

# sleeper

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HOTEL DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT & ARCHITECTURE

## The Greenwich

New York

**Robert de Niro's long-awaited Manhattan hotel, developed in partnership with Ira Drukier and Richard Born's BD Hotels, features interiors by Grayling Design and Samantha Crasco.**

Photos just don't do the Greenwich Hotel justice. What buddies up best with photography is lots of glitz, drama or obvious opulence, yet this 88-bedroom, 68-bathroom hotel is the opposite. It's all about artisanal detail, craftsmanship and hand-selected salvage finds.

Of course, this Manhattan hideaway has garnered plenty of photo-spreads in glossy magazines, thanks to the patronage of Robert de Niro, who created the hotel in partnership with hoteliers Ira Drukier and Richard Born of BD Hotels.

But this is not the usual case of celebrity endorsement for a sideline venture in which the celeb has had little direct input. Over the last decade, de Niro has done a lot for this south-western patch of Manhattan. He opened Nobu here in the Nineties, and started the Tribeca Film Festival at the start of the Noughties. Now, he's given it one of the city's most special stays.

BD Hotels have injected the necessary hotel expertise. With a twenty strong portfolio of Manhattan hotels, ranging from The Mercer to a Travel Inn on West 42nd Street under their belts, they have also proven they can make partnerships work in tie-ups with the likes of Maritime owners Eric Goode and Sean MacPherson, and Ian Schrager, with whom they are developing a property in Greenwich Village.

Bob – as all his staff dotingly yet respectfully refer to Mr de Niro – already owned the land where The Greenwich stands, making their affiliation a logical progression.

TriBeCa is a neighbourhood surprisingly quiet for lower Manhattan, and the unassuming brickwork of this mid-rise property really sneaks up on you. Only by peeping into the Italian restaurant Ago on its corner, do you get a clue that this eight-storey property has anything to do with hospitality. Walk into the lobby, and as you pad across Tibetan silk rugs and handmade bricks beneath recovered beams rescued from a Civil War era factory, it's clear this is a refined and distinguished hotel leading the way in redefining how we interpret 'luxury'.

The terracotta and marble flooring is inspired by a 14th-century palazzo in Italy. The restoration glass features never-seen-in-NY-windows bubbles and kinks. Head out into the walled courtyard, onto a guestroom or penthouse balcony and encounter Turkish travertine. Where once 'luxury' in the hotel industry may have meant smooth, over-polished and dazzling, teamed with over-the-top standing-on-ceremony service, now hotels such as The Greenwich prioritise discreet yet considered details, and eco-friendly recycled furnishings. de Niro himself has had an influence on the design, reportedly favouring classic, elegant and simple curves to trendy furniture or harsh architectural lines.

But de Niro is the first to acknowledge that creating a hotel is as much of a collaborative effort as making a film. Leading players De Niro, Drukier and Born have had a supporting cast including Samantha Crasco, who styled the bedrooms, and Japanese designer Mikio Shinagawa, who created the Shibui Spa. Ian McPheely and Christian Garnett of Grayling Design were responsible for the rest of the hotel, including the exterior, public spaces, and Ago restaurant.

The building has been designed and furnished as though it were a private home. Everything is handmade, from delicate silk rugs to one-of-a-kind pots from antiques

fairs and fleamarkets around the world. Nothing hails from an assembly line.

There are few properties in New York built with this commitment to quality and craftsmanship and artisan-produced detail. The Greenwich Hotel has interpreted luxury by treating its guests to fragile finishes and furnishings such as sofas that will wear faster than, but be as comfy as, theirs at home. Leather armchairs created by Beaumont & Fletcher in England are intended for high-end residential use.

This is not just superficial styling. The Greenwich Hotel also looks like an old building but without the undesirable quirks of noisy plumbing and squeaky floorboards. Rare chestnut wooden floors are expertly sprung so they look grand but not a peep is heard by neighbours.

The guest rooms are not only all unique, but they're huge for this notoriously space-starved city. Behind grand, heavy recycled pine doors, big windows let in lots of soul-uplifting natural light.

The Japanese-inspired Shibuispa also reflects the cherry-picked, hand-fitted ethos. A 250-year-old Japanese farmhouse was carefully reconstructed to house a basement pool without the use of a single nail. Applying an ancient knot-tying technique which only three people still skilled in today, it was constructed with wooden pegs. The plaster walls come care of another specialist traditional Japanese building application that combines a very un-21st-century plaster and straw. Opened only this summer, the cellar spa itself and its treatment rooms eschew any brand partnering. The spa director came from Georges V in Paris and all the treatments are bespoke, available only to residents of the hotel. de Niro's personal trainer surrendered his exclusivity to allow guests to share in his expertise and has been a driving force in the health and fitness facilities.

In Ago, sister restaurant to the celebrity-beloved LA version, a replica of the hearth in de Niro's own upstate residence takes centre stage, alongside a green marble column and reconditioned Thirties seating, beneath a ceiling comprised of 90,000 corks. The bar is formed from an extremely high-quality hard-to-source stone called Goshen Schist that hails from only two quarries in the world – one in Massachusetts and the other in Peru.

You can tell this is a hotel that is the product of a meeting of great minds who've travelled the world and stayed at some of the finest hotels. They've had a long hard think about what they loved and loathed and made sure here it's refined but homely. The Greenwich Hotel doesn't bamboozle with unnecessary hi-tech wizardry, or dazzle with gimmicks. It just makes guests feel genuinely at home.

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