



# The Ned

LONDON

Sir Edwin Lutyens' Midland Bank HQ in the heart of the Square Mile has been revitalised as a hotel and members club in a joint venture between Soho House and SydeLL Group.

Words: Matt Turner | Photography: © Simon Brown

The former HQ of Midland Bank in London stands as testament to a time when banks expressed their strength and stability through bricks and mortar, not stress tests or balance sheets. The glass and steel towers that jostle for position in the Square Mile today may stand taller but they feel somehow more transient than the stone edifices erected here in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup>.

Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens (who signed off his drawings with his nickname 'Ned') and John Alfred Gotch in 1924, the building sits in the heart of the City, at the crossroads of Poultry and Princes Street, opposite the Bank of England.

It is a building that every major hotel group in the world, not to mention many of London's property developers, have run the rule over at some point over the past ten years.

As finance moved online and offshore, its huge banking hall and safe-as-houses vault became redundant. HSBC (as Midland had become) vacated the premises in 2006 to make way for a Russian tycoon. Over the next few years, it reputedly changed hands from oligarch to oligarch (one, I was once told, bought this trophy asset as an engagement present for his trophy-wife-to-be), until the







Above: The ground floor of the original Midland Bank HQ hosts eight restaurants, including Millie's Lounge, naturally separated by 92 green verdite columns

financial crisis of 2008 engulfed the building in its tsunami of debt default. The building lay empty from 2009, as numerous attempts to refurbish it as a hotel or luxury apartments fell flat. No-one, it seems, could make the numbers stack up.

Even Nick Jones, by many measures one of the capital's most successful hospitality operators, felt it too large for a Soho House when he first toured the building. But nonetheless he fell in love with it, as had many others before him.

It was Ron Burkle, the billionaire investor who took a majority stake in Soho House Group in 2012, who suggested Jones consider partnering with Andrew Zabler – erstwhile developer of Nomad in New York, Freehand in Miami and The Line Hotel in LA.

All of which brings us to the here, the now and of course, The Ned, the new nomenclature for this hotel, members club and restaurant space, recently relaunched through a joint venture between Sydell Group and Soho House Group.

It's appropriate, given the hands-across-the-sea nature of this special relationship, that the cue for the interior design was 'the faded glamour of a 1930s transatlantic ocean liner.'

The space now accommodates – deep breath – nine restaurants, 252 bedrooms, a range of men's and women's grooming services and 'Ned's Club' – a social and fitness club, where members have access to a rooftop pool, gym, spa, and late night lounge bar.

The design was handled by a dedicated team including members of The Ned's in-house studio Adam Greco, Alice Lund and Rebecca King; Sydell Group's Stuart Adolph and Rachel Carr; and London-based EPR Architects. Together they have channelled the glamour of the building, and embraced its eccentric spaces: "We trawled the bank's archives to find out what the building looked like in its 1930s heyday," says Greco. "We were inspired by the great ships of that era, including the Normandie, as well as by the Orient Express."

The building's Grade I-listed status provided significant challenges, particularly when it came to the ground floor. "When Lutyens designed the bank he installed 92 green verdite marble columns and hundreds of walnut panelled counters for the bank tellers," Lund says. "The whole lot was protected by the listing, and we had to work out how to fit seven restaurants and bars into the space."

The key to unlocking the building's potential was the clever repurposing of the original bank counters to provide a natural separation of the restaurants on the ground floor.

These include a Cecconi's – sister restaurant to the Cecconi's in Mayfair, Berlin, Istanbul, Miami Beach and West Hollywood, serving modern Italian dishes. Cafe Sou is a Parisian-inspired café, created in partnership with Rachel Khoo serving classic French quiches, salads and patisserie. Zabler's, named for Sydell Group's founder, is a New York-style deli. The largest restaurant, Millie's Lounge, is a British



Above: Guestrooms feature fabrics from Designers Guild, various lighting by Chelsom, and bathroom fittings by Lefroy Brooks and Thomas Crapper

brasserie open 24 hours-a-day. Malibu Kitchen offers a healthy menu of superfood salads, flatbreads, juices and smoothies inspired by Soho House's new Californian outpost Little Beach House. Kaia, opened in collaboration with Instagram influencer Clerkenwell Boy is a modern Asia-Pacific restaurant specialising in 'poke' bowl food. Only one of the restaurants on the ground floor, the Anglo-American steakhouse Lutyens Grill is restricted to members and hotel guests. Finally, the bank's original circular reception desk has been topped to provide a central focal point and a stage for entertainment, alongside the Nickel Bar. On the opening night – described by one attendee as 'the launch party of the decade' – the likes of Gary Barlow, Tinie Tempah and Gareth Malone of The Choir performed here (the latter leading the thousand strong audience in a singalong of Hey Jude). On more sedate occasions a piano player is in residence.

The designers have deployed a light touch to create spaces that feel timeless. Much of what you see is original, and it's hard to tell that which is not: "Many of the timber pieces, including the desks and cabinets, were inspired by furniture from the original building," says Lund.

The repurposing of original bank spaces in the basement is particularly ingenious. The gold bullion store is now a 20m swimming pool, clad in marble. The vault bar, with its two metre thick door –

recreated by James Bond set designers for Goldfinger – is entombed in 3,800 of the bank's original stainless steel safety deposit boxes. Further on into the bowels of the building, the bar's walls are lined with a curated art collection made up of 100 artworks. 93 are by women, seven by men, in a symbolic inversion of the male-to-female ratio of FTSE 100 CEOs.

Furniture here is a mix of vintage and new pieces, including bar stools by UHS and RH Contract. Even the staff uniforms have been given careful consideration, designed and manufactured by Fashionizer to echo the elegance of the property.

Beauty and grooming spaces are also housed in the basement, bringing together a range of men's and women's services. There is a public offering – Barber & Parlour – as well as a members and hotel guests only Ned's Club Relax. Barber & Parlour comprises Cheeky's nail bar, a Cowshed spa, a Miguel Perez hairdressing salon, Ned's Barbershop and The Powder Room make-up parlour.

On the upper floors, meanwhile, the 252 bedrooms are designed to represent the hierarchy of a 1930s bank. "We designed three hotels in one," explains Greco. "A 'small' room reflects the sort of place a mail clerk might live and has a cosy feel and floral wallpaper. The 'medium' rooms are flashier, with matching art-deco furniture and pieces like a marble-topped table that we imagined might have been

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Above: The bank's original gold bullion vault now houses a 20m swimming pool surrounded by green verdite columns that are a signature feature of the building

purchased with a junior banker's first bonus. The 'large rooms' would be occupied by a director and are furnished with opulent pieces like a grand four-poster bed and rich fabrics."

The team spent months creating bespoke wallpaper for the bedrooms. "Adam and I went to Anstey Wallpaper Company in Loughborough to design three separate schemes for the small rooms," says Lund. "Over 100-years-old, it's one of the few companies that engraves and prints wallpaper, and we studied swatches and colourways from the period." Elsewhere hand-painted scenic wallpapers from Degournay have been used to create a mural that envelops the walls of the reception spaces on two levels.

The sixth floor, which houses the main function rooms, has changed least. "The Tapestry Room is cloaked in a huge tapestry, which was the largest in England when it was installed in 1932, and features coats of arms from 120 UK cities and towns," says Greco. "We also restored an enormous 18<sup>th</sup>-century chandelier from Devonshire House on Piccadilly to light The Saloon."

The team behind The Ned are at pains to point out that this is

not another Soho House. The entirety of the ground floor (with the exception of steak restaurant Lutyens Grill) and most of the basement is accessible to the public. The membership scheme for the private areas (comprising the rooftop, vault bar, spa and gym) is separate to that of Soho House, with a considerably shorter waiting list.

The scope of the project is hard to take in, even once you're inside the building. As with an ocean liner, if you lose sight of the horizon, it can be hard to get your bearings. The numbers printed on the back page of the opening night menu give an idea of its sheer scale. 2,523 'Nedgronis' were expected to be served. The surface area of the project is 320,000ft<sup>2</sup>. And £2.2m was spent by Lutyens on the original building (£100m in today's money). Looking at those eight restaurants spread across the 3,000ft<sup>2</sup> ground floor, one is tempted to wonder if they might have bitten off more than they can chew. But certainly on Sleeper's return visit a few weeks after the opening party, every one of those restaurants was packed with diners. If anyone can make the daunting numbers of The Ned stack up, it's Soho House and Sydell Group.

**EXPRESS CHECKOUT:** 252 guestrooms | 9 restaurants | 15 bars | 6 meeting rooms plus private events spaces | Rooftop swimming pool; spa; barbershop; hairdressing salon; make-up parlour | [www.thened.com](http://www.thened.com)  
**Owner / Operator:** Soho House Group and Sydell Group | **Architecture:** EPR Architects | **Interior Design:** In-house



## Four Seasons Hotel at Ten Trinity Square

L O N D O N

Seven years in the making, the former headquarters of the Port of London Authority reopens as a luxury hotel, creating a new showpiece for owners Reignwood Group.

Words: Catherine Martin | Photography: Courtesy of Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts (unless otherwise stated)

In its heyday, Ten Trinity Square was one of the most important buildings in London. As the headquarters for the Port of London Authority, it was the first stop for seafaring traders, lining up in their hundreds to pay taxes on the goods they imported from the Far East.

Built in 1922 to the design of Sir Edwin Cooper, the Grade II\*-listed landmark is a fine example of Beaux-Arts architecture. A grand portico of Corinthian columns marks the entrance, while the Portland stone façade is adorned with statues representing transportation, navigation and commerce. Perched atop, Father Thames, London's river god, points out to sea, keeping watch for those who sail his way.

Located just steps from the river and occupying an entire block on the north-western corner of Trinity Square, the building takes the form of a chamfered square with a rotunda at the centre. The original glass dome emulated that of nearby St. Paul's Cathedral, but was destroyed in World War II, before being filled in and the building repurposed as offices. It wasn't until 2010, having lain vacant for a number of years, that Reignwood Group acquired the property and began the arduous task of converting it to a luxury hotel.

It took six months to secure planning permission, followed by deep excavations to support the original foundations – during which



Above & Opposite: Public spaces and guestrooms feature high-end finishes and furnishings, including furniture from Interdecor, bespoke lighting from Chelsom, and bathroom fittings from Lefroy Brooks

significant Roman archaeological finds were made – before any real restoration could begin. And restoration was the name of the game for Reignwood, opting to preserve and refurbish as many surviving features as possible: a team of experts spent years on the exterior stonework and carvings, while specialist restorers have brought new life to the original plasterwork, marble floors and grand staircase.

Aukett Swanke was appointed to take the lead on the architectural interventions, co-ordinating with historic building consultants Donald Insall Associates, as well as three different interior design practices. Their approach was based on the fundamental core values of restoration, repurposing and remembrance, and involved the insertion of a contemporary glazed rotunda into the central courtyard; unobtrusive integration of new lighting and technology; and the addition of a rooftop extension to house the private residences – all completed with great respect for the original building.

With Ardmore Construction on board as main contractor, Belfast-based McCue – a specialist that counts The Savoy and Claridge’s amongst its clients – was responsible for the fit-out of the public spaces, a complex task owing to the listed status of the building. With the existing features to be preserved, the project demanded the highest level of detail, particularly in the Rotunda, the hotel’s central bar and the starting point for the entire design concept. It was here,

at the former rates office, that acted as the gateway for merchants from the east to trade with those from the west.

Taking the lead on interiors was 4BI & Associés, the Parisian agency headed up by Bruno Moinard and Partner Director Claire Bétaille. Initially brought in to design the private members club – an independent enterprise between Reignwood Group and Médoc winemaker Château Latour – the pair impressed, and were appointed to devise a scheme for the public spaces and 100 guestrooms too. Looking to the history of the site, 4BI & Associés focused on the confluence of east and west. “The building was once a dynamic trading place so the idea of exchanges was thus pursued, strongly connected to the main themes of travel, sailing and exoticism,” say Moinard and Bétaille. “Everywhere in the building, there are evocations of the nautical world and of the countries discovered.”

The copper bar counter for example is inspired by its use on boats, while the Solomonic columns are reminiscent of the twisted rope used for mooring up. Rotunda’s most impressive feature is a plaster relief that wraps around the entire space, telling the tales of those who travelled here. Its installation was an operation in itself, involving careful handling of the individual panels, which were mounted and joined to produce a seamless story-wall.

In La Dame de Pic – featuring the unique culinary delights of





Above & Opposite: In Mei Ume, designed by AB Concept, a series of lighting halos are suspended between the original columns

acclaimed French chef Anne-Sophie Pic – 4BI & Associés have let the architecture do the talking, accentuating the high ceilings with recess lighting and employing a simple palette of tan leathers against a white backdrop. Worth a mention are the cut-out paper chandeliers by Marianne Guély, a Parisian artist who has also created a series of framed peonies for the space.

Elsewhere, Moinard and Bétaille were inspired by the tales of Reignwood’s chairman, Chanchai Ruayrungruan: “We combined his worldwide travel stories and memories of England to create a new journey in a timeless spirit, playing contrasts between the ancient and modern styles, English and Chinese design, to offer a stay punctuated with surprises and discoveries.”

The public spaces are home to a number of spectacular chandeliers forming part of a scheme by DPA Lighting Consultants. In the entry lobby, Welsh artist Cerith Wyn Evans – currently displaying at Tate Britain – has created a striking piece using neon tubing, while in the ballroom, a four-metre lighting sculpture by Lasvit takes centre stage. In a nod to the building’s history, designer Linda Sormova Melichova drew inspiration from antique nautical navigation instruments to produce a work of art with handblown glass. Other chandeliers date back to the building’s inception and have been refurbished by Dernier & Hamlyn in an operation that involved cleaning the crystal and upgrading the light source to LED.

In Mei Ume, a contemporary Asian eatery serving both Chinese and Japanese cuisine, illumination comes in the form of hanging lanterns framed in black metal with patterned glass. Interiors here are the creation of AB Concept, a Hong Kong-based studio headed up by Ed Ng and Terence Ngan, who came to the project through Grace Leo, the former Vice President of Reignwood Group. “I’ve known Grace for a long time and we’ve always admired each other’s work,” explains Ng. “We’ve been trying to find an opportunity to work together so when the owner decided on an Asian restaurant, it was a natural fit.”

In line with the hotel’s principal design theme, Mei Ume fuses eastern and western heritage, effectively introducing an Asian context to classical western architecture. “We come from Hong Kong, where the Chinese and British cultures meet, so the story came naturally to us,” continues Ng, adding that an innate understanding of both cultures was key. That said, with this being the duo’s first project in the UK, working within the confines of a listed building was something of a challenge. “It was an exciting learning experience for us – finding ways to maintain the heritage and sensitively harmonise with the Asian features,” says Ng. The first of those Asian features is a beautiful glass screen, strategically placed at the entrance and depicting the flowering plum blossoms that give the restaurant its name. Another is the gilded triptychs at both ends of the main dining





Above: In the spa, marble columns inset with silver mosaic emerge from the water to frame the swimming pool

room, each portraying daily life from a different era of Chinese history. Bamboo panels, antique porcelain trinkets, and bold accents of red – symbolising luck in Chinese culture – also make an appearance.

Perhaps the most striking feature is a series of lighting halos suspended between the original columns; particular care was taken to attach the structures without detriment to the fabric of the building. The lighting scheme in general was something of a challenge, with authorities advising against the use of downlights. AB Concept's solution was to develop a three-poster u-shaped banquette, in which the underside of the bronze frame is fitted with angled spotlights – a classic example how constraints can become a design feature.

Completing the line-up of international talent, Italian designer Joseph Caspari was tasked with creating the spa, a true sanctuary in the heart of the city. A firm believer that first impressions count, Caspari has invested heavily in the arrival experience, opting for indulgent gold mosaic to line the entire space. With its low ceilings and curved walls, the reception is immediately cocooning, setting the tone for the eight treatment rooms and domed hammam.

Inspired by the original Roman baths, Caspari's scheme is a contemporary take on the architecture and materials of that time. Marble, stone and wood are present throughout, while classical columns emerge from the water to frame the swimming pool. The more luxurious finishes, such as the silver set into the marble in the pool area, reference the materials mined during Roman Britain, and even make an appearance in the treatments in the form of an anti-ageing jewel facial from Swiss specialist Dr Burgener.

Rounding out the facilities are the meeting rooms and events spaces, including the beautifully restored UN Ballroom, the setting for the inaugural reception of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946. The hotel will also introduce nine Heritage Suites and a Presidential Suite in the coming months.

The sheer scale of the site – fronting five different streets – meant its transformation into a luxury hotel was no easy feat. Changes in ownership and design teams, not to mention complex restoration works, resulted in lengthy delays, but after several years and millions of pounds, Ten Trinity Square can stand proud once again.

**EXPRESS CHECKOUT:** 100 guestrooms | 2 restaurants | 1 bar | Ballroom, 4 meeting rooms | Spa, gym, swimming pool | [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com)  
**Owner:** Reignwood Group | **Operator:** Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts | **Architecture:** Edwin Cooper (original); Aukett Swanke (restoration)  
**Interior Design:** 4BI & Associés; AB Concept (Mei Ume); Joseph Caspari (spa) | **Main Contractor:** Ardmore Construction | **Fitout:** McCue



# Crowne Plaza Kings Cross

**L O N D O N**

Nous Design and Superfutures join forces to upgrade a former Holiday Inn following investment from The Firoka Group.

Words: Guy Dittrich | Photography: © Adam Lawrence (unless otherwise stated)

Local and layered are not the adjectives that spring to mind when thinking about branded chain hotels, but in the reincarnation of a former Holiday Inn to the Crowne Plaza Kings Cross, InterContinental Hotels Group have come up trumps. Together with owner The Firoka Group, IHG has gone truly local, appointing two interior design firms based quite literally in the shadow of this rather clunky nineties block. Nous Design, founded by Creative Director Nir Gilad, was responsible for the guestrooms and public spaces, while Ben Webb, Director at Superfutures, took charge of the food and beverage concepts. Of course both know the neighbourhood well,

but careful and detailed research has allowed them to deliver design narratives that will run and run.

The hotel's name is somewhat misnomer, as it is no closer to Kings Cross than Farringdon, Islington or Holborn. Nevertheless, the designation certainly helps with reservations; the hotel has been running at 91% occupancy – well ahead of its competitors – in the weeks since re-opening, says General Manager Mark Barrett. Rather, Crowne Plaza Kings Cross is located in something of a no man's land, on a busy junction overlooking the car park of one of London's main postal sorting centres.



Opposite: Belgo and Bloom feature engineered oak flooring by Havwoods alongside porcelain tiles from Domus and area rugs from Icons of Denmark

Whilst this may not sound terribly appealing, it is near the heart of Bloomsbury, the neighbourhood that hosted the bohemian literary and intellectual set known as the Bloomsbury Group, founded by the likes of Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using this connection, the hotel's corner was named café Bloom. "Our brief was to create a neighbourhood restaurant that not only caters for the hotel guest but also the local residents," explains Webb. "The outcome is a space that can be utilised as a casual working/dining environment during the day and a more relaxed gin bar and lounge in the evening."

So hang a few images of Bloomsbury Group personalities imprinted on acrylic in the window recesses and you're done? Far from it. Webb's story for the venue goes deeper with subtle references to the gang. Suggestive of the broad reach of Superfutures' skillset are staff uniforms, reflective of the era with cravats and neck scarves. Even the gin on offer is local, sourced from award-winning London distilleries such as Sipsmith.

Webb plays further on the creative hub idea of the Bloomsbury Group, bringing in artisanal qualities of stained glass and thick wooden boards for communal tabletops. Glass bell jars display cabinet-of-curiosities objects and terrariums are a neat biophilic touch. A rippled, moiré effect is used in the floral logo for Bloom

and also in offset screens, playing tricks on the eyes as images appear to pulse beyond the lines.

Adjacent to Bloom, Superfutures also designed the interiors for the hotel's restaurant, a franchise of the moules-frites chain, Belgo. Research revealed that the one cuisine type missing from the neighbourhood was a European brasserie. As such, the space has been transformed into a lively Belgian-inspired outpost with stained-glass windows referencing both the Trappist origins of the beers on tap and the nation's association with the Art Deco movement.

Continuing through the public areas, there's further detailed storytelling from Nous Design. The hotel is built on the site of the Georgian Bagnigge Wells spa and gardens enjoyed by Londoners in the 1700s. The spring waters were supposedly therapeutic and came from a circular structure known as the temple. "We wanted to create a lobby that is a gateway to sanctuary," explains Gilad, building on the idea with the installation of a "fountain in the sky" – a chandelier by Into Lighting crafted from blue and white tubes and surrounded by a lamella-like array of wooden beams. Together with the white reception pods acting as clouds, this is a bright and energising welcome.

The adjacent Bagnigge Club Lounge, formerly the bar, provides 54 additional seats that together with Bloom help the 150-seat



© Courtesy of Superfutures



© Courtesy of Superfutures



Above: Redesigned guestrooms are fitted out with desk lamps by Chelsom, bespoke desks by Curtis Furniture and artworks sourced by Artiq

Belgo restaurant cope with the breakfast rush of a 430-key hotel. The lounge plays on the botanical heritage of the spa with earthy tones and floral patterning in the Brintons' carpets, plenty of green glassware, brass accessories and an EcoSmart fireplace all adding to the natural feel.

When it came to the guestrooms, Gilad spotted the opportunity of utilising a double-height void above the covered street entrance to increase the room count. This so-called wing extension saw a further 24 guestrooms suspended from the existing structure. Continuing to trade whilst works of this magnitude are taking place may have temporarily lost the hotel some business, but this is a real return on investment for the owners.

Gilad also persuaded The Firoka Group to take a leap of faith with the redesign. The original brief called for new public areas but only a soft refurbishment of the guestrooms. Gilad argued that creating an uplifting guest experience with 15-year-old bathrooms was going to be tricky, and in the end it was almost a gut job.

The bathrooms were treated to a full makeover with new brassware

from Grohe, tubs by Kaldewei and Pro wall-hung WCs and bespoke washbasins from Laufen. The illusion of space is created with a wall-sized mirror partially back-heated by Demista, a touch of luxury not normally expected of mid-price brand.

Similar thought has gone into the bedrooms, where muted tones are accented with bursts of burnt sienna seen in bed throws and the column of a desk lamp by Chelsom. The bespoke desks by Curtis Furniture are almost sculptural but practical, describes Gilad. Two neat features have been worked into the metal frame – a tray insert for keys, coins and jewellery, and a trough concealing the power supply sockets. The herringbone patterned carpet, textured wallpaper and birds-eye maple wood panelling all provide contrast.

The touches of luxury and delight that both Superfutures and Nous Design have added enhance the guest experience but are far from the full story at Crowne Plaza Kings Cross. Their detailed and substantiated storytelling puts the property right in the zone of where international hotels want to be – providing a certain level of assured comfort within a unique envelope. Cookie-cutter RIP.

**EXPRESS CHECKOUT:** 430 guestrooms | 2 restaurants | 1 bar | 7 meeting rooms | Swimming pool, spa, gym | [www.ihg.com](http://www.ihg.com)  
**Owner:** The Firoka Group | **Operator:** IHG | **Interior Design:** Nous Design (guestrooms and public spaces); Superfutures (F&B)  
**Lighting Design:** Into Lighting | **Contractor:** Connor Construction