

# THE TIMES

## From SoHo boho to literary chic



*Hip Hotels* author  
**Herbert Ypma** picks  
his five favourite  
New York hotels  
from his latest book



### The Mercer

SoHo is the only area in Manhattan without skyscrapers. The tallest buildings are a modest six storeys. These light-filled warehouses were once inhabited almost exclusively by industry.

A decade ago André Balazs, hotel impresario and owner of LA's Chateau Marmont, acquired a red-brick building on the corner of Prince and Mercer Streets, in the heart of SoHo. The Mercer is the first hotel to offer a taste of "loft living", an urban signature that is original to New York City. The conventional notion of a hotel room has been abandoned. Instead every room feels like a loft, with plenty of space and natural light — exactly what attracted

the artists who first gave this area its distinctive character.

A loft demands a design approach that enhances rather than fills the space. That is why Balazs chose to work with Parisian designer Christian Liaigre. The combination of handsome, pared-down furniture in African wenge wood, neutrally toned textiles, simple lamps, dark wooden floors, pure white walls, crisp white linen, and a hint of lilac leather on elegant banquettes is exactly what was needed — a subtle, clean and classic approach that steers clear of furniture fashion.

The Mercer Kitchen, a restaurant in the basement, creates the feel of eating in the kitchen. The ambience and the cuisine of chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten

has made the Mercer Kitchen one of the most consistent restaurants in SoHo. The matte-black crowd of ad agency staff, art directors, photographers and fashion people may have shunted out the artists, but SoHo still has an attitude you won't find on the Upper East Side. For Nathan Silver, author of *Lost New York*: "If anything should stand forever as a radiant image of the essential New York, it ought to be these (SoHo's) commercial buildings." Continually evolving in response to contemporary needs, they are "the best and purest that New York has to offer".

*The Mercer*, 147 Mercer Street, New York, NY 10012 (001 212 966 6060, [www.mercerhotel.com](http://www.mercerhotel.com)). Room rates from £250.