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Architects put pieces together in Long Island City

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It was a combination of New York City zoning changes and personal business acumen that motivated hotel entrepreneur, Ravi Patel, to buy a small, aging, 23-room hotel and an adjoining land parcel in 2005 in Long Island City, Queens, south of the 59th Street Bridge.

As architects, our mandate from this client was to create an expanded hotel design that took full creative design advantage of this unusual site, which has nearly a block of frontage opposite the East River, facing Manhattan, in a recently rezoned, mixed-use, residential and commercial Queens neighborhood.

Our architectural design, now in the final phases of construction and scheduled to open in the spring, was a \$4 million redevelopment plan for an upscale boutique hotel, to be called the Ravel Hotel, that could attract both business and leisure travelers, just one subway stop or a two-minute taxi ride over the 59th Street Bridge from Manhattan, and just 15 to 20 minutes driving time from LaGuardia.

Our architectural design concept for this property was to fully use all aspects of the site to advantage. We began with a gut-rehab of the existing four storey structure and integrated it into an expanded building that, in total, now triples the footprint and expands the hotel from 23 to 78 rooms on four floors.

We designed all guest rooms to face West, with full, sunny views of the East River and mid-town Manhattan skyline. The 55 rooms in the newly built section have bay windows with French balconies or terraces. The parking lot, the lobby, a new elevator core, the check-in and concierge area are all on the "other" side of the hotel, so that they don't interfere with Manhattan room views.

Inside, each hallway is a single-loaded corridor designed so that while all guest rooms have natural light from the West, the new multi-windowed corridor allows in bright, natural light from the East.

Each room is designed with the bed facing the open view toward Manhattan. Behind each bed is the bath and shower area, which is separated by a translucent glass panel wall that is slightly textured for privacy, but which allows a generous amount of natural light into the area, in the style of many of our Manhattan loft designs, which represent the current trend toward the merging of hotel and residential interior design and architectural features.

Doorway, bed and furniture placement was according to principles of *Feng Shui*. When entering the room, there is a clear line of sight across the room and through large windows towards Manhattan. Similarly, when lying on the bed, guests will have a straight-line view across to the East River and the Manhattan skyline.

An unusual feature of this property site is that it is visible to drivers going East across the 59th Street Bridge. We designed a three-level rooftop bar, lounge and garden deck area so that it is pleasant and inviting, and has a distinct, legal smoking section for some guests. Our rooftop design demonstrates contextual architecture, because we designed a rooftop pergola of raw, exposed I-beams of structural steel to echo the mixed-use, partly industrial neighborhood of the site. The steel also mirrors the hefty strength of the beams of the nearby 59th Street Bridge.

In addition to being a social and recreational area with expansive views for guests, the rooftop is now a visible marketing billboard that calls attention to our client's hotel property for all eastbound drivers to see day and night. There will also be an area for local artists to display their work.

As an architect and an urban designer, I was concerned that we were starting out with a parking lot and an existing building that was a banal, plain vanilla box with punched out openings for windows. Our new addition had to relate to the views and the existing box better and had to be more visually exciting, so we used

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numerous bay windows and French balconies to address this challenge.

It was equally important to show, from both the street level and the 59th Street Bridge perspectives, that this would be a building for use and enjoyment by real people, including rooftop access. Many of the nearby properties in the neighborhood are industrial buildings or warehouses with under-used rooftops and unexploited views. We felt that our architectural look and design had to be different, yet a glassier expression of this was not affordable. Our completed architecture blends in with the bridge and the existing buildings, yet stands out in terms of human usage features and design thinking. We look forward to the ultimate test — a completed hotel filled with enthusiastic guests. ■