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Grand Hyatt Goes for Boutique Look Hoping to Attract New Yorkers

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New York Central bar and restaurant debuts as part of the Midtown hotel's \$130 million facelift project

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By Donna M. Aioldi

Special to DNAinfo

MIDTOWN — The Grand Hyatt New York opened its new bar, lounge, and restaurant at Grand Central Thursday night, looking more like a chic boutique hotel than a large chain.

Noting the popularity of the hotel-as-hangout vibe at the Standard, Ace and Jane hotels, among other hot downtown properties, the global chain decided to step up its game. It hired architecture and design firm Bentel & Bentel, known for its contemporary restaurant designs, including The Modern, Eleven Madison Park and Craft, to revamp the 220-seat space.

New York Central is just one stage of the hotel's massive \$130 million renovation project that will upgrade every aspect of the property when it's completed in 2011. The aim for New York Central is to be a draw for local New Yorkers, not just hotel guests and the after-work Westchester and Connecticut commuter sets.

The glass-enclosed venue, which juts out over 42nd Street, features a curved, illuminated white bar; white leather bar stools and light-grey leather lounge seats; a sleek custom-made silver chandelier with tiny lights that extends over the entire bar and lounge and continues into the dining room; and a chef's table with an elevated view into the open kitchen.

Chef Christian Ragano, formerly of award-winning Chicago restaurant TRU and NoMI at the Park Hyatt Chicago,

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heads up the kitchen, which fully opens Friday, pastry chef Katzie Hamilton hails from the Breslin at the Ace.

Ragano's bar menu specializes in artisan charcuterie and cheeses and dishes like Halibut Ceviche, Eggplant Caponata, and Smoked Squash Crostini with walnuts, Gruyere, watercress and roasted shallot vinaigrette. Definitely not your typical hotel pub grub.

There's also a wine gallery with Napa Technology WineStation dispensers, where guests can serve themselves pre-measured samples, half glasses or full glasses of wines from around the world. Prices range from \$4 a taste to \$40 and more for rare vintages, with most glasses priced between \$11 and \$21. Beers are \$7 for domestic, \$8 for imported.

Cocktails are \$15 and include signature drinks such as the Mr. Big (a spin on the now-tired Cosmopolitan) with Death's Door Vodka, Combi Orange Liqueur, Lime, Guava Juice and Orange Bitters; the Hibiscus Kiss, with Death's Door Vodka, Lemon, Champagne, and an edible Hibiscus flower; and the Elliot Ness, a twist on the Manhattan, with Maker's Mark Bourbon, Carpano Antica, Punt E Mes and Peach Bitters.

There's a special \$11 Premium Cocktail Hour 3 to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday on select beverages.

On its first night, the bar drew a crowd of guests, commuters and locals.

"I really like the lighting and the good music; it's clubby but without the pounding bass," said Upper East Side resident Jaime Carolan, who was meeting friends from an event at the hotel. "And the bartenders are really attentive, unlike other hotel bars."

Still, it's going to be a challenge to allure local New Yorkers to the location adjacent to Grand Central Station.

"Sure, you can see the traffic on 42nd Street, but the view is nothing compared to that at the Gansevoort or other downtown hotel bars," said Carolan, who is in her 30s. "And \$15 is a bit high for a glass of wine for regular New Yorkers. But, you know, after two or three drinks, no one cares what the drinks cost."

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