

Forbes

TRAVEL

Newly Restored But With Raffish Spirit Intact, New York's Hotel Chelsea Reopens



The bar at El Quijote in New York's Hotel Chelsea ANNIESCHLECHTER@ME.COM

People still ask if they can stay in or at least view the “Sid and Nancy” room: the first-floor room at New York’s [Hotel Chelsea](#) where Sex Pistol Sid Vicious stabbed girlfriend Nancy Spungen to death in 1978. It’s still the most infamous act within the walls of this historic hotel dating from 1884 that has been the site of plenty of others as the temporary home of music icons such as Leonard Cohen, Patti Smith and Bob Dylan who wrote “Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands” here; writers such as Arthur Miller who while in residence wrote “After the Fall” and Andy Warhol who shot his movies here. Gawkers who want to see the Sid and Nancy first-floor room will be disappointed, though, since it’s been reconfigured as part of the massive renovation that with fits and starts, changes of ownership and lawsuits spanning 11 years is finally on view. The reborn Chelsea opened its public spaces and several floors of rooms earlier this spring with a full reopening expected late this summer.

Forbes



A Chelsea King room at Hotel Chelsea ANNIESCHLECHTER@ME.COM



The kitchen in a Hotel Chelsea pied-a-terre ANNIESCHLECHTER@ME.COM

Aficionados of the hotel's edgy history who worried that it might emerge sanitized and sterile should be relieved by the new look. Owners Sean MacPherson, Ira Drukier and Richard Born who also own [The Bowery Hotel](#) and [The Maritime Hotel](#) have maintained original elements such as the mosaic marble tile floor, brass rail, mirror, mottled plaster ceiling and dark wood paneled walls of the lushly renovated Lobby Bar alongside the restaurant [El Quijote](#) while adding a new solarium extension and outdoor space. The intricate black wrought iron staircase railings have also been maintained as have the paintings created by former guests lining the walls in the lobby and the rooms. Another original element is the mix of other guests: long time residents who obtained their apartments through the city's rent stabilization scheme years ago and won the right to stay are still in the hotel, guaranteeing memorable conversations by the elevator bank.

What is new here is still in sync with the vintage elements. Room categories were always idiosyncratic-different sizes and shapes for different rents-and still are, although the 155 rooms are now pared down to 14 categories from the very small studio queen to a two bedroom pied-a-terre featuring a kitchen with a marble center island that is the stuff of many New Yorkers' dreams. The design, created by the owners, is also fresh but hardly generic: a combination of tiger striped chairs, Victorian era styled carpets in burgundy and gold, headboards that look like they're composed of vintage tapestries and purple velour couches that is sharp but also nostalgic in feel.

Forbes



The dining room of the restaurant El Quijote ERIC MEDSKER

Also old but new is the ground floor restaurant El Quijote, smaller than the original but with its 1930's elements restored including its etched wall mural inspired by Don Quixote, mosaic tile floors and red leather booths; the menu is still Spanish with specialties from Catalunya, the Basque Country and Valencia. Another restaurant, French with a chef to be named later, should be open by the fall along with a Japanese restaurant on the floor below the lobby. A spa and fitness center are also in the works for the rooftop. Not yet decided is whether to remove the nets extending below the staircase railings. Given the dramatic goings on of some past guests, current guests can easily imagine what they were for—another edgy reflection of the past.