

New York's New Boutique Hotel Brand

An Interview with
Gerald Barad, Co-Owner, Triumph Hotels

EDITORS' NOTE *Gerald Barad is a second-generation hotelier and has been an active investor in commercial and multi-family residential real estate in New York City for over 20 years. In February 2014, with his business partner Shimmie Horn, Barad united six iconic boutique properties to form the Triumph Hotels brand. He is also part of the Triumph Executive team. In addition, Barad is the founder of Generations Against Genocide, a charitable organization for human rights. He received a Bachelor of Arts in English from Emory University and a graduate degree in social work from the University of Southern California.*



Gerald Barad

COMPANY BRIEF *Triumph Hotels (triumphhotels.com) operates six hotels as diverse and distinct as the city surrounding them. From traditional luxury to graceful elegance to downtown chic, each of their six boutique hotels in New York City delivers a unique experience inspired by the personality and character of its neighborhood. The Boutique Luxury hotels include The Iroquois New York and Hotel Chandler, and the Limited Service Boutique Hotels include Hotel Belleclaire, Cosmopolitan Hotel-TriBeCa, and Washington Jefferson Hotel. The Gershwin is being converted now to a Boutique Luxury property.*

How is Triumph Hotels evolving in terms of properties and brands?

It's an organic organization that was started by New Yorkers. We have been in the hotel business since the 1950s – it's very much family run. The properties are unique in that they're historical and located in a variety of neighborhoods. One of the aspects we're embracing as a brand is the history of the hotels and the various neighborhoods where they exist. Each of the properties is in various stages of renovation.

In terms of the full organization, we're six properties and 1,000 rooms, consisting of 500,000 square feet and 75,000 square feet of retail, and we're looking to expand over the next few years throughout New York City and to other markets. This year, we united the hotels to create the Triumph Brand and centralized many of our departments in order to maximize efficiencies and improve the guest experience.

The Chandler was the first renovation to be completed and that involved the refurbishment

of the rooms and the hallways, and renovating the lobby. We also added 10 guestrooms, a bar, and the restaurant Juni, where Shaun Hergatt is serving some of the best food in New York City.

We're creating another private dining room with a skylight and a rooftop where people can have private dinners catered by Shaun. Hotel Chandler is a high-end, boutique hotel suitable for both the leisure and business traveler. The Chandler's neighborhood just North of Madison Park has also become quite hot over the past few years.

The Gershwin is in the heart of NoMad, just a few blocks north of Eataly, and it's undergoing a complete gut renovation. When we're done, we'll have 160 new boutique hotel rooms that are geared for the luxury and business traveler. We are planning to have a rooftop bar/lounge and, on the first level, there will be an 8,000-square-foot lobby that will incorporate a long hidden 25-foot-wide circular skylight that had been covered for over 50 years. The lobby will also include one, if not two, bar/nightlife elements as well as a high-end restaurant and a café. We will finish the rooms within the next six months, and plan to complete the lobby renovation within 12 months.

The Cosmopolitan, on Chambers Street in Tribeca, was built in the 1840s. It is considered the oldest continually operating hotel in Manhattan. It has 131 rooms, and is in the first stages of a refresh that will include expanding the lobby, renovating the rooms and hallways, adding an elevator, and updating the retail outlets to include innovative food and beverage options. This will take 12 months to complete.

The Iroquois Hotel is located on a beautiful block on East 44th Street, which is famous for having several lovely hotels. We're about to add 40 additional hotel rooms on adjacent land and then we'll expand the lobby, add meeting rooms, and create a new restaurant/bar concept. This involves some ground-up construction and will take 12 to 24 months.

Most of the renovation of Hotel Belleclaire is complete. It has 232 rooms and is an Emery Roth masterpiece. Mille-Feuille bakery just opened in a retail space and we have Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf offered in the lobby. We're actively planning a renovation to revive the rooftop, which in the past housed a restaurant and events space. It has beautiful views of the Hudson River as well as north and south on Broadway.



The Iroquois New York

In the Belleclaire, we found a second hidden skylight that had been covered by three layers of sheetrock for 75 years. The lobby feels very similar to the way it did when the hotel opened in the early 1900s. We're really focused on building out the historical aspect of our hotels. When guests walk into our hotel lobbies, they cultivate an emotional connection to the hotels.

Our sixth property, the Washington Jefferson, is located on 51st Street, and we're organizing a renovation project now that will start in four months. It will involve redoing the lobby, putting in a new food and beverage outlet, and renovating rooms and hallways. This will probably take 12 months.

Will the expansion in the future need to stay within that same focus and how hard will it be to grow?

We're looking to organically expand into areas with properties that we can bring our set of values to, in terms of our ability to renovate, our ability to be creative with design, and our ability to manage efficiently. They don't necessarily have to be hotels that were built 100 years ago; they have to be hotels that we can improve and that allow us to give our guests a better experience.

Is it a similar guest that goes to all six properties?

Not necessarily. Our hotel on the Upper West Side has a different guest profile than our hotels in Midtown or Tribeca. However, once all the hotels are renovated, any guest that stays at a Triumph Hotel will experience an exceptional level of service and luxury regardless of which they choose. By consolidating our six hotels under one umbrella and establishing our corporate offices this year with centralized reservations, marketing, and brand initiatives, it allows us to train our employees the same way so that the guests always enjoy a consistent level of quality, service and an excellent guest experience throughout the brand.

Do you worry that the market can sustain the amount of product coming online and does it bring a certain pressure to the game?

There has been an incredible amount of hotel development in two categories: in the ultra-luxury product at \$600 or above ADR, or in the mid-block, limited service flagged properties that are 75 to 200 rooms and are competitive in the \$200 and below market.

We want to create a luxury brand that can compete with the \$600-plus property, but our ADR will be in the \$250 to \$450 range, so we're very confident we can compete effectively. ●