

New York Project Spotlight

# At Walker Hotel Tribeca, Renaissance Revival Meets Downtown Cool

The luxe-yet-cozy Manhattan hotel did not skimp on high design when revamping its classic building

By Carly Olson

November 28, 2019



A pair of sofas face off in the lobby of Walker Hotel Tribeca.  
Photo: Adrian Gaut

It's early Thursday morning, and the lobby of Walker Hotel Tribeca is already buzzing. Hot tea in hand, I'm joined on a velvet sectional by two bright-eyed young tourists and a fellow laptop-bearing woman starting her work day. Stylish New Yorkers slip in and out among the hotel guests to grab Blue Bottle coffee. But this is hardly just a spot to be seen; the warm, inviting lobby is packed with covetable design, including Pierre Jeanneret chairs and luxe Børge Mogensen sofas perched atop colorful rugs.

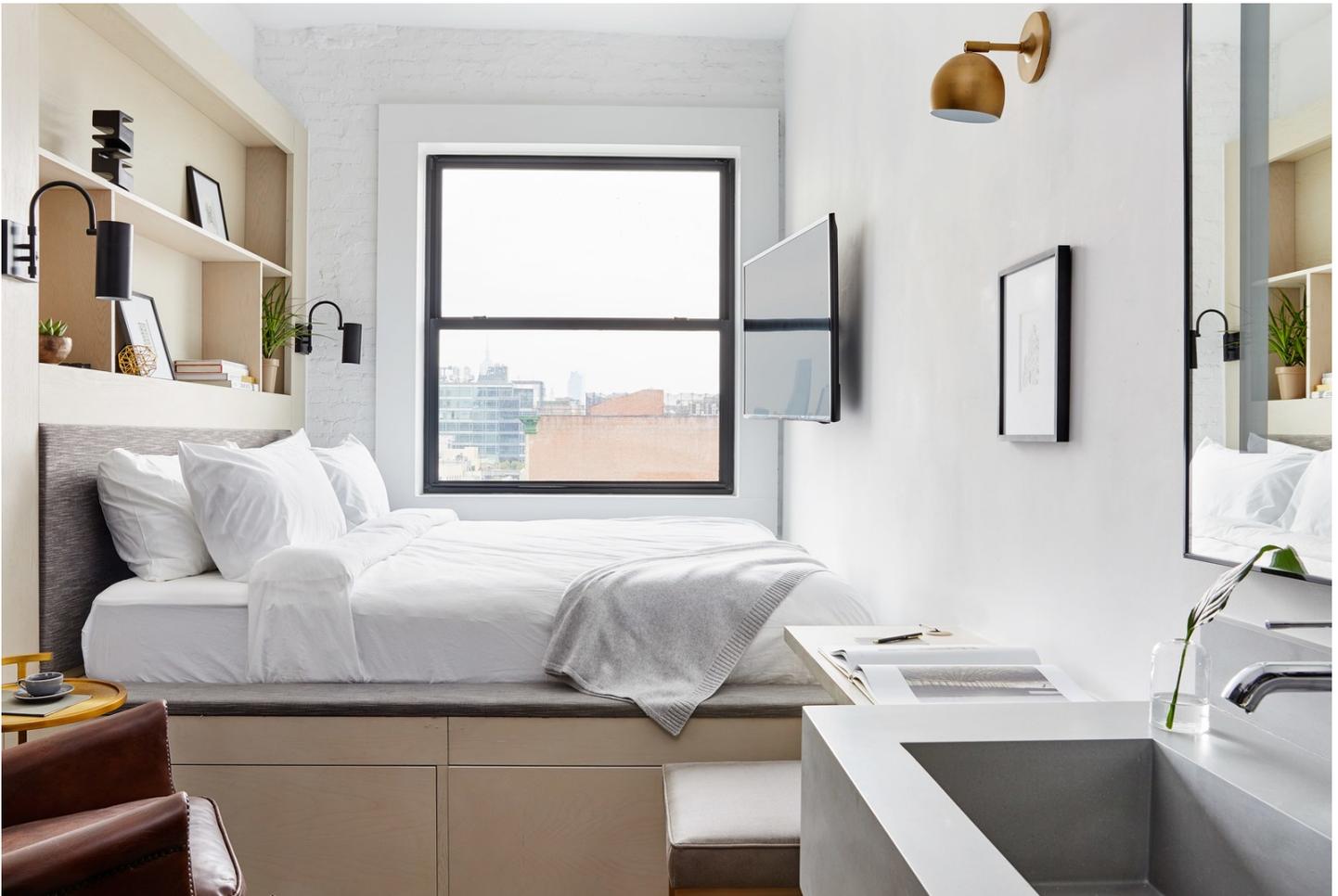
This is Walker Hotels' second outpost (the first is less than two miles up the road in Greenwich Village), which is owned and operated by hospitality company Bridgeton. The 171-room hotel offers a variety of room types, from lofted queens to corner kings with views of the midtown or downtown skylines, all gussied up with rich leather armchairs, herringbone wood floors, and baths lined with Carrara marble subway tiles. By early next year, six restaurants, cafes, and bars will be open on the property, including a rooftop bar in the spring. AD PRO caught up with with Conor O'Byrne—Bridgeton's VP of development and design—to hear about how he honored the building's storied past while dressing it up for the present.

**AD PRO: Tell me about the architectural bones of the building. How did the design team work with these features?**

Conor O'Byrne: The building was originally designed by William H. Birkmire—probably most well-known for the building that houses the Strand bookstore—120 years ago. When one thinks of a Tribeca Renaissance Revival building, his buildings capture the image. In an area known for remarkable architecture, the building had strong bones, and we saw great potential. The gorgeous ornamental iron and limestone façade was covered in graffitied faux stone and an aluminum storefront, the interior plaster detailing had been hidden by acoustical ceiling tile, and the ornate metalwork and stair detailing were covered up to hide other problems.

**AD PRO: What things stayed and what had to go?**

CO: We restored everything possible. We kept the desirable high ceilings, large windows, and unobstructed open floors. We kept all of the finishes. We even had computers scan the handrails to create perfectly matched curves of what would have been originally installed. We replicated the lobby moldings in the traditional way, using plaster and burlap to adhere them to the ceilings. Even the parapet at the roof was rebuilt utilizing solid four-inch bluestone coping, in lieu of precast or metal flashing caps. The original service elevator was still functioning when we purchased the property. We rode it during our original tour, but sadly it had to go.



A guest room at Walker Hotel Tribeca.  
Photo: Read McKendree

**AD PRO: You must know a thing or two about what travelers really care about. What were the most important features in each guest room?**

CO: A great bed, a great shower, and quiet. We know that a hotel shower needs to be better than the shower in your primary residence. So we gave every unit a rain shower and hand showers. We invested in the bathroom tile—a mosaic herringbone at the floors and heavily veined Carrara on the walls. In addition, we splurged on really comfortable and luxurious mattresses in every room.



Pierre Jeanneret Chandigarh chairs join an Osvaldo Borsani shelving unit in the lobby.

Photo: Adrian Gaut

**AD PRO: The lobby has a stacked lineup of covetable design furniture. What pieces might design lovers geek out over?**

CO: The lobby bar, which serves cocktails and espresso, is a sequoia-brown brushed-marble altar loaded with wildflowers. To its right, a matching marble fireplace is flanked by rosewood Osvaldo Borsani shelving loaded with art books from Assouline, more vases of wildflowers, and other curios. And there are conversational groupings of midcentury classics, such as Børge Mogensen sofas, Pierre Jeanneret loungers, and Philippe Bestenheider's Lui 5 chairs, all upholstered in a cool palette of Schumacher velvets, ikats, and linens.

Anchoring the space is a midnight blue velvet Milo Baughman sectional that wraps around a custom Nero Marquina coffee table from Withers and Grain. Beyond it sits a Saarinen tulip table surrounded by a collection of Roland Rainer chairs. Playful, sculptural light fixtures and a collection of custom rugs from Patterson Flynn Martin gently divide and evolve the space.



A staircase brings guests down to reception from the hotel's entrance at street level.

Photo: Adrian Gaut

**AD PRO: The reception desk is below street level, down a twisting stair. What was the design idea behind this?**

CO: We thought that separating the check-in process would allow the social area to be more inviting. The Walker's entrance is between floors, and the lobby is elevated off the street. The original check-in was slated for the lobby, but we moved it down half a flight of stairs to a mullioned, walnut alcove. We enlarged the staircase, opened up the floor between the floors, and made it a proper entry into the building.

**AD PRO: How was it designing a hotel for Tribeca's distinct neighborhood vibe and style?**

CO: We didn't want to intrude into the neighborhood by creating something that was out of place and character, which we feel we are seeing more and more of these days. We feel we brought life back to this building, and crafted interiors that merge all of Tribeca's best qualities.

## Project Details

**Name:** Walker Hotel Tribeca

**Design Team:** Bridgeton (design lead); Cycle Projects (restaurant); John McCormick Design (subterranean bar)

**Size:** 62,000 square feet

**Location:** Tribeca, New York

**Project timeline:** “Three years, with F&B spaces still to come.”

**Biggest challenge:** “Working with a building that was not square. Every corner is slightly off 90 degrees, to accommodate the block layout from when Canal Street was an actual canal.”

**Strangest source:** “For our subterranean cocktail lounge, we found a 19th-century Gibson oak icebox that we procured from a man named Doc in the mountains of Tennessee.”

**Biggest-ticket item:** “Besides the bluestone at the parapet, the Osvaldo Borsani shelving unit in the lobby. It was a splurge, but the best design decision made.”

**Most interesting thing on your project mood board:** “A Bollinger B2.”