

## Lifestyle Hotels

An Interview with Vikram Chatwal,  
Founder-Lifestyle Division, Début Hotel Group

**EDITORS' NOTE** Vikram Chatwal is the founder of lifestyle hotel brands Dream, Night, and Time. He has assembled a dream team of designers over the years, which includes Adam Tihany, Thierry Despont, Studio Gaia, and the Rockwell Group to create otherworldly environments as the canvas for his adult playgrounds. He also brought in the best and brightest in the nightlife and restaurant realm to further engage his prospective guests creating special alliances customized to his properties that include a union of the Tao Group and Strategic Group, alongside celebrity chefs Todd English and Geoffrey Zakarian.



Vikram Chatwal

**COMPANY BRIEF** Launched in 2015 by Hampshire Hotels Management, Début Hotel Group ([debuthotelgroup.com](http://debuthotelgroup.com)) is a visionary brand management company spearheaded by industry veteran Eric Danziger, which oversees the development and launch of five distinct lifestyle hotel brands: Augustus Hotels & Resorts, Dream Hotels, Time Hotels, Night Hotels, and Unscripted Hotels. Début Hotel Group is committed to offering travelers an authentic connection to their chosen destination through an out-of-the-box approach to operations.

### What was your original vision for this company?

At the time I founded it, we were doing our first hotel, which was known as The Time.

The vision was to create this one animal and have it be representative of the culture around it, because boutique hotels are tied in with trends or concepts. We wanted to have a boutique hotel where people would be able to recognize our vision for the industry.

As we started to build it, the market went up, and we felt this would be a great business around the world because there are so many metropolitan cities that cater to people in fashion and the arts.

We thought it would be great to expand and we found opportunities to open a few more. However, we were careful to open one hotel at a time, making sure we put all of our efforts and energies into it so it would become something that would lead by example and be the cornerstone of our company.

### Can the Time brand be replicated and what are your growth plans?

Time can be replicated. We did not know what Time could become until we opened the Dream Hotel, which was about five years later in 2004 – the uptown Dream. It was with the Dream brand that we found a model we knew we could replicate because of its strong name and how we could push design style associated with that name through the whole brand. We put a lot of time and effort into developing the brand and the lifestyle around the brand.

Time is just a bit more intimate and private. We are having David Rockwell redesign it. Dream, which is a more contemporary luxury boutique hotel, is the one we want to create the big splash with.

### What about Night?

There is more of a standard vision for Night – it is a very petite hotel, and very prolific in its design and its statement. People either love it or hate it. It has its own following – people meet there every day for a drink at the bar. Night can be replicated too. It is going to be lower in terms of rate access. Dream has the highest rate, followed by Time, and then Night.

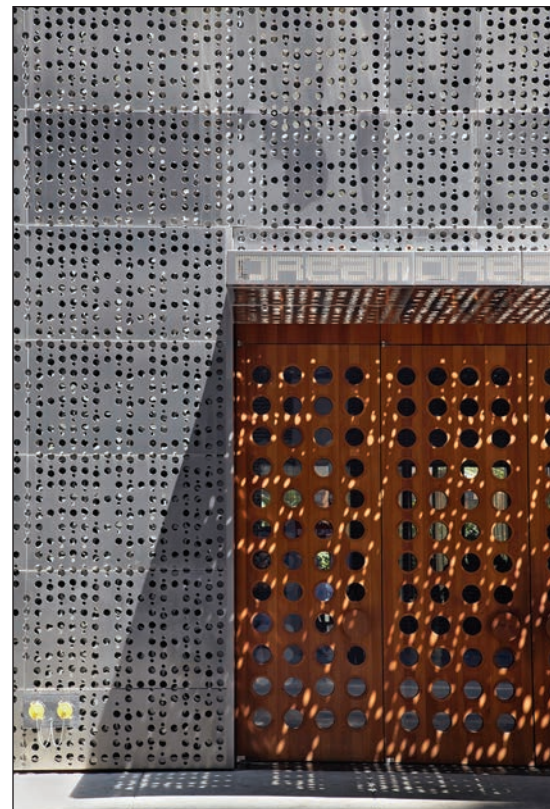
### Will expansion be primarily in the U.S. or will it be more international?

We are looking at both. Our next few hotels are in the U.S., but Dream has more hotels internationally – we have one in Bangkok and one in India, as well as one in Miami and three in New York. Right now, our expansion is domestic, in the Midwest and West. Internationally, we are looking aggressively at London and other key cities in Europe. It is going to be interesting.

### Is it difficult to articulate the message that you have that lifestyle feel while also offering a great guest experience?

We are trying to capitalize on the guest experience, the quality of service, and the entertainment value that comes from a great nightclub and restaurant.

The only thing people complain about is the noise factor, so we try to put a hush on that. We added soundproof walls and do not run things past certain hours. Dream Downtown has done that the best. People love the quality of our services, and it has a unique food and beverage element that no other hotel offers.



Dream Hotel in the Meatpacking District of New York City

### What is the secret to the success of your food and beverage operations?

I do not concentrate heavily on food and beverage. My skills are in the hotel and design field, and in overall creation. The success has to come from someone who knows how to adjust if the first concept fails.

We went through two incarnations with the restaurants in Dream Downtown and have also had to do that with other restaurants and hotels. Knowing what to do when things go wrong is the key to the food and beverage element, even though hotels in Manhattan always get that great push from the market. With restaurants, there is so much more competition, so you have to be ready to move forward if things go wrong.

There is also a certain lifecycle. You have to be very innovative in that field, because you can be the hottest restaurant one week and then a few restaurants open up and you are not anymore. Innovation in restaurants is important. If you can come up with new concepts quicker and better than others, you are ahead of the game.

### How far do you go on the technology side?

There are still people who like to go over their bills when standing in front of someone and some others who like to do that via e-mail. I want customers to have good access however they like it. Now we are getting into things like Apple TV, so technology is huge for us. There are even new operating systems coming up that are making an impact.

We are interested in everything that provides a more user-friendly environment.

### What does the word “boutique” mean to you?

It used to mean an intimate little hotel with 20 or 30 rooms. This is because in the past, when people did not want to take risks with 300 keys, they would open boutique hotels. Now people see a boutique hotel as a lifestyle and as contemporary, no matter its size. ●