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Harry Handelsman on Manhattan Loft Gardens



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Property developer Harry Handelsman is the man behind some of London's most admired buildings; the Chiltern Firehouse and St Pancras Renaissance Hotel among them. His eye for spotting potential has led to the evolution of entire neighbourhoods and next on his list is Stratford, where he is currently developing Manhattan Loft Gardens, a 42-storey luxury tower complete with design hotel, two restaurants, three sky gardens and 248 apartments.

How did your concept for Manhattan Lofts come about?

Everything I do comes from passion. I need that to be motivated. When I created the concept of 'loft living', it didn't exist in the UK – but it quickly became very popular. It was exciting as it gave me the opportunity to look at some beautiful buildings but also to introduce new neighbourhoods. I was the first developer in Clerkenwell – I found an amazing building that I thought would be good for a loft. I thought it was bizarre that nobody had done anything there before – it has this great infrastructure, great restaurants, markets – and you're literally halfway between the West End and The City. After that, we did Soho lofts then moved over to Bankside which was a bit of a nouveau area in the early 90s.

It has been said that St Pancras was an enormous financial risk. Has it paid off?

It was the biggest risk of my career but it is paying off enormously. Here was this incredible building that was derelict but had such a presence and nobody wanted to touch it. I really wanted to embrace it, to recreate that splendor. When you look at the detail, it's incredible. Its vast, its amusing, its beautiful – being able to do that is a privilege for a developer. We were at the forefront of the regeneration of all of Kings Cross and it is now considered one of the most important buildings in the UK. The fact that it is a hotel gives visitors a sense of ownership too. London is blessed with great buildings but with a hotel you stay the night and it belongs to you



for the time you are there.

How did you find the Chiltern Firehouse?

The Firehouse when it was first presented to me was possibly going to become a Malmaison, which was totally logical but I thought we could do something with it that could redefine Marylebone. I thought Chiltern Street was amazing and the people on it. Before the Firehouse we had tried to buy the Corinthia Hotel to put a Standard there but were outbid, which was disappointing. But when I found the firehouse I said to Andre [Balazs], ‘we might have lost a jewel but I think I’ve found a gem.’ What was particularly exciting was the fact that it had a courtyard. It impresses you before you’ve reached the threshold. The team are all happy, they have charm – that translates to how they serve you and how they interact. It feels like a private dining room open to the public instead of being a business entity. Being busy alone is meaningless, lots of places are busy and yet I still hate them – but this place feels genuine.

What led you to move east for Manhattan Loft Gardens?

People think about Stratford as being another country – but there’s no fence, we’re not keeping people out! Its only 10 minutes by car to Shoreditch or Hackney. I want to create something modern and new that signifies what east can be. East is cool but I want to refine it a bit, make it new and exciting and sexy. As well as Sadlers Wells and the V&A, the University of the Arts is moving there too, which will change things. I think I am coming up with one the most important buildings London has ever seen.

To find out more visit manhattanloft.co.uk

