

Hotels near Ground Zero find room to grow

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When you build on hallowed ground, you treat it as such.

An empty lot across the street from Ground Zero will soon become the city's newest Courtyard by Marriott. But instead of the budget-friendly, cookie-cutter lodgings synonymous with the chain, the developers behind 133 Greenwich St. are promising something striking.

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Designed by Danny Forster, the 30-story tower will boast a faceted façade that makes the 317-room hotel look like it floats above the National September 11 Memorial.



Ritz-Carlton Battery Park: opened 2005, 289 rooms, 38 stories. (Ron Starr/Ritz Carlton)

"I'm a New Yorker, so to me, this is the most important site in the city," says Jack A. Hidary, principal at Hidrock Realty and co-developer of 133 Greenwich St. "It's not just any piece of real estate. It's the World Trade Center."

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While it took more than a decade for the World Trade Center to take shape, Hidary will complete his project in just 14 months, hoping to capitalize on the growing crowds downtown.



Courtyard by Marriott: opening in 2014, 317 rooms, 30 stories.

His team is among dozens of developers driving a hotel boom in lower Manhattan, a neighborhood written off as a ghost town 12 years ago.

On Sept. 10, 2001, there were just six hotels south of Chambers St., including the 565-room obelisk-like Millennium Hilton and the swank 45-room Wall Street Inn. The oldest and biggest south of 42nd St., was the 825-room Marriott, opened in 1979 at 3 World Trade Center.



Four Seasons Downtown: opening 2015, 185 rooms and 157 condos, 82 stories.

It, too, vanished on 9/11.

That left only five hotels and 1,475 rooms. Today, there are 18, with nearly 4,100 rooms, according to a study by the Downtown Alliance. Over the next two years, a dozen more are in the works, bringing the total number of lower

Manhattan hotels to 30 — a six-fold increase from 2001, with a total of roughly 6,750 rooms.



A stunning view of lower Manhattan. (dbox)

"We're going to be graced with a quality of edifices, and not just our own, the likes of which the world has ever known," said World Trade Center developer Larry Silverstein. "It'll be the greatest thing since Rockefeller Center."

Silverstein deserves a good deal of credit for downtown's hotel boom. It was his determination to rebuild the 16 acres that is spurring the blitz of hotels — including his own, the Four Seasons Downtown.



Millenium Hilton (Jeff Bachner/for New York Daily News)

The hoteliers aren't just banking on the 52 million tourists swarming the city annually, but also the thousands of suits-and-ties and Chanel dresses who will have business in the soaring Trade Center towers set to open next year.

With chic companies like Condé Nast and global ones like China Vantone moving in, visiting executives, clients, even models prepping for *Vogue* photo shoots will need a place to stay.



Millenium Hilton: opened in 1992, 565 rooms, 54 stories (Jeff Bachner/for New York Daily News)

But lower Manhattan still has plenty of catching up to do, according to hotel consultancy PKF. Its 4,100 hotel rooms are paltry compared to the 50,000 in midtown.

"We've come a long way, but we've got plenty of room — and rooms — to grow," says PKF senior vice president John Fox.



Conrad New York: opened 2004 as Embassy Suites, reopened 2012, 463 rooms, 17 stories. (Jeff Bachner/for New York Daily News)

Memorial visitors and business travelers won't be the only guests. Developers expect the neighborhood will soon attract another kind of clientele: shoppers.

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The World Trade Center once had the busiest mall in the world, and retailers like Victoria's Secret, Abercrombie and Apple are lining up to fill new shops on the site. Next door, high-end boutiques like Ferragamo and Hermes are headed to a reborn World Financial Center. Tourist-favorite Century 21 is also undergoing a top-to-bottom makeover.



Construction has begun on a Courtyard by Marriott at 133 Greenwich St. across from Ground Zero. (Jeff Bachner/for New York Daily News)

"You're going to have some of the best shopping in the world down here," said Robert Rechtermann, general manager of the neighborhood's newest hotel, the 463-room Conrad, which opened in March 2012.

Make that reopened. The Battery Park City property debuted as an Embassy Suites in 2004. When Goldman Sachs opened its new headquarters next door in 2009, it bought the hotel and transformed it.



A 44-story Holiday Inn (right) just steps from Ground Zero is set to open next year. Further down Washington St. is the 54-story W Downtown (center). The main attraction looms in the background, the 104-story 1 World Trade Center (left). (Jeff Bachner for New York Daily News)

Out went the Applebee's and DSW shoe outlet. In came three Danny Meyer restaurants, an Artsee glasses boutique and The Vintry, where one bottle of wine is on offer for \$23,500.

Helping drive the influx of hotels is the fact that lower Manhattan is no longer just a Monday-Friday, 9-to-5 neighborhood.



W Downtown Hotel & Residences: opened 2010, 220 rooms and 222 condos, 57 stories. (Jeff Bachner/for New York Daily News)

"We've become a real 24/7 community, where people want to hang out," said Stephanie Jennings, a vice president at the Downtown Alliance.

The neighborhood's soaring residential population, which has nearly tripled to 60,000 since the attacks, also creates new demand for hotels.

It was those residents that inspired Joe Moinian to start planning his W Downtown Hotel & Residences in 2004.

In the 1990s, Moinian, who owns more than a dozen buildings in lower Manhattan, began converting offices into apartments. More than half of his tenants moved out after 9/11, but by 2002, many had taken their place.

By the following year, his apartments were all full.

"When I saw that, and when I saw the master plan for the World Trade Center, I knew we would be back," Moinian says.

It took 18 months to convince W to anchor its 57-story tower at 123 Washington St., in part because of the specter of Ground Zero. Once they were on board, a tragic fire at the former Deutsche Bank headquarters in 2007 delayed construction. The building didn't open until 2010, in the midst of the Great Recession.

Still, with its sleek lines and hip brand name, the 220-room hotel (with 222 condos on top) was full almost from day one.

It's not the only success story. The neighborhood now boasts hotels from the budget — the Seaport's no-frills Hampton Inn — to the boutique — like the Smyth on the border of Tribeca.

The 54-story Millenium, perched across from the Trade Center, has had a front-row seat to this renaissance.

It was the first hotel to reopen after the attacks, in March 2003 following a gut renovation, and management is planning another multimillion-dollar reno' to capitalize on the new Trade Center.

"A lot of people doubted our desire to reopen," says Jan Larsen, the Millenium's general manager, sitting inside his fifth-floor office overlooking the half-built PATH station. "We never had any doubts, and I think if you just look around, it's easy to see our determination paid off."

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