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GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

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Soho House

Quintessentially English style with a Catalan twist, the private members' club makes its Barcelona debut

Leman Locke

Serviced apartment living meets the lifestyle hotel experience in a new brand from SACO

Barry Sternlicht

The businessman with creative talents discusses the new brands that are shaking up the industry





Soho House

BARCELONA

The latest Soho House is a conversion of an 18th century building overlooking Port Vell, its interiors giving the group's signature look a Catalan twist.

Words: Matt Turner | Photography: Courtesy of Soho House

It has taken the backing of two billionaires – fashion mogul Richard Caring, who bought out many of the club's original founders in 2008, and American investor Ron Burkle, who acquired a 60% stake in 2012 – to really ramp up Soho House's overseas expansion. What was once a UK-centric group, with London clubs in Soho, Chiswick, Notting Hill and Shoreditch alongside countryside properties Babington House and Soho Farmhouse, has become more international in its outlook of late, with outposts launched in New York, Toronto, Los Angeles, Berlin, Chicago, Istanbul, and now Barcelona. Along the way, its recent houses have seen the model evolve from private members' clubs into something more akin to a fully-fledged hotel – though the guestrooms are only one element of a business that still generates the majority of its revenues from F&B and membership fees.

Such rapid expansion has put a strain on cashflow, as widely reported in the financial press. Yet the waiting list for membership, 32,000 strong at the last count, remains the envy of its competitors. And as it has increasingly invested in the real estate that houses its properties, through acquisition rather than lease, its investors stand to benefit from the upswing in property values that typically follows the launch of a Soho House in any up-and-coming neighbourhood.



Above and opposite: Areas open to hotel guests and members include the clubhouse on the fifth floor and a rooftop pool with stunning views over Port Vell

But perhaps the biggest juggling act for the group is not cashflow, but credibility. Retaining the exclusive cachet of Soho House is increasingly difficult as the brand becomes more familiar and its 65,000 strong membership continues to grow. Its founder Nick Jones believes the individuality of the different houses will be crucial as its rollout gathers pace. “Being non-corporate and not using a cookie cutter keeps things interesting,” he recently told New York property magazine *The Real Deal*. “As we’ve grown and entered new cities, there is always a great amount of research and feedback gathered, which influences everything from the overall design of the house to the details like the kind of music that is played within the club. The local inspiration means that each house feels individual.”

Its latest opening in Barcelona is very much a case in point. The design has been spearheaded by Jones himself, and an in-house design team overseen by Managing Director Vicky Charles and former European Design Director James Waterworth.

They have been careful to balance Soho House’s signature, quintessentially English style with authentic local influences. Inspiration was taken from classic Catalan design, with gothic architecture influences and double-height, vaulted ceilings. The lobby is a beautifully styled space with herringbone parquet floors, brick archways and a colourful blend of fabrics, rugs and

furnishings. Guestrooms have a modern but rustic look, with warm, Mediterranean colours and traditional Spanish patterned textiles. Bathrooms feel light and simple with local tiles, bronze fittings and Devon & Devon copper bathtubs. Furnishings throughout are a mix of mid-century European pieces with local antiques and custom-made designs from the Soho House team.

Applying this intensely bespoke approach across a property with 57 guestrooms is a challenge in itself. The collection of vintage ceramic lighting took over two years to amass in the run-up to opening. A huge antique rug, found in Madrid, was cut up and used in the public areas. Tiling for the fireplaces was sourced in the nearby Barri Gotic, whilst wallpapers are by Lewis & Wood.

This is not the largest house in the group, but the facilities are comprehensive. Another balancing act for Soho House to consider with any new opening is that of accessibility – which elements are members only, which are for hotel guests, and which are open to the public. In Barcelona, guests staying in the bedrooms have access to the private members’ spaces, including the fifth floor club area, the rooftop pool and Cowshed active gym, with its House Ride spinning classes and yoga studio. Public areas include a Cecconi’s restaurant on the ground floor and the Cowshed Relax spa with its impressive indoor pool and a design inspired by a traditional Spanish pharmacy.





Above: Guestrooms combine vintage lighting and antique furniture with authentic Spanish textiles

Additional areas available for private hire include a 36-seat screening room with velvet upholstered armchairs and footstools; the Green Room speakeasy in the basement; The Marina Room members' event space on the fifth floor; and La Mercé – an annexe to Cecconi's with its own lounge and bar.

Food is a mix of familiar Soho House staples (the flat iron chicken and avocado on toast are present and correct) alongside Spanish-influenced dishes such as Iberico pork presa, Galician beef tartare and a wide range of tapas.

In fact, the menu offers a taste of Soho House Barcelona in microcosm – built upon Anglo-American foundations instantly recognisable to its worldwide membership, but infused with authentically Spanish and Catalan flavours to attract guests from the surrounding city.

No doubt there will be spicier fare on offer when Soho House Mumbai opens later this year. Further Eastern expansion in Hong Kong and Tokyo has also been mooted. Closer to home, another Soho House will open in Amsterdam's historic canal belt. The 'Bunghuis', built in the 1930s as a trading office, will be converted to offer 79 guestrooms

with a spa and gym, screening room, restaurant, library and roof terrace.

But perhaps the company's most ambitious project to-date lies back in its London heartland. The Ned – a conversion of the former Midland Bank headquarters on Poultry – will feature a staggering nine restaurants, 252 guestrooms and extensive gym, spa and private hire spaces. A project on this scale has required the involvement of another investor – New York-based Sydell Group, owner of NoMad NYC, Freehand Miami and The Line in Los Angeles, amongst others.

Taking its moniker from the nickname of its original designer Sir Edwin Lutyens, The Ned will open in Spring 2017. Guestrooms channel early 20th century design with vintage pieces, hand-knotted Afghan rugs and rainforest showers. Ned's Club upstairs has a rooftop with a pool, canopy bar and restaurants. The original bank vault – made famous in James Bond movie Goldfinger – will house a subterranean lounge bar, complete with original safety deposit boxes.

Seven restaurants in the former Grand Banking Hall will offer cuisines to match Soho House's globespanning ambitions – ranging from British (Millie's Lounge) via New York (Zoblers Deli and the Grill Room) and California (Malibu Kitchen) to Japan (Kaia).

EXPRESS CHECKOUT: 57 guestrooms | 2 restaurants | 4 bars | Gym, spa, swimming pool and screening room | www.sohohousebarcelona.com
Owner / Operator: Soho House & Co | **Investors:** Ron Burkle, Richard Carin, Nick Jones | **Interior Design:** Soho House & Co In-House Design Team