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TRAVEL | HOTELS

SLEEPOVER HOTEL GANSEVOORT, NEW YORK

BY SHEREE-LEE OLSON, NEW YORK

When you're paying New York rates for a hotel, it's nice when the show is free. Imagine spring break meets *Sex and the City*, played out on the set of *West Side Story*. That's the setting of the Hotel Gansevoort, the sleek new landmark in the so-hip-it-hurts Meatpacking District.

From its lantern-like bay windows overlooking the gritty foot of Ninth Avenue, you can watch convoys of cabs delivering pretty young things to some of the most overpublicized addresses in town. And if you're still partying at dawn, you just might catch a waiter sweeping the cobblestones across the street at Pastis, like a lone stagehand tidying up after last night's performance.

Ambiance

The film-set metaphor extends to the 14-storey hotel itself. It even has built-in studio lighting in the form of giant glass columns framing the entrance that glow red, blue or purple.

But the look here is more minimalist European than Hollywood glam. The two-storey, light-filled lobby is grounded by a Matisse-inspired carpet and plenty of lounging seating. Even the guys in dark suits and ear buds look like they're from Paris.

Clientele

A hotel this stylish attracts plenty of styling types: Think Germanic accents and architect's glasses. There are also sensible-looking boomer couples with hip-designer-clad teens in tow.

And what's a New York hotel without a sprinkling of celebrities? Guests have included Kelly Ripa and Mark Consuelos, Ashton Kutcher and Scarlett Johansson, who undoubtedly enjoyed her stay here more than the bland McHotel depicted in *Lost in Translation*.

Design

Designed by architect Stephen Jacobs, the Gansevoort manages a feel that is both casual and privileged at the same time. The lobby features glass right up to its ceiling, creating a light-filled look that is

being described as "South Beach." It's warmed up with cherry wood panelling (interiors were designed by Jacobs's wife, Andi Pepper) and lots of art, including works by Frank Stella and Andy Warhol, as well as a rotating roster of contemporary works in the corridors and guest rooms curated by the Wooster Projects gallery.

Throughout the hotel you can play spot-the-designer, with brightly coloured chairs and coffee tables by the likes of Philippe Starck and Verner Panton scattered about the rooftop lounge and pool.

Rooms

Like the new Mini Cooper, the rooms feel bigger than they are, thanks to three-metre ceilings and tall bay windows with a day bed for lounging and side panels that actually open.

Controls for raising and lowering the blinds are at bedside (instructions would help). The lighting is discreet and efficient. The generous bathroom boasts a marble-topped dark wood console, a deep stainless sink and illuminated makeup mirror.

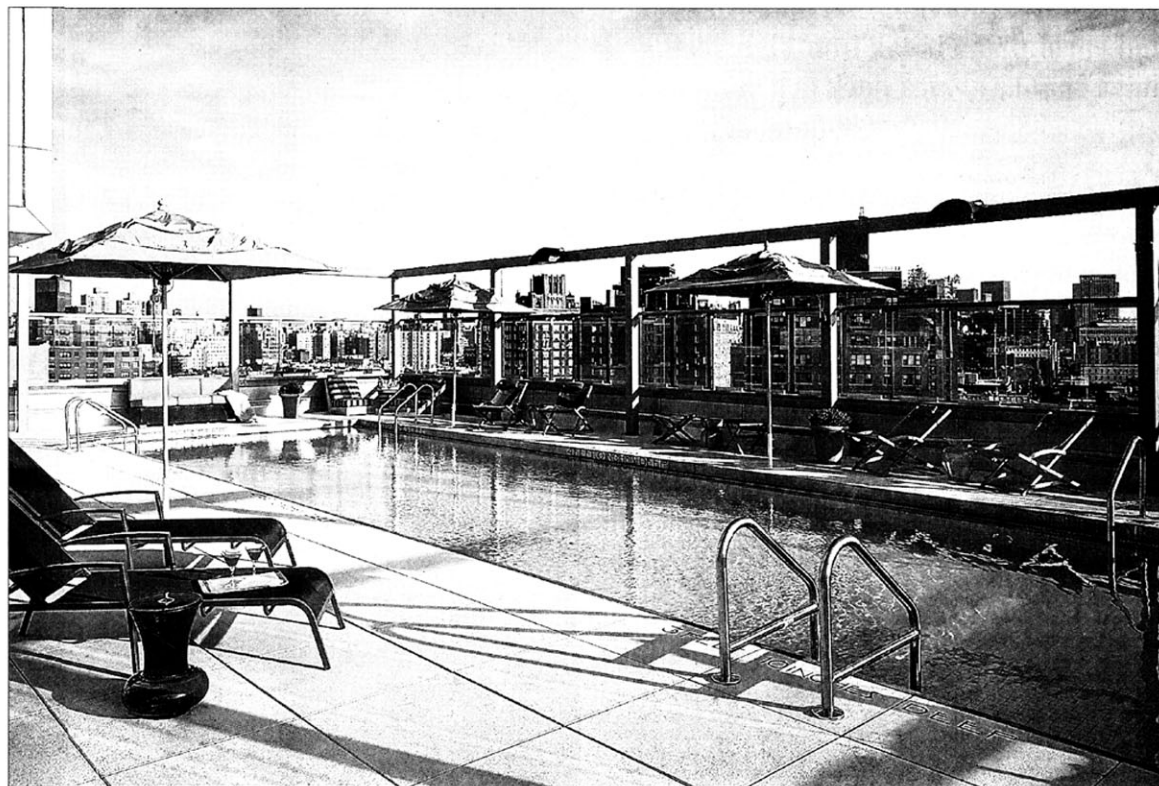
A flat-screen TV offers superior picture quality, though it's unlikely you'll spend much time watching.

There is the usual mini-bar, stereo and in-room safe, as well as 400-thread-count bed linens encasing a comfy featherbed. But there are special touches: a luxurious robe of just the right weight and cozziness; terry-cloth slippers; an umbrella. And everywhere, the attention to design detail that delights the eye: a celadon glass door, a sculptural potted plant, a well-chosen group of photo silk-screens on the wall.

Amenities

The big draw is the glassed-in rooftop pool, the only one in New York with a view of the Hudson River.

This is an advantage over the rival Soho House pool across the street, the summer hot spot for Manhattan socialites and wannabes (the Gansevoort is also offering rooftop privileges to an A-list of non-guests). There is an exercise room temporarily housed on the third floor, which will move to the spa area once that is completed in the fall.



The glassed-in rooftop pool, the only one in New York with a view of the Hudson River, is the Gansevoort's big draw.

Food and drink

Morning caffeine addicts may want to order room service, since there are no coffeemakers in the rooms. But if you throw on your juicy tracksuit, you can avail yourself of all the java you want during the excellent buffet-style continental breakfast in the penthouse. Outdoor tables offer views of the Hudson and uptown; in the evening you can lounge on a big comfy couch in the open-air rooftop bar, pomegranate martini (\$14) in hand. If, that is, you can get in the door: The bar is so popular with the public that lineups are common later in the week (and at press time, hotel guests were not being granted VIP access).

The hotel's Ono restaurant — which is slated to open this fall — will serve sushi and *robatayaki* cuisine, and will feature a large outdoor garden and café seating.

In the meantime, room service offers such treats as steak frites with roasted tomatoes, mushrooms and a béarnaise sauce, and mille feuille with a chocolate bitter orange sauce.

But why eat in when you are steps away from some of the hottest restaurants in town? If you can't get reservations at Lotus or Spice Market, there's always El Faro, a neighbourhood hole-in-the-wall that advertises itself as the city's oldest Spanish restaurant — and looks it.

Things to do

Forget NoLIta. The Meatpacking District offers one-stop fun, so much so that The New York Times recently dubbed it a "mobbed, boozy and tragically hip theme park."

In the daylight hours, fashion addicts can shop at Stella McCartney, Diane von Furstenberg or Alexander McQueen, while design junkies can scope out Italian modernism at Vitra and Scandinavian antiques at Lars Bolander.

At night, the meat-delivery trucks are replaced by stacked-up limos, and the fun really starts. What's this week's "It" spot? How about that little place at Gansevoort and Ninth with no sign? If

your taste is more anthropological, head for one of the retro trailer-trash bars (The Hog Pit, Hogs 'n' Heifers) where the choppers are parked outside.

Or if you just want to wander and enjoy the street theatre, there's a corner store on 10th Avenue that will sell you a bottle of beer in a discreet paper bag. But don't tell them we sent you.

Information

Hotel Gansevoort: 18 Ninth Ave. (just below 13th Street); 212-206-6700; www.hotelgansevoort.com. Rates start at \$395 (U.S.), with suites starting at \$625.

Continental breakfast is included.