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## The Stratford Hotel

LONDON

Harry Handelsman's third London hotel marks the introduction of both a distinctive new building and a bold take on hospitality to the UK capital.

Words: Kristofer Thomas  
Photography: © Rich Stapleton (unless stated)

Harry Handelsman – CEO of Manhattan Loft Corporation – is on something of a winning streak when it comes to London hotels. It started with the renovation of the former Midland Grand in 2004, where the German-born entrepreneur oversaw the reimagining of the historic St. Pancras frontispiece, working with architects Aedas to restore the Gilbert Scott-designed icon of gothic revival to a staple of the capital's hospitality scene. Then came Chiltern Firehouse, a similarly grand reinstatement of the Grade-II listed Marylebone Fire Station in collaboration with owner André Balazs, and still the namedrop of choice for the city's A-list four years since opening. And now, following a decade-long process, the opening of his latest effort, The Stratford Hotel, rounds out a trifecta.

Set across the first seven floors of the Skidmore, Owings & Merrill-designed Manhattan Loft Gardens in the heart of an emerging Stratford district, the property may not hold the glittering historic credentials of

its predecessors, but instead seeks to create its own; the structure opens as Newham's tallest tower, and perhaps its most eye-catching too – a double cantilevered, 42-storey modernist spire clad in serrated terracotta and glass.

Comprising the 145-key The Stratford Hotel and 248 residences above, the project draws prominent influence from the long-stay New York hotels of the 1950s and a 'vertical living' concept championed by Handelsman. More than simply a marketing catchphrase, the concept sees designers Signe Bindlev Henriksen and Peter Bundgaard Rützou – co-founders of Danish studio Space Copenhagen – thread a prominent social philosophy across all elements of the property's design.

"As we worked more and more with this phrase it became a way of thinking about the design of the project," Rützou comments. "The idea of vertical living is very much connected to the tower itself; the long-lease residences are merged with hotel activity, and the transitional guest interacts with an existing group of



© Sam A. Harris

The triple-height lobby features the Gleda Chair from British manufacturer Benchmark alongside Stellar Works dining seats – both designed by Space Copenhagen

marble cladding fixtures connect with shades of cool grey leather, whilst pastel red upholstery juxtaposes with the pop of green plantlife for a moment of vibrancy. The desk and chair, sourced from Stellar Works' Slow collection – designed by Space Copenhagen to infuse classic Danish visuals with Japanese values – adds a touch of bespoke precision.

Larger options are equally streamlined, laid out like apartments to stretch the minimalism across wider spaces, yet never feeling empty or bare. Marble bathrooms are clad with slabs chosen and sourced for the distinctive movement of grain across their surfaces, which spreads across the space as if in place of a swirling wallpaper pattern.

“It’s a very masculine building, with a lot of sharpness to it,” notes Bindslev Henriksen. “But it is a beautiful piece of architecture, and we tried to find a counterbalance and a layer of warmth and intimacy within. As a studio we have an appetite for natural materials, and whilst there is the practice for that out in Scandinavia, we’re

now seeing that it is becoming more and more a value package which resonates across borders to connect people, so the inside belongs to the people, whilst the building is for the skyline.”

Arranged to look in on an atrium containing another impressive installation in the form of a specially commissioned six-tonne moving liquid sculpture by Petroc Sesi, or outwards to views of the city, guestrooms continue the precedent of bespoke pieces set below; the furnishings, bathroom vanities, mirrors and tables all of the studio’s own design. This bespoke coherence continues throughout the F&B spaces punctuating the structure; the casual mezzanine eatery, bar and co-working space featuring a smaller-scale fireplace overlooking its lobby counterpart, and Allegra on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor incorporating an expansive custom-made bar, along with further Benchmark collaborations including dining tables with Montpellier stone tops and brass edges, and host stations in distinctively stained tambour cladding.

One of the few explicit links to Manhattan



© Jan Baldwin

Loft Co's previous projects, Allegra is lead by Patrick Powell, the former head chef at Chiltern Firehouse, who will seek to establish Handelsman's vision as an F&B destination on par with the Marylebone outpost. Serving up European cuisine with an old-school twist, the space features flooring assembled from three different shades of warm stone, along with gilded bar shelves and a canopy to the plant life hinted at in guestrooms. The lengthy bar – designed with smooth indents for champagne buckets – follows the curve of the space, and links to the exterior terrace as a circuit. Stepping outside, guests will find a platform clad in timber slats reminiscent of the building's profile, countering the open-plan restaurant with smaller divisions created by planters and a rhythm of trees.

"When we began our work, the tower was mostly defined, but we had an influence on some of the components within, and the creation of spaces that would be attractive for social encounters," Rützu explains. "I think of it as an anchor point locally, but it also exists

beyond, and transcends the area in a way. There are elements that belong to a locale, but also ideals of the travelling lifestyle; anyone who travels, for either fun or work, should be able to pick up on things that relate to the notion of travel, both local and global."

And so in an increasingly global London, The Stratford Hotel has placed itself as beacon, spiritually through the combination of Handelsman's vision and Space Copenhagen's design, but literally too; stepping into the skyline with angular confidence at odds with other recent major newbuild projects.

From Allegra's exterior platform, or the similarly styled Sky Terrace carved into the upper cantilever, the view is of a locale still growing. If all goes to plan, The Stratford Hotel's placing will be prescient, and when the rest catches up, it will be in prime position as point of orbit for a new community.



**EXPRESS CHECK-OUT**

**Owner:** Manhattan Loft Corporation  
**Developer:** Harry Handelsman  
**Operator:** The Stratford  
**Architecture:** Skidmore, Owings & Merrill  
**Interior Design:** Space Copenhagen  
[www.thestratford.com](http://www.thestratford.com)