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The New Public Square: Moxy's Experiential Take On Hospitality

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From the neon-light art installations to cool rooftop bars; genius space-saving rooms to artisan cocktail lists, the **Moxy Hotels** brand is all about fuelling a hotel stay with a playful essence. But, while youthful in ethos, Moxy, the youngest sister in Marriott Bonvoy's hotel stable, also serves up a grown-up, intelligent offering, by tapping into what savvy travellers truly want from a city visit.



Moxy Lower East Side.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

The experiential hotel brand plugs into each destination with its affordable rooms and imaginative design inspired by local architectural designs. Check in and you'll be offered a complimentary cocktail, meanwhile the 'living room' lobby spaces merge work-relax areas with a bar, café and often a DJ playing chill-out tunes. Guest rooms make the most of the space available with hanging pegs for clothes, hidden drawers for storage and clever fold-up furniture. From walk-in rain-showers to flat-screen TVs; high-thread-count linens to 'grab-and-go' cafés, the Moxy's principles are designed around a practical yet luxurious feel.

What's more, properties are found in the most hip quarters of major cities, with recent openings including Moxy Lower East Side and Moxy Williamsburg in New York and Moxy Tromsø in Northern Norway.



Mitchell Hochberg, president of Lightstone.

(CREDIT: MOXY)

As president of the **Lightstone Group** – the owner and developer of a collection of Moxy hotels, including five addresses in New York – Mitchell Hochberg reveals more about Moxy’s hotel design approach and its innovative place in the hospitality market.



Moxy hotels feature innovative design,
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

How would you describe the ethos of Lightstone’s Moxy hotels?

As long-time hotel investors and developers, we’re constantly studying the evolving hospitality market and guest desires. We recognized that with so many hotel options in New York City, there was a void in the lifestyle segment for an affordable lifestyle hotel. We felt that there was an opportunity to fill that void by developing a brand that would provide affordability without sacrificing style or comfort – and Moxy aligned perfectly with that vision.

Nowadays, hotels are no longer just a place for travelers – they’ve become the new public square, social hubs inhabited as much by local residents as by visitors. What’s more, today’s travelers don’t want to spend time in their rooms – they’re looking for experiences and social connections.



Factory Suite at Moxy LES.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

Tell us why Moxy is a good fit for NYC?

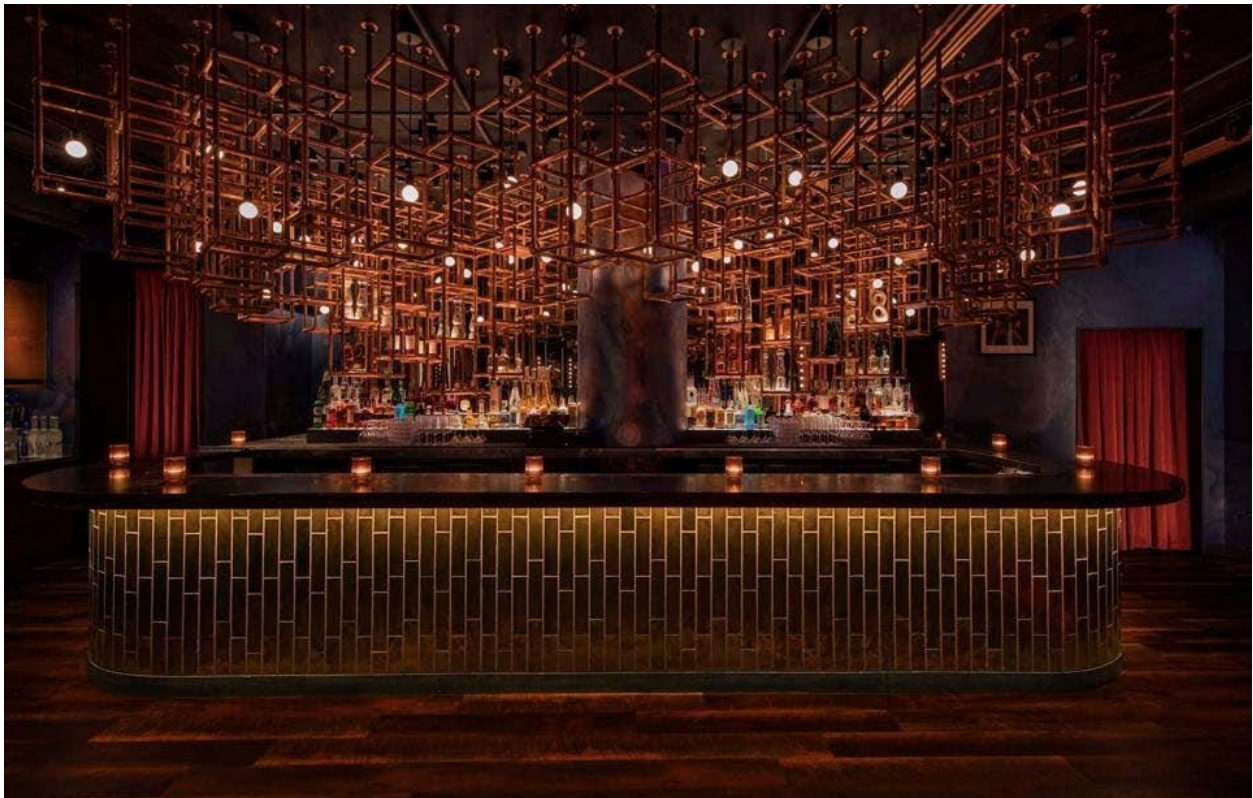
When we developed the first Moxy hotel in NYC – Moxy Times Square which opened in 2017 – we wanted to create a hotel model that aligned with this evolving consumer. That meant socially activated, versatile public spaces; cleverly designed rooms; multiple restaurant and bar options; and engaging, inclusive, community-minded programming – all at an affordable rate. We’ve used the same basic equation for each new opening since, but ensured that each is adapted to the specific neighborhood’s ethos, tone, and style, embracing it in a way that feels organic and intuitive and reflecting its lifestyle and culture. That way, our guests are completely immersed in local life, and can interact with visitors and locals in a fun and organic way.

Why was Lower East Side chosen as a location?

Over the last several years we’ve noticed that New York City’s center of gravity has shifted decidedly toward Downtown. The Lower East Side has always been iconically cool, so we saw it as the next logical frontier for Moxy – the perfect place to build upon the success of our first three hotels. Our guests are true explorers who seek a different, authentic experience each time they come to

New York. As Moxy fans, they have the opportunity to dive into a variety of neighbourhoods: Times Square, Chelsea, the East Village, and now, the Lower East Side and Williamsburg.

Traditionally known as a landing pad for immigrants from Eastern Europe and Latin America, the neighborhood has evolved past its working-class roots to become one of the city's most modern and desirable places to live and stay. We see Moxy Lower East Side as a place to put guests at the doorstep of all of the neighborhood's attractions, and reflect the variety and vibrancy of the Lower East Side with its own offerings.



Loosie's Bar.

(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

How is the essence of this area infused into the hotel?

The Lower East Side was one of the city's first entertainment districts and has always been a place of avant garde entertainment and pleasurable pursuits designed to bedazzle and tantalize. Working with designers Michaelis Boyd and the Rockwell Group, we immersed ourselves in the evocative social history of the area and found ways to bring them to life throughout the hotel's design.

We built layer upon layer of cultural references to channel the neighborhood's DNA while maintaining Moxy's trademark whimsy. The lobby, with its lush plantings and botanical motifs, is a multi-purpose amusement space – a 21st century rendition of the Vauxhall Gardens, Bowery Theater, and other entertainments that once defined the area. Loosie's evokes the gritty art scene of the 1980s – taking inspiration from the local 'backhouses' that artists often adapted as studios – and the Eden-like Highlight Room was inspired by the German Winter Garden that stood along the Bowery in the mid 18th-century.

Why is innovative design an important part of Lightstone's Moxy properties?

When we first conceived of developing our first Moxy, a lot of people didn't think you could create an affordable product without sacrificing design. But, by flipping the script of what traditional hotel design should be, we've been able to create hotels that are provocative but contextual with interiors that are functional yet memorable – and, most importantly, offer it at a reasonable rate.

Although the hotels' rooms are compact, they've been thoughtfully created with clever functionality, such as pegboards in place of closets and collapsible furniture that can be hung on the wall when not in use. We also included high-quality finishes that wouldn't be out of place in a five-star hotel, such as comfortable beds, luxurious rain showers, and custom-glazed lava stone sinks and vanities that are located outside the bathroom to maximize space, yet are as aesthetically pleasing as a piece of beautiful furniture.



Silver Linings with its statement design.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

What is one of the standout design features at Moxy LES?

Silver Lining is one of my favorite spots in the hotel -- an intimate, dreamlike piano lounge on the ground floor. We wanted to create a sophisticated yet approachable bar with elevated cocktails and a relaxed but still upscale atmosphere. I think we've achieved that in part through the design, which was inspired by Andy Warhol's Silver Factory. He believed that silver's reflective qualities could spur creativity and inspire hope even in the darkest days. Silver Lining's deep, mysterious shades of blue, black and gold with ethereal touches of silver evokes that sentiment, especially as the idea was conceived during the depths of the pandemic when everyone was yearning for a place to socialize and celebrate. Hence the name, which evokes glimmers of hope.

Live entertainment is the forefront of the programming, with everything from a piano player on some nights to a band or vocalist on others. The room feels sumptuous, with plush velvet drapes, blue color-blocked velvet chairs and tables embellished with hand-painted motifs, and a wallcovering complementing the furniture in gradient shades of blue. Between the vaults, there's an elaborate custom light fixture by New York artist Erin Lorek, which consists of hand-blown glass lenses on a serpentine iron frame. There's also a

shimmering mural which depicts objects associated with the history of the Bowery and Warhol's life and career. The bar is a particular focal point, glowing with a playful arrangement of circular mirrors that are each backlit with its own 'silver lining'.



The hotels immerse guests in each destination.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

What can guests expect from their bedrooms?

As per the usual Moxy formula, the rooms are compact, with clever design solutions to optimize space for living and storage. Michaelis Boyd adapted the trademark Moxy peg system for hanging and storage, threading it along one entire wall to provide hanging space for clothes and to integrate mirrors, a Smart TV, and a fold-down desk. Guests can sit on custom poufs decorated with 'urban nymph' characters and easily move them around to adapt for different uses.

The design was inspired by the vivid patterns and colors of the circus and old-time menageries that once lined the Bowery. The bedrooms are meant to be the quiet moment within the hotel – a step back from all the activity – but they're spirited havens, with symmetrical structures and shapes, bright hues, and some unexpected design elements.

The bathrooms are models of achieving maximum design impact from an efficient space. Rain showers are statement pieces of colored glass in geometric shapes that evoke the work of the early Modernist designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The lava stone sink, embedded into a bespoke vanity, offers a colorful jolt of red or mustard yellow.

What are the highlights in NYC’s Lower East Side for guests to explore?

As a New Yorker, one of the reasons I enjoy exploring downtown is that it’s constantly evolving. There’s always something new and interesting that you won’t see in other parts of the city. Walking around the Lower East Side, you never know what you’ll discover next – a new sneaker shop, a hip little coffee place, a pocket-size art gallery.

The neighborhood is an incubator for the avant-garde and an arbiter of what’s cool in NYC – whether it’s the pastrami piled high at classic deli Katz’s or the Rajasthani rabbit at modern Indian joint Dhamaka; eye-opening history at the Tenement Museum or mind-bending art at the New Museum; dive bars (169 Bar) and speakeasies (Garfunkel’s) and cat cafés (Koneko and Meow Parlour).



The dramatic entrance to Sake No Hana.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

Tell us about Sake No Hana.

Sake No Hana is the fourth restaurant we've created with Rockwell Group and Tao Group Hospitality, and each has been an explosion of creative talent. For Sake No Hana, we wanted the design to create an alluring atmosphere that matches the buzzy vibe of diners sharing teppanyaki platters and sushi rolls and sipping on sake cocktails.

As a sort of collision of Japanese street culture and New York culture, we're playing off that tension to create a Japanese restaurant infused with the spirit of the Bowery. It's not your typical inspiration for a Japanese restaurant, but something anchored stateside, and with a grittiness that feels right for the Lower East Side.

This fusion is expressed through the Hollywood-style banquettes that line the perimeter of the main dining room, with a detail that evokes the turned-up collar of a leather jacket lined in kimono-like fabric; the cherry blossoms and fantastical birds that cover the walls; and the lantern-like fixtures – a *yankii*-inspired take on the 'pleasure garden' theme.

The real showstopper is the entrance-way. Guests come in via two dramatically curved staircases that descend from the catwalk at the hotel's entrance, flanked by large kimono-inspired tapestries. Everybody sitting in the bar or waiting for tables is watching people walk down the steps, making their grand entrance like in the theater. It's voyeuristic and very dramatic – a real show.



Bar Bedford at Moxy Williamsburg.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

How does the new Moxy Williamsburg differ from the other properties?

As our first NYC property outside of Manhattan, we intended for Moxy Williamsburg to be both a destination for visitors and a long-lasting staple for residents of the neighborhood. We decided to partner for the first time with BASILE Studio, a boutique design firm known for crafting one-of-a-kind, eclectic environments that reference the past while remaining contemporary – an approach that personifies the Williamsburg ‘brand’.

The design was inspired by the neighborhood’s history as a magnet for mavericks, immigrants, and creators, while taking its place at the center of Brooklyn’s contemporary social scene. The hotel’s eclectic public spaces reflect the area’s melting pot character, finding inspiration in both past and present, with influences from both near and far.



The lobby space at Moxy Williamsburg.
(CREDIT: MICHAEL KLEINBERG)

Rather than creating a particular design story, we consciously kept the concept looser to appeal to Williamsburg locals, who have a wide variety of tastes and interests. There are retro touches here and there — Bauhaus architecture in Mesiba, 1980s nightclubs in Jolene Sound Room — that reflect Brooklyn’s reverence for history but bring it into the present. Overall, the hotel is an assortment of experiences that coheres into a whole and reflects the diversity and dynamism of Williamsburg itself.

The vision of the whole hotel is that once you enter, you don’t want to leave. You can start with a drink at Bar Bedford, meet some friends for dinner at Mesiba. Then you head up to LilliStar for the rooftop views and finish up the night dancing at Jolene Sound Room. We wanted to create a sense of discovery, of anticipation, where Moxy Williamsburg encapsulates a multitude of narratives and experiences to enjoy.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/angelinavillaclarke/2023/10/05/the-new-public-square-moxys-experiential-take-on-hospitality/?sh=34bbea2b34e2>