



AT YOUR SERVICE
The bar at Millie's, a 24-hour brasserie at The Ned, opening this month. "We want this to be a showstopper for everybody," says Nick Jones.

HOT PROPERTY

GRAND HOTEL

Nick Jones, founder of Soho House, has teamed up with the Sydell Group's Andrew Zabler on The Ned, a colossal new project in the City of London.

BY MARK ELLWOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY TUNG WALSH

NICK JONES IS KEEN to stress the difference between his latest, sprawling project in London and Soho House, the globe-spanning, exclusive club he founded there in 1995. This time, he's aiming to appeal to more than just an elite few. "The Ned is for everyone," Jones repeats several times as he leads a tour of its dusty first floor amid the clatter of construction. Jones rarely walks, preferring a skipping jog as he climbs stairs and pinballs from room to room. "I'm so impatient. I hate waiting for an elevator," he says, pointing to the eight-strong bank of lifts newly installed at the building's core. "If the planners hadn't let us do that, I'd have said, 'OK, we're not the guys for this site.'"

The Surrey-born entrepreneur has built an impressive hospitality empire over the past two decades: His group now operates 18 Soho House sites worldwide, from Toronto to Istanbul, as well as 40 restaurants, most in the U.K. With The Ned, opening this month, for the first time he's partnered with an outsider on a hotel—American Andrew Zobler, CEO of the Sydell Group, best known for boutique hotels like New York's NoMad and The Line in L.A.'s Koreatown. In contrast to the boisterous Jones, Zobler is soft-spoken and relaxed. "We kid each other," he says. "Well, Nick kids me. I'm always on the receiving end." Zobler likens their five-year collaboration on the \$270 million project to filming a blockbuster. "Nick was making the movie and I acted as an editor, challenging him and asking questions."

If The Ned were a film, it might be a mash-up of Merchant Ivory and Marvel—classy and historic yet heroic in scale. The complex, which combines a hotel and a members' club with restaurants and amenities like a barbershop and spa, is housed in a City of London landmark: an 11-story building finished in 1924 as the headquarters of the Midland Bank. The neoclassical edifice is a masterpiece of Sir Edwin "Ned" Lutyens, at the time the favored architect of the British Empire. "His buildings are grand but unpretentious and have a feeling that people should be in them," says Jones.

With 60,000 square feet of public space, The Ned will need to be as welcoming as possible to survive. More than 250 rooms and suites, designed to evoke early-20th-century transatlantic liners, range from a handful of tiny spaces dubbed "Crash Pads" (\$220 a night but discounted for guests under 30) to an 1,880-square-foot suite carved from the wood-paneled, onetime chairman's office, at \$4,300 per night. In the lobby, Jones points gleefully to a small door off the main entrance, leading into a vintage private elevator. "The chairman wouldn't come in and say hello to all the tellers; he'd just go straight up to his office," he says. "Whoever takes the chairman's suite will have their own elevator."

Jones is standing with Zobler on a raised stage in the center of the lobby; a former lightwell into the vault below has been covered to form a wooden dais on which The Ned's in-house musicians, including its own choir, will perform. Jones does a quick shoe-shuffle as he looks out across what had been Midland's Grand Banking Hall. The huge room is being converted into a luxury food court, with a design that incorporates the

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—ANDREW ZOBLER

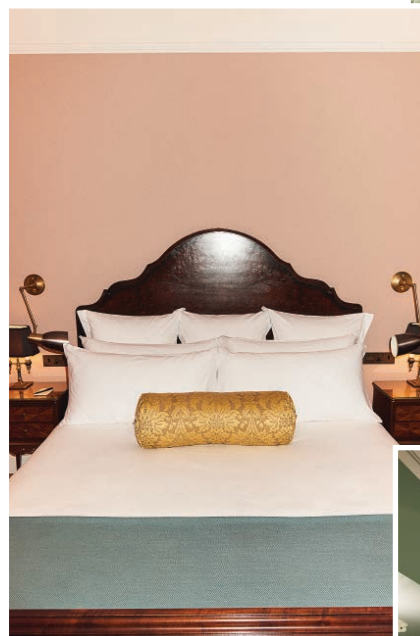
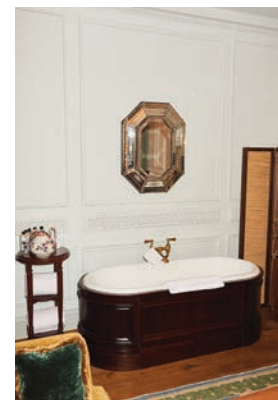
walnut-paneled counters and African verdite columns from Lutyens's original interior, a legacy of the building's stringent preservation rules.

The lobby will contain eight restaurants, including an outpost of the Soho House-owned Cecconi's and a Manhattan-style deli, Zobler's. "It started as a joke," Zobler says at the mention of his name. "London doesn't really produce Jewish deli the way we do in New York." It's become a passion project for the hotelier, who was born in Manhattan and raised on Long Island. "If you use the water here to make bagels, they don't taste the same, though we've been trying and trying," he says. "We think we're just going to freeze them and bring them over from New York."

Three subterranean floors, originally housing the bank's vaults, will now be home to the private club, to which hotel guests will also be admitted. The initial membership roster of 1,500—Jones expects that number to grow over the next three years—will be entitled to a 20 percent discount on hotel rooms as well as the use of a gym, a spa and the loungelike headquarters of Ned's Club, which sits behind a 20-ton door resembling the entrance to a Bond villain's bullion stash (in fact, the makers of 1964's *Goldfinger* used it as inspiration for Auric's lair). Another privilege is access to Upstairs, a social space on the building's roof boasting three bars and a casual cafe. Its centerpiece is a new pool with a commanding view of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Launching a venture in the City of London is a change for Jones, a man who built his reputation on prioritizing the creative class over bow-tied bankers (Soho House was founded expressly as a mingling spot for artists and writers). The Ned is also several times larger than any project he's undertaken—a potential risk for a clientele accustomed to more intimate properties. But Jones believes the hipster revival of nearby Shoreditch has shifted London's social center of gravity and will help draw a new crowd to a location several miles from London's West End.

Zobler agrees. "Think of it as an urban resort. If you had a quirky little hotel, it would be more challenging, but this sends out a beacon." Jones nods vigorously. "We want this to be a showstopper for everybody," he says before sprinting up the grand stairs.



ANTIQUÉ CHIC
From top: Zobler (left) and Jones; a vintage tub; tea at Millie's Lounge; a guestroom chandelier; a classic walnut bed; the spa; dinner at the Grill Room. The retro décor is meant to evoke ocean liners.

