



The stunning lobby lounge at Renaissance New York Midtown changes mood from quiet workspace to sociable bar from day to evening. PHOTOS: RENAISSANCE NEW YORK MIDTOWN HOTEL

CHECKING IN

RENAISSANCE REVIVES N.Y. FASHION DISTRICT



ROCHELLE LASH

Renaissance means rebirth, and the Renaissance New York Midtown Hotel, across the street from Madison Square Garden and Macy’s Herald Square, represents an exciting post-millennium blend of classic luxury and contemporary esthetics. Renaissance, part of Marriott International, once was a conservative brand but now is implementing a design strategy that dances with clever theatricality and lots of surprises. Renaissance New York Midtown uses digital imagery, flirty graphics and three-dimensional artworks. The entrance walls are alive with projected images, a vivid tapestry of interactive sound and multimedia visuals created by a Montreal company. With a friendly staff, elegant-but-edgy decor and a wildly successful food and drink scene, the hotel is particularly “sympathique.” I discovered its secret. The general manager, Gilles Rebmann, is a homie from Quebec and an alumnus of l’Institut de Tourisme et d’Hôtellerie in Montreal, so he has brought a certain “je ne sais quoi” to the Renaissance.

When we met, he was dapper in a sharp navy suit, white shirt and pocket square, but no tie. “That’s the Renaissance look,” he explained. I get it. Upscale, but not uptight. **Location:** Renaissance Midtown is in New York’s Garment District, across from Macy’s, and near the Empire State Building, Broadway, Times Square and Penn Station. But its biggest neighbour is Madison Square Garden. The hotel is pumped for Imagine Dragons, June 19; U2, June 25-26; Billy Joel, July 18; The Smashing Pumpkins, Aug. 1; Rod Stewart/Cyndi Lauper, Aug. 7; and Shakira, Aug. 10. The location also is sports heaven. I did not dare ask Rebmann which team he will root for when the N.Y. Rangers face off against the Montreal Canadiens on Oct. 8. Go Habs Go, non? **Service:** I like the classic side of Renaissance. The 24-hour Club Lounge, available for some room categories, is an escapist hideaway with computers, newspapers, a breakfast buffet and afternoon refreshments on certain days. And do you remember hotel service? Renaissance Midtown has it. The bellmen at the 35th St. entrance take care of valet parking and luggage, Ambassadors staff the front desk and Navigators help plan your stay. That Renaissance-Marriott

global brand training pays off. I dialed zero to solve an air-conditioning question. “May I send an engineer immediately to assist?” the operator asked. “Oh, yes, thank you.” He came. He saw. He fixed. In 10 minutes. Now, that’s service. **Design:** Just like New York City, the Renaissance Midtown blends gloss and grit. Designer Jeffrey Beers used dazzling light fixtures, polished marble bathrooms and smooth woodwork and contrasted with rough concrete walls, iron sculptures and street-style art. The 348 guest rooms and suites are serene, with rich honey-toned wood, creamy walls and floor-to-ceiling windows that look out onto the hubbub of Manhattan, and even as far as the Statue of Liberty. Beers played cleverly on the Garment District’s influence. The Club Lounge is graced with bolts of fabric — satins, tweeds and silks — artfully displayed. And tables are etched with inspirational quotes from Karl Lagerfeld, Diane von Furstenberg and Christian Dior. Throughout the hotel, there are amusing artworks representing stiletto shoes, millinery mannequins and needlework. **Interactive art:** Réalisations-Montréal, a progressive multimedia design studio, has created a striking interactive ambient intelligence installation at Renaissance Midtown.

What’s interactive ambient intelligence, you ask? Roger Parent explains the project, which uses such technology as reflective wallpaper, motion detectors, projectors and 3D cameras to exhibit happenings. “The digital concierge is a high-tech display that changes constantly, responding to human movement,” Parent said. “For example, you might wave your hand toward the Broadway panel and the device will display theatre information.” **Lounge life:** Thread, the lobby bar, is a phenomenon. During the day, it’s a tranquil place to work or read. After work, Thread pops with a sociable crowd clamouring for steak spring rolls and rare spirits like single malt Oban or Cazadores tequila. If you love artisan drinks, Thread’s Bar Ritual unfolds at 6:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. Master bartenders shake up a cocktail-of-the-day in a punch bowl and pass around their creations — the first one is on the house. **Pub hub:** Rock & Reilly’s Irish Pub sounds straightforward, but it’s so much more. It has a 10-screen sports bar, an outdoor terrace, a bistro and an impressive collection of vintage photography of sports and rock ‘n’ roll — think Bruce Springsteen, Jimi Hendrix and Babe Ruth. Bartenders pour connoisseurs’ choices such as Woodford Reserve Double Oaked Bourbon as well as Brooklyn brews like

IF YOU GO...

Renaissance New York Midtown Hotel: 212-239-0014; rennycmidtown.com/renhotels.com; 218 West 35th St. at 7th Ave., New York, N.Y. Marriott rewards apply. Renaissance operates 170 hotels, including Renaissance Montréal Downtown and the Renaissance Paris République. Upcoming are Chelsea and Harlem in New York plus Bali and Amsterdam. **Price:** Prices fluctuate and are approximate, starting at US\$306 (suites cost more), including Planet Fitness, Wi-Fi, in-room coffee, Thread Bar Ritual (Mon.-Fri.). Best rate guaranteed. Some rooms include Club Lounge. **New York City:** nycgo.com.

Other Half IPA. The comfort food menu features mushroom risotto, braised short ribs and hangar steak with chimichurri, as well as under-\$20 choices like tuna burgers, meatballs and beef tacos.

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