

SoHo's Broome Hotel, an all-American inn with deep French roots

Four Frenchmen, including three longtime New York restaurant owners, create a hotel with Gallic flair

By MATT CHABAN

With cobblestone streets, classic architecture and bustling bistros — you still can't get a table at Balthazar after 17 years — SoHo could almost be mistaken for Paris.

Make a reservation at the new Broome Hotel, opening Friday at the corner of Broome and Crosby Sts., and it'll really feel like spending the night in the City of Light.

"We wanted to create a hotel that was an escape," says Jean Claude Iacovelli, who created the hotel with his brother Stephane and partners Vincent Boitier and Damien Jacquinet. "Something special, transporting, in Manhattan, beyond Manhattan."

That particularly French *je ne sais quoi* is built into the hotel's DNA.

All four proprietors are from the nation that gave us *liberté, égalité* and *sauce Bearnaise*. Three members of the team have been running French-ac-

cented eateries in SoHo for more than three decades, including such hot spots as Jean Claude, SoHo Steak and L'Orange Bleu. The last used to be catty-corner from the Broome's location.

Their success, along with the rest of SoHo's, is partly what made the trio decide to shut down their restaurants and open a hotel.

"No more rent!" Boitier says. "When I opened L'Orange Bleu in 1992, the rent was \$5,000 a month. When I closed after two decades, it was \$15,000. Now they're paying \$28,000. Sure, we've got a mortgage, but at least we own the building."

Yet for all the Francophone flair, this hotel is as much a part of New York as its owners are. From its historic 19th-century Federalist facade down to the Brooklyn-made Flavorpaper wallpaper depicting various New York neighborhoods, the Broome is the perfect Gallic-Gotham hybrid.



"Everything in the building is American, nothing here is French," Stephane Iacovelli says as Boitier straightens a French-named but Minnesota-woven Faribault throw resting on a settee. Like all the furniture — which is different in every room — it's from SoHo's own Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams.

"Everything is American but us," quips Stephane's brother.

This trans-Atlantic menage is what makes the Broome unique as a boutique hotel in a city that's full of them. The philosophy of these Frenchmen is unmistakable in their made-in-America goods.

The lobby shop could be a collection from the famed Clignancourt flea market, but it's actually an outpost of the Hamptons' boho-hip *Share With ... boutique. That shop's proprietor, Joelle Klein, also lives in SoHo and was a regular at both L'Orange Bleu and Jean-Claude.

Among the offerings are bangles with the words “B-loved” and “B-have” on them, a riff on Broome St., and a “Secrets I keep from the Internet” notebook.

The owners worked with a Parisian perfumer to craft their own toiletries. The labels come in four shades, drawn from the colors of the light in the courtyard out back throughout the day. The shampoo is red and stamped 6:42 a.m., the hand lotion blue, 2:15 p.m.

“Details are very important, and so are feelings,” says Jacquinet, a businessman and friend who lived in SoHo for 12 years and is now based in Brussels. “Hotels need to make sure guests feel at home away from home.”

The minibar, really more of a snack bar, features Lafayette brand trail mix (\$5), white-cheddar Pirate Booty (\$2) and Tate’s cookies (\$6). If there was any question of the hotel’s provenance, there’s a loosey e-cigarette (\$10) and a signature “intimacy kit,” which, for \$25, offers guests three condoms, lube and a small vibrator.

“We can barely keep them stocked — they’re the most popular thing,” Jean Claude Iacovelli says of the little black boxes.

The only thing more breathtaking is the courtyard, hidden away in the middle of the building — the pièce de résistance.

The wrought-iron-lined courtyard rises four stories, surrounding a Moroccan-tiled patio. If the outside of the building is New York and the inside Paris, then this is a passport to Provence in the South of France, where the Iacovelli family originated.

“This is our little slice of home,” Stephane Iacovelli says.

And like some secluded Provencal hideaway, it is remarkably quiet — especially for being in the middle of bustling SoHo.

“It is the greatest compliment to hear from our first guests how fast they can cool down once they enter the hotel,” Jacquinet says.

The courtyard also separates the different rooms. Standard and junior suites are on the first three floors in the 1850s house, with a penthouse up top that has two terraces. Out back are the “courtyard suites” with 11-foot ceilings inside a new building.

Prices range from \$399 to \$699 for the 15 rooms, although there are introductory discounts. The rooms are not huge, but they’re still quite comfortable. The feel is of an intimate hôtel particulier in the Seventh Arrondissement.

“We want this to feel like a home away from home,” Jean Claude Iacovelli says. “There are enough Sheratons and Hiltons out there.”

Also out back is a cafe and wine bar to be manned by another friend, Robert Arbor. Boitier and Jean Claude Iacovelli have had enough of running restaurants. Arbor will be reviving a Manhattan location of his popular Le Gamin, banished from both SoHo and Alphabet City to Greenpoint by ever-encroaching gentrification.

“Nothing too fancy, but very nice,” Boitier says. “We want the smell of coffee, not frites. Who wants to wake up to that?”

It’s getting harder and harder to find “nothing too fancy” in SoHo these days, even though that was what drew these four to the neighborhood in the first place. Boitier still speaks fondly

of how Crosby St. didn’t even have streetlights when he opened L’Orange Bleu.

“Courtney Love, Lenny Kravitz, Kelly Ripa, now they’re all there, or were,” he says. “Even they can’t take it.”

But just stepping through the doors at the Broome, it’s hard not to forget all that. And to forget you’re even in New York.

