched with airport hotels that were available by the hour. Its first city-centric hotel, opened near Times Square in Manhattan in 2011, has consistently reported occupancies of more than 90 percent, according to Viriot.

The 16-hotel brand is now in growth mode, with 25 projects in various stages of development, including YotelPad, an extended-stay product in resort areas such as Park City, Utah. A second hotel in New York City, in Queens' Long Island City neighborhood, has already been announced.