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EXPLORER

## To Be a Hotel and Gay in New York



Julie Glassberg for The New York Times

The Out NYC hotel in Midtown. Many rooms face an AstroTurf "lawn" festooned with beanbags.

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ON a recent Saturday night at the new XL nightclub on West 42nd Street, revelers danced with abandon on a sunken floor while the D.J. [Manny Lehman](#) spun a percussive house mix, lights flashed, go-go boys undulated on raised platforms and bartenders busily mixed cocktails. I'm really not the party-all-night type, but I stayed pretty late, given that my bed was a short walk away through a couple of glass doors that lead to a Manhattan hotel lobby.


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[Six Gay Hotels Where the Welcome Mats Have Always Been Out](#)  
(March 18, 2012)

Welcome to the [Out NYC](#), whose owners have called it both the first gay hotel in New York and a "straight-friendly urban resort." Located in west Clinton between 10th and 11th

Avenues, the three-story, 70,000-square-foot hotel, the brainchild of Ian Simpson Reisner, a managing partner of [Parkview Developers](#), has 105 rooms. The XL nightclub and bar are just off the lobby; a restaurant and other amenities are in the works.

So my question was: in a place like [New York City](#), what does being a gay hotel mean, exactly?

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To answer that, I nosed around a handful of New York hotels that identify themselves as gay or gay friendly and gave myself a bit of a history lesson in the process.

The general litmus test for a gay-friendly place is whether it is [TAG-approved](#), a standard established by an organization called Community Marketing Inc. to identify businesses that have a nondiscrimination policy and offer diversity training for their staff members, for instance. Many hotels in New York are TAG-approved, but a few (some founded, quietly, decades ago) do more than simply assure gay guests and employees of a comfortable environment, and actively cater to gay clientele.

Since the Out is certainly the biggest, blingiest and most brazen of them all, I started there, checking in on March 3, along with my partner, Brett, and a couple of lesbian friends who could help assess whether gay-themed actually meant only gay-male themed.

We showed up separately; the women got a room right away while we had to wait almost an hour. So Out passed our secret lesbian discrimination test but lost points for not having my room ready until almost 5 p.m., despite a 3 p.m. check-in time. (It was opening weekend, so kinks were still being worked out.)

After checking in, we headed up to our room, passing areas still blocked off for construction. It felt a bit like going to a Broadway show during technical rehearsals.

But the unfinished feeling did not extend to the service. Every employee I encountered was friendly. The staff was pretty much universally attractive, too. (The majority of the employees also seemed to be male.)

Our second-floor room was done in black-and-white minimalist chic. White furniture and sheets popped out against dark curtains and a black carpet. There was no closet; the storage space was in the bathroom, where a hanging rod was big enough for only a few shirts.

Pluses included a big flat-screen television mounted on the wall at the foot of the bed, room-darkening shades, a king bed with a perfect mattress and soft, pristine sheets.

Another plus: the whole bathroom. The glass bowl sink, coffee-colored ceramic tiles on the walls and stone-floored open shower stall were sleek and attractive. One shower wall is a mirror, and there's another huge mirror over the sink and an even bigger one at the head of the bed. It's tough to hide from reflective surfaces here; learn to love your body.

Directly outside our door was the “great lawn,” an outdoor expanse covered in AstroTurf with brightly colored beanbag chairs scattered about. Eventually almost all of the rooms will open or look out onto this space or one of the two other courtyards being completed. (One will feature plants and tables; the other will have hot tubs, a reflecting pool, a waterfall, cabanas and areas for sunbathing.)

The proximity of the courtyards — open to all guests — to room windows creates a sort of fishbowl effect in that people can stare in and out pretty easily. This may have some people feeling exposed while, say, sunbathing; others might not want to seem to be voyeurs.

I could hear every conversation as people walked by our door, too, though the courtyard was mostly empty during our stay. I wondered if the front desk would start getting noise complaints when the place is more crowded with late-night revelers. (Our lesbian friends won again on this point; they found earplugs on their pillows upon check-in.)

Also, since these courtyards will provide most of the common space (the lobby’s lounge area is pretty small), bad weather is likely to hinder socializing.

But there’s always XL for that. The club, run by the promoter John Blair, is a 14,000-square-foot complex comprising one bar facing 42nd Street, the sunken dance floor, two more bars, a V.I.P. seating area and a huge D.J. booth.

A cabaret space with tables some nights and a giant dance party others, the club was little more than a month old but was in full swing by midnight on the night I stayed.

Watching the crowd (mixed but mostly male) I was reminded of the hotel’s goal: to provide a place that is not just gay friendly but that is out and proud — or, as Mr. Reisner told me on the phone a few days after my stay, “a place that was built from the gay point of view from the ground up.”

The Out certainly seems gay in terms of the balance of gay to straight guests (about 80 percent of them are gay, Mr. Reisner said), and based on the scene I saw at the club and the staff of mostly model-pretty men.

There is also a more-abstract measure. As Cristian Bonetto, a travel writer for [Lonely Planet](#), told me in a recent e-mail, some gay travelers seek “an all-out, proactive ‘green light’ to be themselves,” and the Out surely offers this.

Mr. Reisner said he specifically wanted to do something better and more unapologetically gay than the smaller gay inns of yesteryear. Below are some thoughts on a few of those, and the other places I recently checked out.