

# Downtown hotelier heads to Midtown

## Pomeranc-owned 6 Columbus hotel set to open after two-year delay

By STEVE CUTLER

Here's the positioning for Midtown Manhattan's newest boutique hotel: Think of a television studio head or magazine executive in from L.A. with business in Midtown. He or she feels too hip for the Mandarin Oriental, but not in the mood for what some detractors see as the cheap-chic antics at the nearby Hudson Hotel.

A new hotel on Columbus Circle looks set to satisfy those über-cool customers. After a two-year delay, Thompson Hotels, a Downtown boutique hotel developer, finally held a soft opening for 6 Columbus on May 29.



Rooms at 6 Columbus, above, are stocked with creature comforts that appeal to jet-setters, like preloaded iPods. A rendering of the Smyth, a project by the same developer, Thompson Hotels, below.



Owned by the Pomeranc family, Thompson Hotels has been the subject of media and blogosphere needling because of 6 Columbus' much-delayed opening, originally scheduled for 2005. The firm, which operates two California hotels in Hollywood and Beverly Hills, is known for design-savvy projects targeting haute-bourgeois bohemians such as its 60 Thompson hotel in Soho, the Smyth hotel and condo project in Tribeca (see sidebar) and the soon-to-open LES Thompson, on Allen Street.

The 88-room, 14-story 6 Columbus has a variety of room types and rates. For \$400 a

night, one can stay in a narrow "pod." Duplex penthouses featuring fireplaces, kitchens and floor-to-ceiling windows with grand views of Central Park go for \$2,500 to \$3,000 a night. All the rooms are stocked with the kind of creature comforts jet-setters might crave: a plasma TV, preloaded iPods, broadband Internet connections and – for those with a taste for art – photos by Guy Bourdin, the late French fashion photographer.

The Columbus Circle project is a joint venture with Rosen Partners, a Manhattan-based developer. Thompson Hotels acquired the age-worn West Park Hotel at 6 Columbus Circle in 2000. "We bought it as an investment, without any intention of repositioning it. We parked it as something to think about in the future," recalls Larry Pomeranc, Thompson co-principal along with his brother Jason.

The partners gave the hotel a paint job and kept the operation going while the neighboring Time Warner Center made steady construction progress. By 2003, when the Time Warner Center opened and began drawing crowds, the brothers acknowledged Columbus Circle's transformative shift. With its cultural offerings and window onto Central Park, Columbus Circle had become a legitimate destination – the kind of place where Thompson Hotels' clients could conceivably hang.

"The Time Warner Center, the Hearst Building and the new Museum [of Arts & Design, under renovation at 2 Columbus Circle] are redefining that area as the epicenter of New York City, as Rockefeller Center was in its time," says Jason Pomeranc, the 36-year-old hotelier who was cited two years ago in People Magazine as one of its "50 Hottest Bachelors."

Pomeranc suggested several reasons for the delayed opening. One was aesthetic considerations. How, the brothers wondered, could they integrate their modest building into a setting dominated by towering office buildings?

"It's no secret that it's taken us longer than we would have liked," he says, "but when you're exploring an old building like that, there's no way of knowing what's underneath. What started out as a more simplistic renovation became a complete gut of the existing building, except for the outer shell. Everything in the interior is new."

Inspiration arrived at last. "We went the other way with it, made it intimate, slightly funky, inspired by the late 1960s, early '70s

## Paging Mr. and Mrs. Smyth

The Smyth, a 100-room luxury hotel with 15 condominium apartments at the top, which is now under construction at Chambers Street and West Broadway, marks the first time the Pomeranc brothers have combined a hotel with a condo project.

No matter, says Jason Pomeranc of Thompson Hotels, the developer of the Smyth in partnership with Tribeca Associates. "I see Downtown – everything below Houston Street – becoming one big neighborhood."

And an opportune place to build a hotel. "Downtown is dramatically underserved in hotel rooms and particularly boutique hotel rooms," observes Bill Brodsky, principal of Tribeca Associates. "It's a natural spot for someone from the Financial District or the movie business who would rather not go to the Marriott or Hilton."

Brodsky and his partner Elliott Ingerman, both Tribeca residents, acquired 85 West Broadway, a building containing a Marine Midland Bank, some office space and a shoe store that was a 30-year fixture in the neighborhood, at the end of 2005. After a brief auction, they chose the Pomeranc brothers as their co-developers.



"They're the right fit for this location and the type of clientele we're going for," says Brodsky – "media, advertising, L.A., Florida, London kind of people."

Tribeca Associates has a high-end condominium in the works, Artisan Lofts, just to the west at 157 Chambers Street.

"We're deep into that market right now," says Brodsky, "building 40 condos around the corner." As such, he says, "we would have preferred to make the whole thing a hotel. But to do it as of right, because of the mixed-used district we're in, we had to make the top portion of the building a condo. It does bring down the basis of the hotel to sell condos, but if we had our choice we would have built more rooms to rent."

Meanwhile, the Pomeranc brothers are encouraged. "This is a whole new place for us, selling condominiums," says Jason Pomeranc, "something we've been contemplating for a while. When we opened 60 Thompson, a lot of high-profile celebrities, media types and European travelers said, 'I wish I could buy the penthouse or one of the suites and have it be my home.' The prospect of hotel living is a fantasy for people."

The condominium portion of the 13-story building, called Smyth Upstairs, opened for sales at the end of March, offering one- and two-bedroom units from 600 to 1,600 square feet, plus one penthouse, with prices ranging from \$1.2 to \$5 million. Scheduled for completion in mid-2008, the building is marketed by Stribling Marketing Associates.

Stribling agent Alexa Lambert, sales director along with Sean Turner, calls the Upstairs, "a hipper version of what the Carlyle once was. In the old days, people had places on top of the Pierre or the Carlyle. You had your cool apartment upstairs and would head down to hear Bobby Short at the end of the day."

Unlike in some larger condo/hotel projects, residents enter their apartments through the hotel lobby. "If I were a person who traveled for business," says Lambert, "I wouldn't want to come home to a lonely little lobby after a business trip. It would be fun to walk into a place where there are always people coming and going, maybe drop down into the restaurant for dinner, or call down to have a meal sent up to the private residents' roof deck."

The architect for Smyth is Brennan Beer Gorman. "It's very contemporary," says Pomeranc – a stately, elegant stone and glass structure articulated by dark gray mullions running throughout. "We're taking an almost contrary view of the Tribeca cliché of exposed brick. We're building a new building, but not flashy. It's modern in a way you'd see in Amsterdam or Berlin."

The hotel will feature a polished concrete lobby floor, a 2,000-square-foot lobby lounge, cellar bar and a ground-floor signature restaurant. Guest rooms will have full-wall wood headboards, geometrically inspired wooden furniture and clean white marble bathrooms.

The hotel will feature more suites and larger rooms than Thompson's new 6 Columbus hotel project at Columbus Circle, says Pomeranc, "because we believe the average guest will be there longer than our other locations. In Tribeca, there's a big demand among the entertainment industry," including film people who stay for location shoots.

Apartment interiors, by Richardson Sadeki, designer of Bliss Spa in Manhattan and the Bathhouse in Las Vegas, are classic contemporary, with clean lines, 10-foot ceilings, black wood floors and kitchens with ebony etched glass cabinets. The master bathrooms have sand-blasted stone walls, wet rooms and Duravit freestanding tubs.

Lambert says four contracts are out on the Upstairs condominiums. She said the Smyth, along with Artisan Lofts, will gentrify lower Tribeca and the upper Financial District. "You already see little hip restaurants opening on Chambers Street and West Broadway. We're at the tipping point." **By Steve Cutler**

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