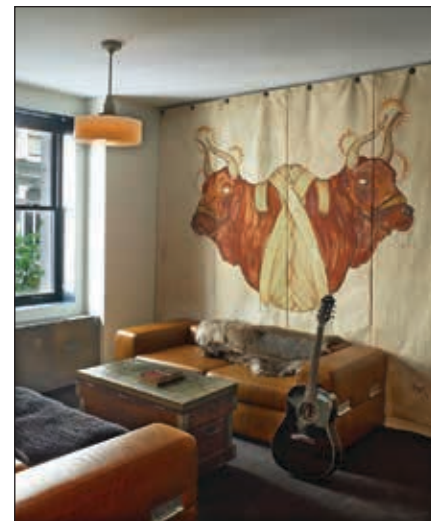




## A Real New York Feeling

An Interview with Jan Rozenveld,  
Managing Director, Ace Hotel New York



An Ace Hotel New York logo (left); guestroom

**EDITORS' NOTE** Jan Rozenveld has held his current post since December 2008. Prior to this, he was General Manager of The Greenwich Hotel, The Tides South Beach, and Ian Schrager's Paramount and Royalton Hotels. He has also been Executive Assistant Manager with Amanresorts in Asia and Europe, as well as the Director of Food & Beverage for Westin Resort in the Cayman Islands. After receiving his M.B.A. in Miami in 1991, he was Maitre d'Etage with the St. Regis Hotel, New York.



Jan Rozenveld

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Ace Hotel New York ([acehotel.com/newyork](http://acehotel.com/newyork)) lives in a historic, turn-of-the-century building in Midtown Manhattan, invested with the spirit of its surroundings, the culture of the city, and the ancient bones of the building. Ace New York has become a central hub for New Yorkers, Brooklynites, and international travelers, and a hotbed of start-ups, freelancers, and people who just want to kick it. However bustling the lobby gets, the hotel is a respite from New York's mayhem, full of local art, thoughtful details, and the best beds in the universe.

### How do you position Ace Hotel New York in such a crowded market?

We've been lucky that we've been different from the get-go. The Ace culture came from a different part of the world (Seattle and Portland) where hospitality was looked upon through a fresh set of eyes. The creativity that we put into our properties is unique to the industry and our staff is unlike traditional hotel staff in order to share this new culture with New York City.

When we started in this particular neighborhood, it was not the thriving hotel, restaurant, and retail district that it is today. It was considered a distressed area. This speaks to how people have embraced the hotel, not only for its sleeping rooms, curated art, retail, and restaurants but especially for our lobby, which is a communal living room for the city.

Ultimately, it gives visitors a real New York feeling. People are more about "life experiences" today than ever before. Ace strives to make our out-of-town guests feel like they are New Yorkers if only for a day or a week. This was always the vision we had in mind and we

work to execute it on a daily basis. We change things around so there is always something new to experience, see, feel, and listen to. This is what makes our customers return repeatedly.

### Is there a similar feel throughout the accommodations?

We've always had this notion of the high and low, like the Ace in a deck of cards, so you could have the aspiring artist who is staying in a mini room randomly meet with an art collector who is staying in a loft suite.

Therefore, there is a wide variation in room types. The neat thing that happened in this particular property is that the building was an SRO tenant building, so when we renovated it to become a hotel once again, we had to stick to the existing layouts. This has given us 280 completely different rooms, so from a guest experience perspective, it's enticing. Another key ingredient is the work of local artists who hang their own unique pieces in the rooms, which complement the standard features, like the SMEG refrigerators, turntables and vinyls, Pendelton blankets, and Rudy's bath amenities. We even have Martin guitars and sheet music in some rooms for those inspired to write and play.

### What do you offer in the food and beverage area and how have you attracted the local community?

We have two restaurants – The Breslin is more meat-centric and the John Dory Oyster Bar is more fish-centric.

We put in two restaurants with the idea that we wanted both to be unique rather than blend them into one place. It has worked really well. The restaurants are on either side of the lobby. Each restaurant has access from the outside so it is easy for the community to enter. This has a matching benefit because people who enter from the outside get drawn into the hotel and they experience what we have created there.

### Is there close coordination among the Ace Hotel general managers from property to property?

We work quite closely together. The good thing is that we are a relatively small group – we have seven properties at this point so we all know one another well and have been with the company for quite some time.

We know which guests have stayed with us many times and we give them special treats that one doesn't get in a typical chain hotel. We create, for instance, a trunk for someone who has stayed with us multiple times so they can leave stuff behind when they check out and we put those things in their room upon their return.

Early this year, we started an integrated customer relations management program within the properties that makes it easier to communicate our repeat guests' preferences.

### Have the rates come back and do you see movement there to where we were?

Fortunately, they are coming back. The city really took a beating in 2008 but New York is resilient. Over the long term, it will be stronger than ever.

### Are you surprised to see the amount of supply coming in?

New York is an ever-growing market. More people are travelling today than ever before. Markets that never used to travel are now traveling, which creates a need for more inventory. The fact that we have 55 million visitors annually coming to New York, which has never been achieved before, is exciting.

I look at the future optimistically with all of this market growth. Everybody wants to see New York at least once in their lifetime and we need to be prepared to welcome them.

### Is the role of general manager as much about business as hospitality today?

Our jobs have only become more exciting and multifaceted. We have always carried the financial responsibilities but the deal structures are more intricate with the various ownership interests that are involved. At the core though, it all starts with the hospitality; if you don't understand that, you as the GM, the people you work with, and the hotel itself will not be successful. We try to give everybody a hefty dose of freedom to do what they feel is right for the guest. You have to find a very good balance.

A lot of it comes down to what I have felt and learned since starting in this business as a young boy, which is love for hospitality. When we interview for new employees, we look for those people who have a similar sensibility. A successful hotel operation is achieved by having a strong team that understands the business, and believes in the vision and the product. This ultimately makes the GM job easier because no one can do it alone. This method allows for the creative culture to naturally flow through to our guests as well as to enhance our bottom line. ●