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# The Boutique Hotel Concept

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*In addition to the 207 residential units in the tower, the MahaNakhon will feature the Bangkok EDITION, a 159-room boutique hotel catering to a growing global clientele that seeks unique accommodations served by responsive, down-to-earth staff. The hotel was conceived by Ian Schrager, an entrepreneur who started the boutique hotel trend back in the 1980s, and has since partnered with Marriott International to bring the concept to numerous locations around the world. Occupying the lowest floors of the MahaNakhon, rooms at the EDITION will reflect the unique conditions of Bangkok, featuring a regional materiality brought to life by the design philosophy of renowned architect Kengo Kuma, who was designated as the lead interior designer for the project. Along the first six levels, a number*

*of hotel amenities will take advantage of the tower's juted pixelation, with outdoor seating and gathering spaces providing a visual connection to the ground plane of the site. The boutique hotel phenomenon has proliferated over the past few decades, due in no small part to the continued efforts of Ian Schrager, who transitioned from the owner of one of the world's most successful nightclubs to the designer of unique, personalized hotels. Schrager's experience in this industry are driving the EDITION brand, and his story provides a glimpse of what's in store for the Bangkok EDITION in the MahaNakhon.*

## What is a Boutique Hotel?

Boutique hotels have a specific set of characteristics that make them stand out

from typical hotels. To start, boutique hotels are limited in size, although there is not a clear consensus regarding the number of rooms they contain. Generally, boutique hotels are larger than a bed and breakfast, which often feature 10 rooms or less. On the other end of the scale, they usually offer no more than 150 rooms. The size of the hotel is very important, because the ultimate goal is to provide an intimate, personal experience for guests. This is something innately lacking in standard hotel chains, which generally operate on a large scale with greater than 200 rooms. This discrepancy in size has a number of implications that make the boutique concept stand out, from the level of service provided, to the efficiency of hotel operations. Boutique hotels also have much greater flexibility in where they can be located in an urban context (Harrison, n.d.).

It follows that with a more personal experience comes better service. Boutique hotels pride themselves on having responsive staff that are quick to acknowledge requests and are comparable in aptitude to those found in five-star luxury establishments. This also comes as a result of having fewer rooms and a larger staff-to-guest ratio. The specific services that are carried out by staff in each hotel vary widely by location, but all have unique strategies for making guests feel comfortable and welcome.

Critical to the boutique hotel concept are the unique themes, styles, and designs that they incorporate. In fact, the attention paid to interior décor is one of their biggest draws. It is common for each hotel to hire a well-known artist or architect to assist

Left: Interior of the Clift Hotel, San Francisco.

Source: Ian Schrager Company

Opposite: Lobby at the EDITION London. Source: Nikolas Koenig







with the fit-out, creating individual flare and a way to impart a sense of exclusivity to an equally individualistic clientele. Unlike conventional hotels and the clean, almost sterile environments of contemporary five-star institutions, boutique hotels are often eccentric, whimsical, and to some, a bit quirky. This emphasis has led to boutique hotels also becoming known as “design hotels,” as their design is often their most central defining feature. Thus, although the majority of boutique hotels are privately owned, those that belong to a larger chain are commonly designed to be completely unique from their counterparts.

Another essential component of the boutique hotel is location. Due to their size, boutique hotels can be located in some of the most vibrant and attractive areas of a city. They can also be located in quiet, picturesque neighborhoods, blending in seamlessly to the typology of their surroundings. In New York City, a number of aging buildings have been converted into boutique hotels, not only for their 20th-century charm, but their unbeatable vicinity to attractions, landmarks, and public transportation systems.

It is also common for these hotels to incorporate destination restaurants and bars, with offerings that attract a much wider audience than those just staying at the hotel. Their themes are acutely represented in the décor of the spaces and the menus, which are often prepared by celebrity chefs and barmen.

Ultimately, the boutique hotel concept reflects the refined desires of global travelers, who have become weary of the “manufactured” hotel experiences replicated identically around the world. Instead, they want to be instilled with a sense of adventure in their accommodations. They want to be enveloped by the unfamiliarity of their location, but with a level of service commensurate with that of a five-star hotel. Perhaps no one predicted this market shift more than Ian Schrager, who started the boutique hotel trend back in the 1980s with the Morgans in New York City.

#### About Ian Schrager

Emerging from Syracuse University with a Bachelor’s of Art in 1968 and John’s University School of Law in 1971, Ian Schrager began his professional life as a lawyer, practicing

for three years before making a major career change. It was at Syracuse University that Schrager met Steve Rubell, a fellow fraternity brother that would later become his business partner. Together, Rubell and Schrager opened the Enchanted Garden, a disco club in Queens that was widely successful when it opened in 1975 (Raz, 2014).

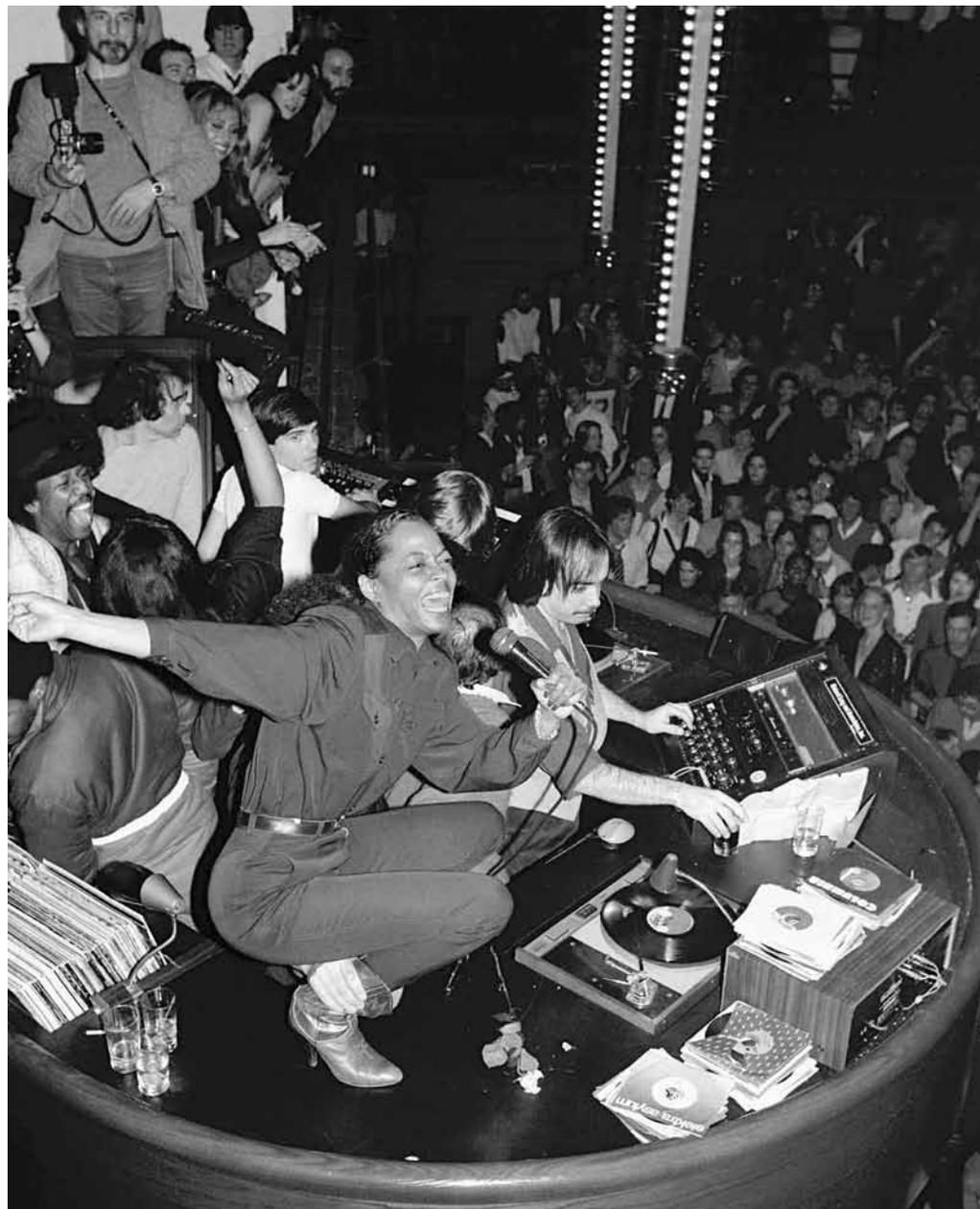
In an interview with *The Talks* in 2014, when Schrager was asked about this career transition, he said “I was a lawyer for a couple of years, but I won a very big case very quickly and then I think I got bored with it. I didn’t become a lawyer out of love, I became a lawyer because I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do. I think as you are growing up, deciding what you want to do is really the process of elimination rather than gravitating towards something, until you land on what really makes you happy. I realized that when I was driving around Manhattan and saw people waiting in line to get into a nightclub and I thought, ‘Wow! That is a business I want to get into.’” (The Talks, 2014).

Not long after witnessing the success of Enchanted Garden, Rubell and Schrager decided to open a club in Manhattan, but

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not just any nightclub; this was Studio 54, which despite only being open for two years became one of the most well known clubs in the world. When asked about his concept for the nightclub, Schrager said “I did a nightclub I wanted to go to. I wanted to go to a great party with a lot of energy in the air. I didn’t want to be around a lot of rich people, a lot of old people, young people. I wanted that kind of energy, that kinetic spark that happens. I was never comfortable going into a nightclub that you went to meet girls. It felt very contrived to me. So I did the kind of nightclub where you could be anonymous or you could meet someone, you could dance or you could do nothing and be perfectly comfortable. So that was the nightclub we did” (The Talks, 2014).

It wasn’t long before Schrager and Rubell went into the hotel business, applying their knack for tuning in to the swing of popular culture to create a completely unique lodging experience. Speaking with MR Porter in 2013, Schrager confessed, “You know, we got into the hotel business by accident. When we sold Studio 54, we were given promissory notes that the owner couldn’t pay, so we traded them for a hotel



Bottom: The first of Ian Schrager's boutique hotels, Morgans, New York. Source: Ian Schrager Company

Opposite Top: The upscale pool at the Delano Hotel, Miami Beach. Source: Ian Schrager Company

Opposite Bottom: Guest room at the Paramount Hotel, New York. Source: Ian Schrager Company



he owned."This hotel would end up being Morgans, considered to be the world's first boutique hotel. Schrager and Rubell enlisted the interior design expertise of Andréé Putnam to instill the hotel with a timeless, tasteful ambience. Checkerboard patterns, colorful lighting, and an assortment of comfortable, yet style furnishings define the public areas of the hotel (Rawsthorn, 2013).

When Metropolis asked about how his hotels remain relevant, Schrager said "I did my first hotel, Morgans, in 1982. The design there is just as compelling and relevant now as it was then. And now I've come full cycle. I started out work with Andréé Putnam. I went to a European – even though it was considered treacherous at the time – because I wanted a new aesthetic. But it was also classic, old-fashioned good taste. And now, having gone through my Phillippe Starck years – with the one-line jokes and tricks and irony, which was necessary then, because I was looking to be noticed – I don't think it's necessary anymore, so I find myself going back to the approach I had at Morgans. If something is really well done, it's the antithesis of trendy. It may be provocative, it may be out there on the edge, but if it's well done it will stand the test of time, and be just as relevant in thirty or forty years" (Pedersen, 2013).

Rubell and Schrager went on to open a number of hotels, including the Royalton Hotel and Paramount Hotel in New York City. After the death of Steve Rubell in 1989, Schrager continued to champion the concept of the "hotel as lifestyle," with a number of openings: the Delano Hotel in Miami, which presented a new take on the typical urban resort; the Mondrian Hotel in West Hollywood; the Clift Hotel in San Francisco; and the St. Martins Lane and Sanderson Hotels in London, among others. After selling the Morgans Hotel Group in 2005, he went on to form the Ian Schrager Company, which develops and operates a number of hotels and luxury residences around the world, most recently



the PUBLIC Chicago hotel. Now, Schrage is also collaborating with Marriott International to develop up to 100 boutique hotels around the world, one of which will be located in the MahaNakhon (Ian Schrage Company, 2015).

### The EDITION Hotels Concept

EDITION Hotels marks the next chapter in the boutique hotel story. Ian Schrage conceived the new brand in partnership with Marriott International. It combines the personal, intimate, individualized, and unique lodging experience that Schrage is known for with the global reach, operational expertise, and scale of Marriott. This delicate balancing act brings together, for the very first time, not only great design and true innovation, but also personal, friendly, modern service, and outstanding one-of-a-kind food, beverage, and entertainment offerings.

The concept, the brainchild of the new partners, addresses new cultural and social imperatives that Schrage says have emerged. This brand reflects these changing lifestyles and caters to a vast underserved market of guests expecting a unique experience, not merely a place to sleep. "Together Marriott and I have a new vision





Left: Relaxation room at the EDITION Istanbul.  
Source: Nikolas Koenig

Bottom: Berner's Tavern at the EDITION London.  
Source: Nikolas Koenig

Opposite Bottom: Lobby at the EDITION Miami.  
Source: Nikolas Koenig

and plan to radically rethink and catapult the boutique/lifestyle category hotel into the present by capturing the spirit of the times," said Schragger. "People today are sophisticated and they understand good design, quality, originality, and commitment to excellence. They will not accept something derivative and they want the ethos and soul of a hotel to be authentic and have character. They also expect and deserve impeccable, modern, and gracious personalized service that is at the same time luxurious yet down to earth. It is the ultimate balancing act of these apparent contradictions to create a hotel that simultaneously specific and customized yet universal. We intend to make this type of lodging widely accessible and available for the first time in the key lodging destinations across the globe and to everybody around the world who wants it" (Ian Schragger Company, 2015).



Each of the hotels, with its individuality, authenticity, and originality reflects the best of the cultural and social milieu of its location and time. According to Schragger, the brand's unifying aesthetic is in its approach and attitude to the modern lifestyle rather than its appearance, with design and architecture derived from the scale, location, and feel of the individual properties. "The brand is about an attitude, about a feeling rather than a look," he said. "Sophisticated public spaces, finishes, design, and details serve the experience, not drive it." Under their terms of agreement, which is non-exclusive, the partners divide responsibilities, with Schragger leading the effort on concept, design, marketing, branding, food and beverage, as well as other forms of entertainment. Marriott oversees the development process, and operates and manages the completed hotels. A diverse set of world-renowned architects and designers are recruited to create one-of-a-kind buildings spanning the complete range of project types, from new construction, to conversions, to gut renovations.

EDITION Hotels have already been opened in London, Istanbul, Miami, and New York. Plans are in place to open locations in Sanya, Bangkok, Gurgaon, Abu Dhabi, Shanghai, Wuhan, Times Square, West Hollywood, and Bali. The Bangkok location in the MahaNakhon is scheduled to open in 2016 along with the residences in the tower. Kengo Kuma has been appointed as the lead interior designer for the project, and has collaborated closely with Ian Schrager on the final concept. As with all hotels under the EDITION brand – and boutique hotels in general – the EDITION Bangkok will be an upscale reflection of its unique location. As the tallest tower in the country, and one that features a radically original form, there couldn't have been a better home for the latest installment in the boutique hotel phenomenon.



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