

The New York Times



Photographs by Nicole Hongisto/The New York Times

The hotel's next-door neighbor has sued the owner of 60 Thompson over its use of the neighbor's basement.

A Hotel With Buzz, or Is It a Din?

Along With the Glamour, Noise Complaints in SoHo

By DAVID W. CHEN

It is one of the brightest new stars in Manhattan's hotel firmament, with its stylish decor and monogrammed toilet paper. It is one of SoHo's hottest traffickers in bohemian sang-froid, too, with its celebrity guests and regular bar crowd of aesthetes. Russell Crowe liked the \$3,500-a-night penthouse duplex so much, he offered to buy it.

But just off the main stage, beyond the wide-angle lenses of the paparazzi's cameras, the Thompson Street hotel is attracting notice these days for a far less glamorous reason: its supposedly shabby treatment of its neighbors.

First there was the construction of the hotel itself, which neighbors say caused structural damage to nearby buildings. Then there were complaints about the hotel's use of the basement next door. But worst of all, there was the concussive noise from the hotel's revelers, night after late night, that compelled some sleep-deprived neighbors to walk over to the hotel in their nightgowns, begging for quiet. "It's like taking the worst neighbor in your apartment building, and multiplying it by a thousand," said David Ruth, who lives next door, at 64 Thompson Street.

This is a pronouncement that the hotel's owner, Jason Pomeranc, and chief operating officer, Stephen C. Brandman, are eager to challenge. They say that they are very sensitive to community concerns, and are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to muffle the noise. But they also say they feel exasperated, adding that many of the complaints have been exaggerated or distorted by a small band of cranky neighbors who have opposed the hotel from Day 1. "It's been a bit of a mob mentality, this piling on, and I really feel victimized in this process at this point," Mr. Pomeranc said. "Some people are always going to be antiprogress, antidevelopment, antichange."

In New York, neighbors must tolerate some sights, sounds and smells of other neighbors as part of the social contract for living in such close quarters. But when some behavior becomes "too much," battle lines are drawn. The bad blood between the Thompson hotel and its neighbors is thus a classic New York tale of discord. So elected officials

The 12-story, \$25 million hotel, right, opened in 2001 on a mostly residential stretch. Its second-floor bar, below, has drawn complaints over loud music.



Exp. Li Wang/The New York Times

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are beginning to weigh in.

"This is the worst violator we've seen in the neighborhood, and I've seen many awful violations," said City Councilman Alan J. Gerson, who represents the SoHo district but has not yet met the hotel's management. "It's pure inconsideration and greed at the expense of neighborly quality of life."

The 12-story hotel — officially called 60 Thompson, after its address — is on a mostly residential stretch of Thompson between Spring and Broome Streets that, until recently, was saturated with longtime Italian-American immigrants. The hotel's site — once a forlorn metal shop — had such poor soil that contractors had to dig deep into the bedrock and sink caissons.

Neighborly relations started badly when residents said that the hotel's construction resulted in cracks in their walls and sent rats and cockroaches scurrying into their apartments. In 1999, the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development found 72 violations in one building alone, 64 Thompson; Barry Mallin, a lawyer representing the tenants, said most of them were apparently related to construction.

Once the \$25 million hotel did open in February 2001, however, it quickly won acclaim for everything from the sleek staff uniforms, designed by Nino Cerruti, to the sumptuous rooms, which offered Frette bed linens and Dean & DeLuca gourmet snacks. Last year, Condé Nast Traveler called 60 Thompson, with rates starting at \$370 a night, one of the five hottest hotels in the world.

Several local businesses, meanwhile, have credited the hotel for reinvigorating the block, and making it safer, thanks to round-the-clock doormen and high-end customers. "I think it's been good for the neighborhood," said Henry Buhl, founder of the SoHo Partnership, a nonprofit group that helps homeless people find jobs and housing. "It wasn't so good down there before, but it's coming around now because they now take care of it, and it's clean."

But if the hotel's appearance has been impeccable, its attitude has been imperious, even arrogant, say neighbors, who range from tenants paying \$350 a month for rent-stabilized apartments to wealthy artists in Olympian lofts worth millions. Since the hotel opened, neighbors have complained incessantly about the loud music, particularly from a second-floor bar that is only partially covered by a bamboo-like canopy.

They have also complained about hotel guests spilling out onto the street and acting boorishly until 3:45 a.m. or later, said Irene Da Costa, president of the Thompson Street Community Association. Marilyn Karp, an art professor at New York

Local businessmen say the hotel makes its block safer.

University, sleeps in a bedroom facing the rear of the hotel. "When you're in bed," she said, "it's concert-hall realism, and shutting the windows doesn't help, even if you turn the air-conditioning on."

Because of the nature, gravity and frequency of complaints, the New York State Liquor Authority has decided to hold off renewing the hotel's liquor license, said J. Mark Anderson, deputy commissioner for the authority. And in the last year or so, the Department of Environmental Protection cited the hotel three times for noise violations, totaling \$12,800 in fines. "It is a lot for one establishment, and it screams out that something has to be done about it," said Charles G. Sturcken, a spokesman for the department.

In response, the hotel says that it is spending \$300,000 to \$400,000 on noise abatement measures like a glass enclosure for the second-floor bar, extra sound insulation and an upgraded stereo system that mutes vibrations.

"We're doing all this stuff because we don't want to disturb our neighbors," Mr. Pomeranc added.

And yet, Mr. Pomeranc and Mr. Brandman are frustrated that they have become targets for people who may not like gentrification. Sometimes, Mr. Brandman said, people even complain about "the clinking of the silverware in our restaurant as a noise issue."

"You have to be realistic," Mr. Brandman said. "We're near Greenwich Village, not Greenwich, Conn."

Unfortunately for all parties involved, noise is not the only nettlesome issue. From the outset, the tenants of 64 Thompson have groused about the fact that their landlord leased the basement to the hotel for storage space of food, Durafire logs and employee lockers. They have also complained that the backyard, already holding some of the hotel's air-conditioning units, is also where hotel workers smoke and chat loudly late into the night, said Mr. Mallin, the tenants' lawyer.

So the owner has sued the hotel in housing court for using the basement space illegally. The tenants have sued the owner for jeopardizing their health and safety. Both cases are scheduled to be heard again in Manhattan housing court at the end of this month.

In response, the hotel says that while it believed its use of the facilities would hold up in court, it removed the employee lockers last week as a gesture of good will. At the same time, though, the hotel says that its critics may be failing to consider the broader impact of its success.

The hotel pays \$2 million a year in taxes and has more than 100 employees. It is sold out nearly every night, and has served as an economic boost for the battered post-9/11 economy in Lower Manhattan.

Mr. Pomeranc still hopes that the relationship between the hotel and its neighbors can improve.

"It's very frustrating, and I sometimes say to myself, 'Could I have said hello to more people on the street?'" he said. "But then I realize, the crux of the matter is, the core group of opponents to this hotel is the same core group that has opposed most of the development in SoHo. So there's only so much you can do."