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**Jason Pomeranc
fuses design and
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with the Jason Pomeranc at the hotel and at the Thompson Hotel, East Side.



Outside of 60 Thompson



The lobby at Gild Hall on Gold St.



The bar at Smyth in Tribeca

The Local Mix

Thompson Hotels use New York City culture to attract guests and neighbors by Jason Sheftell

Blending art and design from various eras of New York City's past, Jason Pomeranc and Thompson Hotels create living museums of local neighborhood culture. At the same time, the company's five-star service, real estate acquisitions and an uptown-meets-downtown bar/restaurant mix expands neighborhood boundaries, increases street traffic and delivers a non-tourist New York usually reserved for locals only.

"New York's underlying grittiness is what makes it so glamorous" says Pomeranc, who grew up in Rego Park and took the subway into Manhattan before his parents moved there when he was in high school. "You can get so overwhelmed by the power of these neighborhoods that you become a different person as you enter each one."

A student of design history and New York culture, Pomeranc knows that back in the 1950s, the Oak Bar at the Plaza hotel was as much a local bar as any Irish joint on Second Ave. Today, the Carlyle at 77th St. and Madison Ave. still attracts more neighborhood drinkers than tourists.

But in new hotels, such as Ian Schrager's Gramercy Park Hotel or Robert De Niro's Greenwich Hotel, only those on a guest list or staying on-property can access the hotel's hot spots

and public spaces. In some cases, even paying guests are turned away. This is not the case in most Thompson environments, where locals are welcome and velvet ropes shunned.

"The intellectual soul of a property is directly connected to the soul of a neighborhood," says Pomeranc, sitting in the same suite at 60 Thompson where, short-staffed, he flipped burgers for Russell Crowe and his rock band when the Australian movie star wanted a real barbecue on the terrace. "This is New York, where success is measured by what the locals think. If you create a strong market for the locals, then that's a strong foundation for guests."

In just eight years since it opened 60 Thompson, on a less-traveled western border of SoHo near Broome St., Thompson Hotels has grown

into an international luxury hotel company with an "Urban Resort" formula perfected in New York to expand to Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Toronto and Seoul, South Korea.

Pomeranc splits responsibilities between the Pomeranc Group, a real estate equity arm managed by his older brothers, Michael and Larry, and Thompson Hotels, a luxury hotel management company helmed by operations expert Stephen Brandman. This arrangement allows Jason Pomeranc to focus on the nightlife, branding and art selection while working with acclaimed designers to turn properties into neighborhood-centric destinations.

At the 6-month-old Thompson Lower East Side, a mosaic of Andy Warhol taken from a film-still of the pop culture artist by his long-time assistant



Thompson Hotels and the Pomeranc Group work together

and co-creator Gerard Malanga sits at the bottom of the hotel's pool. Woodsy photographs by Lee Friedlander, who bounced around the lower East Side in the 1960s photographing jazz musicians, decorate each room in light boxes above the beds.

"I wanted subtle to counter the aggressive nature of the interior design and the building's exterior architecture," says Pomeranc, who read Luc Sante's history of the lower East Side, "Low Life," while working on the hotel. "The building is this big black smoky thing overlooking all of these smaller structures. This artwork calms things. The Wårhol is a bit of fun. He was so anti-establishment. By making him part of the physical structure, he is the establishment, literally."

The hotel has caught on. Sean (Diddy) Combs, Jay-Z and Mary J. Blige dined together two weeks back at Shang, the in-house upscale Chinese restaurant. Madonna even threw the hotel's first event, a party in the restaurant.

"The neighborhood is full of great boutiques and small restaurants," says Pomeranc, who takes seriously complaints that his properties speed up gentrification. "Allen St. is this double-wide, European-type boulevard. It can take this scale, and we made it a real destination location the entire area benefits from."

At Six Columbus, across the street from the Time Warner Center, Pomeranc traveled back to a New York when Central Park South eateries were chic draws for actors such as Warren Beatty and international socialites. Pomeranc chose photos by French fashion photographer Guy Bourdin to bridge the more modern pace of the neighborhood with its society roots.

"Jackie O took her kids to Rumplemeyer's on Central Park South," says Pomeranc, wearing a long-sleeved T-shirt, dark brown leather boots, jeans and pea coat. "This was the neighbor-

hood. I wanted to turn the hotel into that kind of place, where glam butts heads with the sophisticated set."

Bringing the established downtown New York restaurant chain Blue Ribbon to Six Columbus established its first uptown location. It also delivered to the upper West Side the downtown flavor it lacked. At Gild Hall on Gold St., a men's club motif attracts the new neighborhood resident as well as vestiges of Wall Street powerbrokers.

In Los Angeles, Pomeranc and company exported New York culture, bringing the stylish Nolita sushi restaurant Bond Street to the Thompson Beverly Hills. Their other Los Angeles hotel, The Roosevelt, is the hottest hotel bar scene in the world, with nightly visits from young Hollywood A-listers such as Lindsey Lohan and

Paris Hilton. Prince, who asked the hotel to lay fur on the floors penthouse suite while he stayed there, played five intimate acoustic solo shows in the hotel bar.

"You don't plan on these things happening," says Pomeranc of the Prince shows. "But none of this notoriety happens without us being able to offer service first. The average age of the guest at 60 Thompson is 44. We have affluent 60-year-olds staying in SoHo and in the Lower East Side. I'm proud of that. It proves psychographics matter more than demographics."

Operations expert Brandman oversaw more than 160 global properties for the Intercontinental Hotel Group before working with the Pomeranc brothers to open their first hotel, 60 Thompson in

2001. His expertise lends the company credence as a bonafide luxury hotel group.

"We hate the term boutique hotel company," says Brandman. "We don't just throw an oversized red lampshade in the lobby and say we're cool. We are a luxury hotel group specializing in service and style. That's why, in today's tough economic times, we're still growing."

Last week, the Thompson Hotels opened Smyth in Tribeca. Located on West Broadway and Chambers St., Smyth is named for the Y-shaped triangular outdoor space at that same corner. It also stands for the anonymity associated with checking in under a fake name.

Already, locals stop by for coffee, tea and drinks in the lobby. That's a far cry from the neighborhood's other new hotel, the De Niro-owned Greenwich, where no one is allowed onto the property without being a guest of the hotel.

At Smyth, interior designer Yabu Pushelberg used pinstripe suit fabrics on lobby walls and herringbone black-and-white checks on couches. The result leaves visitors feeling as if they're sitting in the living room of a friend with money.

"This hotel bridges the gap between Tribeca and the Financial District," says Pomeranc. "Tribeca is only 20 years old in terms of being a residential neighborhood. It's defining itself as we speak. This is a more mature hotel."

Unlike other Thompson properties, Smyth has 15 residential units developed by the building owner separate from either the Pomeranc Group or Thompson Hotels. For rebranding purposes, the units are temporarily off the market.

"We had all 15 sold to one investor, but he wanted to renegotiate," says Pomeranc. "If the hotel works well within the neighborhood, everyone will want to live here."

For info and room rates on all these hotel properties, go to www.thompsonhotels.com



RON ANTONELLI/DAILY NEWS

Whether you like it or not, Thompson LES is an icon on Allen St.



Art by Lee Friedlander in light boxes above the beds at Thompson LES