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A photograph of Robert De Niro standing in a large, multi-paned window. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light-colored shirt. The window has a dark frame and is set in a brick wall. To the left of the window, there are large green plants. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

## Hotel De Niro

He is the unofficial mayor of New York's TriBeCa neighborhood, with two restaurants, a cinema, a film festival, and now a hotel—the Greenwich. KEVIN SESSUMS talks to Robert De Niro, the man who is directing it all. *Photographed by* DEAN KAUFMAN

Robert De Niro at his new hotel, the Greenwich.



**R**OBERT DE NIRO'S GREENWICH HOTEL sits resplendent—all brick and glass and wrought-iron—between Franklin and North Moore Streets in Manhattan's TriBeCa neighborhood.

It looks as if it has been here since the turn of the last century: the handsome cragginess of the façade may be rough-hewn, but it has been carefully crafted to appear this way. The interior displays a gracious incongruity; there is a soft masculinity about it.

It sounds as if I'm describing De Niro himself, who sits down opposite me in the hotel's guests-only Drawing Room, in a worn leather club chair. De Niro, who has been the driving aesthetic force behind the hotel, settles in and silences his insistent cell phone. "So," I ask him, "have you been getting in touch with your inner interior decorator?"

He gives me the twofold De Niro look that has served him so well in his vast repertoire of roles, the look that signaled his pained bemusement at Streisand's seductive stridency playing his in-law in *Meet the Fockers*, as well as the one Francis Ford Coppola coaxed from him in his most chilling mo-

ments as a Corleone: a childlike, lopsided grin combined somehow with the deeply menacing grimace only a grown man can summon. If looks could kill, indeed. Its curdled sweetness makes you sweat.

And then he laughs.

"Yes—completely," he says. "This is the way I would do my house. Comfort has been behind the choices I've made about this hotel. Of course, Ira had a lot to do with the look of the place too." Ira is Ira Drukier, a partner in the project along with Richard Born of BD Hotels and De Niro's son Raphael. "I was telling Ira how much I identified with the craftsmen and artisans—we made a point of hiring the best we could find in New York. I related to the way they worked to get that...specialness to something. I totally respect that way of working: taking something very basic and making something quite rare out of it."

Is he talking about Method acting now, or a design aesthetic? Lee Strasberg, who led the Actors Studio and helped establish the Method in America, could have uttered that last sentence in one of his master classes. Most of the wood used in the hotel is reclaimed, a word that recalls Strasberg's approach for using an actor's own emotions to trigger some deeper truth in a performance—though De Niro credits Strasberg's rival, Stella Adler, for his approach to acting, as well as design. "What Stella would say is that talent is in the choice, so in that regard, my aesthetic is more Adlerian than Strasbergian." I glance around >>

'THIS IS THE WAY I WOULD DO MY HOUSE,'  
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The Drawing Room at the Greenwich, with vintage furniture from the St.-Ouen flea market in Paris.





The sun-drenched lobby, with reclaimed wood beams, top. Above: Room No. 409, a corner suite with rounded windows.

THE BEST HOTELS POSSESS THE same canny sensuality as the smartest movie stars.

the Drawing Room. The mirrored glass between the custom-made French doors that connect to the private, Paris-inspired courtyard was salvaged from New York's Flatiron Building. Antiques and vintage books are everywhere. The huge utilitarian fixtures hanging from the 14-foot ceilings are from a Horn & Hardart Automat—icons of 1950's New York that were frequented by taxi drivers. The lights now illuminate a room designed by the most famous *Taxi Driver* of them all.

The best hotels possess the same canny sensuality as the smartest movie stars. Maybe it's the built-in drama of lobbies that so many celebrities find seductive about hotel life. These spaces are both public and private; they are stages of sorts, places to see and be seen. Yet once guests lock themselves away behind their doors, there is a sense of privacy that borders on anonymity. When a star has the kind of fame that De Niro has had for almost 40 years, this is the most luxurious service a hotel can offer. The security of such cosseted anonymity, in fact, is what causes movie stars to take up residence in a hotel sometimes—from Warren Beatty (a onetime resident of the Beverly Wilshire in L.A.) to Ethan Hawke (who lived in New York's Chelsea Hotel).

Other cinema legends have taken it one step further and owned the whole property: Clint Eastwood's Mission Ranch is in Carmel, California; Robert Redford's Sundance Resort serves as a ski lodge and backdrop for his Park City film festival; Coppola has three properties in Central America—Turtle Inn and Blancaneaux Lodge in Belize, and La Lancha Resort in Guatemala. And now De Niro has the Greenwich. With 88 rooms, eight floors, and 75,000 square feet, the hotel is a kind of crown jewel among his real estate holdings in TriBeCa, which some have said makes him the neighborhood's de facto mayor. Those investments include the Tribeca Film Center, as well as Tribeca Cinemas (which has hosted his annual film festival), and Nobu and Tribeca Grill restaurants.

Are there different satisfactions for De Niro in building a hotel and in constructing a character? "It's similar. Making a movie is a totally collaborative »





‘MAKING A MOVIE IS A TOTALLY collaborative endeavor, and this hotel has been the same thing.’



endeavor, and this hotel has been the same thing, really,” he says, alluding to his cast of cohorts in this project, which have included Ian McPheely and Christian Garnett of Grayling Design, Samantha Crasco of BD Hotels, and Mikio Shinagawa, the Japanese designer who was in charge of the hotel’s Shibui Spa, the centerpiece of which is a 250-year-old Japanese house that was shipped over from a village near Kyoto and reassembled around the lantern-lit pool downstairs.

I had asked Crasco, during an earlier tour of the place, to describe De Niro’s and Drukier’s aesthetics. “Bob is a little more classic, and Ira tends a little more toward the modern.” Drukier elaborated: “There is an organic feel to this place as opposed to a slickness, which has a lot to do with Bob. He doesn’t like trendy. He doesn’t like square lines. He likes curves, so to speak.”

A Louis XVI-style bed, in room No. 415, above left. Above right: Room No. 412, with a custom-made strié velvet Beaumont & Fletcher sofa and oak floors.

De Niro is squinting toward the wall in the Drawing Room. “I’m thinking of putting a certain painting of my father’s over there,” he says, telling me he plans to hang several of his father’s works in the hotel.

Robert De Niro Sr. was a well-known Abstract Expressionist who met Virginia Admiral, also an artist, when they were both studying at Hans Hofmann’s studio in Provincetown. They married in 1942, and divorced soon after De Niro was born. De Niro’s upbringing was bohemian; during the 1940’s and 50’s his father’s Greenwich Village loft was frequented by other artists of the time, such as Jackson Pollock, and literary figures like Anaïs Nin, Henry Miller, and Tennessee Williams. He attended the Little Red School House on Bleeker Street, and later enrolled in the High School of Music & Art.

Artistry is part of De Niro’s DNA. So how would his parents—his mother died in 2000, his father in 1993—feel about his becoming a real estate investor in TriBeCa? “I have that side of me as an artist that is unpredictable. But at the same time I have another side that has a lot of »



common sense about things. While making a movie, both of those sides often come into play.”

And why TriBeCa? Was coming even farther downtown to stake out an identity a way of separating himself from the Village and Little Italy, where his childhood and teenage years were marked by emotional upheaval? Such psychobabble seems to bore him. “I came down here initially during *Raging Bull* to find a space to set up a gym, and wound up loving the area,” he says.

Some of the neighborhood’s community activists have complained about this new venture, however, because much of the financing for the hotel—which is rumored to have cost upward of \$50 million—was secured with \$38.9 million of tax-free Liberty Bonds from the New York Liberty Development Corporation. The bonds were created after 9/11 to help get the neighborhood back on its feet, and some residents believe that this money could have been better spent on affordable housing. “I certainly don’t want to upset anyone, but I think this will be a nice ad-

dition to the neighborhood and be good for all kinds of businesses,” De Niro says when asked about the controversy. “Look, there’s always going to be somebody to complain about something. But I hope now that it’s finished, people will take pride in its being here. We were very conscious when building this hotel to complement its surroundings and be respectful not only of the neighborhood but also our neighbors.”

“Why didn’t you just call it De Niro’s Hotel?” I ask. “It’s so identified with you that it’s what people are calling it anyway.”

He blushes a bit at such a suggestion. “I’m the one who wanted to call it the Greenwich,” he says. “I thought it was classic, elegant, and simple.” Forget about earlier allusions to a carefully crafted façade and an incongruous interior. In that one succinct statement about the name of the hotel, the man has just described himself. +

*The Greenwich Hotel, 377 Greenwich St., New York City; 212/941-8900; thegreenwichhotel.com; doubles from \$625.*



#### WHERE THE STARS ARE

Which T+L World’s Best hotel does George Clooney stay at in Las Vegas? See which of our readers’ favorite hotels are also great places for celeb-spotting at [travandleisure.com](http://travandleisure.com)

## Making the Scene: 7 More Celebrity Hoteliers



#### BONO AND THE EDGE

**The Clarence, Dublin, Ireland** This Arts and Crafts hotel—a former haunt of U2 band members—was restored by the singer and the guitarist and reopened in 1996. 6-8 Wellington Quay; 353-1/407-0800; doubles from \$580.

#### FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA

**Blancaneaux Lodge, Belize** Ten cabanas, six villas, and a cottage set in the jungle of the Maya Mountains. *Mountain Pine Ridge Reserve*; 800/746-3743; [blancaneaux.com](http://blancaneaux.com); doubles from \$285. **Turtle Inn, Belize** Twenty-five Balinese-style seaside cabanas and villas. *Placencia*; 800/746-3743; [blancaneaux.com](http://blancaneaux.com); doubles from \$365. **La Lancha Resort, Guatemala** Ten casitas on Lake Petén Itzá. 800/746-3743; [blancaneaux.com](http://blancaneaux.com); doubles from \$175.



#### CLINT EASTWOOD

**Mission Ranch, Carmel, Calif.** Formerly a dairy (dating from the 1850’s), and saved from condominium development by the actor in 1986. 26270 Dolores St.; 831/624-6436; [missionranchcarmel.com](http://missionranchcarmel.com); doubles from \$120.



#### OLIVIA NEWTON-JOHN

**Gaia Retreat & Spa, Brooklet, Australia** A Zen-inspired retreat with daily yoga classes near Byron Bay, co-owned by the actress-singer. 933 Fernleigh Rd.; 61-2/6687-1216; [gaiaretreat.com.au](http://gaiaretreat.com.au); two-night all-inclusive package, \$900.



#### ROBERT REDFORD

**Sundance Resort, Sundance, Utah** Near Mount Timpanogos, Sundance was purchased by Redford in 1969. North Fork, Provo Canyon; 800/892-1600; [sundanceresort.com](http://sundanceresort.com); doubles from \$294.



#### JAY-Z

**J Hotel, New York City** The music mogul is rumored to have bought a lot on 22nd Street in the Chelsea neighborhood late last year in order to build a high-end hotel.

