

New York Helmsley Hotel

New York

CONCEPT: Opened in 1981, the 774-room New York Helmsley Hotel named for noted real estate developer Harry Helmsley has been an icon long associated with the city. But over time, it had lost some of its edge in terms of contemporary style and design, according to Zack Zahran, general manager. When approaching the upgrade of its interiors, the look of the public spaces was most important because they are the guest's first impression and set the tone for everything to come, but the guestrooms needed to be updated as well.

"Guests' expectations of luxury hotels have continued to change and nowhere as much as in New York. Pillow-top mattresses, upgraded bedding, flat-screen televisions and iPod docking stations are all things the luxury traveler takes for granted today," Zahran said. "Our job in undertaking a renovation was to exceed those expectations."

EXECUTION: To help realize their vision, Zahran and his team turned to J/Brice Design International. "A boutique hotel, by most definitions, has 150 rooms or less. But it's also about a very personalized statement where the guest assumes ownership immediately. The New York Helmsley had this potential," explained J/Brice founder and CEO, Jeffrey Ornstein. "We wanted to make it a destination in and of itself."

Upgrades in the lobby, restaurant, bar and lounge made use of dramatic lighting, rich woods and saturated colors to accentuate the double height spaces. The color palette in guestrooms, which included charcoal, lime, and white, was chosen for its "cool, crisp and urban, very Manhattan feel." Ornstein noted that, given how dramatic the views were from the guestrooms, "the colors inside the room were meant to complement what you see outside the window."

RESULT: The public spaces were completed first, followed by the first phase of guestrooms. Both aspects have already been well received by The New York Helmsley's clientele. "The renovation has been reflected in our performance numbers and guest satisfaction scores," Zahran noted. "Guests tell us it has personality and sophistication. But they also say that when they're sitting in their guestroom looking out at the skyline, it's like an oasis, an island of calm in Manhattan."

—Bruce Serlen



Design Details:

Project Owner: Helmsley Collection

Designer: J/Brice Design International

Theme/Influence: A contemporary, sophisticated Manhattan oasis

Signature Features: Dramatic lighting; charcoal, lime and white guestroom palette; rich woods

Major Vendors: JLF Furniture, Kosta Furniture, DL Couch, Robert Allen