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SQUARE FEET

## **Paving the Way for Hotels in Hell's Kitchen**

By JANE L. LEVERE

The pioneering San Francisco-based Kimpton Hotel and Restaurant Group, which worked its way eastward, is looking west again — this time to Hell's Kitchen.

An originator of the boutique hotel concept, Kimpton manages two hotels in [Manhattan](#): 70 Park Avenue and the Muse, at 130 West 46th Street. Next spring, it will open a new \$125 million hotel with 222 guest rooms at 653 11th Avenue, entering an area of the Far West Side of Manhattan that is distant from any existing hotels.

Converting a 1930's printing plant on the west side of the avenue between 47th Street and 48th Streets and adding three floors, Kimpton will create the Vu, called that because of its 360-degree unobstructed vistas of the Hudson River and [New Jersey](#), facing west, and the Midtown Manhattan skyline, facing east.

Owned by Horizen Global, a Manhattan developer of residential buildings, the Vu is the first new Midtown hotel going up far to the west of Times Square. If it is successful — as many industry executives predict it will be — it could pave the way for other hotels in the neighborhood.

In fact, the Rockrose Development Corporation, which owns a 216,000-square-foot three-story industrial building at 660 12th Avenue, one block northwest of the Vu, which is now a Federal Express sorting center, has been talking to hotel developers for the last six months about leasing the 257,000 square feet of air rights above the building for construction of a hotel, said Patricia Dunphy, vice president.

The Vu is the latest step in Kimpton's expansion plans. Founded by Bill Kimpton in 1981 with one hotel in San Francisco, it has gradually expanded eastward and into [Canada](#), and today operates 43 hotels in 17 cities.

The company's chief executive, Michael A. Depatie, has said he wants to double the company's hotels by 2012, and increase its hotels in the New York market to 20 by 2017. In addition to the Vu, it will also manage a new 290-room hotel in a 50-story mixed-use tower at 839 Avenue of the Americas, at 30th Street. As yet unnamed, this hotel will be developed by the JD Carlisle Group and is to open in 2009.

According to Troy Furbay, Kimpton's senior vice president for acquisitions and development, the company considers the New York metropolitan area "five, six or seven different markets." He added: "We're trying to put a hotel in every area. We've looked at [Brooklyn](#) a bit, maybe Hoboken and the Jersey City area."

Although Mr. Furbay said Kimpton initially found Hell's Kitchen "an odd location" for a hotel, he said it was won over by what it believes is its growth potential. He said that in recent years the neighborhood has attracted not only residential real estate development, but also grocery stores, bars and restaurants, migrating westward from Ninth Avenue.

Regret is another factor, he admitted. He said Kimpton looked at a site in what was then the remote meatpacking district five years ago, but decided against going in there; this later became the successful Gansevoort Hotel, at Ninth Avenue and 13th Street.

On the Far West Side of Midtown, “we were worried we’d make the same mistake twice,” he said. “We didn’t want to overlook an area where it wasn’t immediately obvious why there was no hotel there.”

The designer of the Vu’s interior is the Rockwell Group, which has worked on other Manhattan hotels — like the W New York and Carlton — but has never collaborated with Kimpton.

Rockwell is designing a hotel that will take advantage of the site and the configuration of the existing industrial building, which has oversize windows and high ceilings.

A three-story addition by the architect Carlos Zapata that is approximately half the size of the roof of the original building is being built atop the existing structure.

The new 15th floor will hold an 1,800-square-foot glass-enclosed bar — with 360-degree views of Manhattan and New Jersey and doors that can open in fair weather — as well as a 230-square-foot rectangular Jacuzzi for guests and decorative reflecting pool. A new 16th floor will contain six guest rooms, including a presidential suite, which will itself be connected by stairs to a new 17th-floor roof deck, with another, smaller Jacuzzi and views.

Ed Bakos, a principal of the Rockwell Group overseeing the Vu project, said 30 percent of the guest rooms will be junior-suite lofts; these will measure 40 feet long, which he said is eight feet longer than most New York hotel guest rooms, 11 ½-feet wide and more than 11 feet high. Nine-foot-high windows will be covered by sheer shades, also affording expansive views.

Kimpton executives are bullish about the Vu's prospects, pointing to the strength of the overall New York hotel market — occupancies in the five boroughs in 2005 and 2006 were 85.9 percent and 85.1 percent, respectively, and are projected to rise to 86 percent this year — and of the Times Square area in particular.

A number of other new hotels will open in the next few years near Times Square, including two being built in Hell's Kitchen by the McSam Hotel Group: a 198-room Holiday Inn Express at 505 West 43rd Street, and a 144-room hotel at 506 West 44th Street, both opening between 10th and 11th Avenues in the second or third quarter of 2009.

Donna Keren, vice president for policy and research for NYC & Company, the tourism marketing organization, is also upbeat about the Vu's prospects.

She believes it will attract guests attending conventions at the enlarged space for midsize trade shows at Piers 92 and 94, between West 52nd Street and West 54th Street along the Hudson River, being redeveloped by the [New York City](#) Economic Development Corporation.

Already popular for design and fashion shows, this space will be a good fit with Kimpton, Ms. Keren suggested, since the company is known for being “stylish and cutting-edge.