

# Hit the heights

Space Copenhagen brings its distinctive brand of Scandinavian design to a long-awaited hotel in a Stratford skyscraper

A very large chimney is taking shape in Stratford. Not the sort of stark, industrial chimney you might imagine in this gritty part of east London, but rather a sculptural smokestack, nine metres tall. Located in the lobby of the new Stratford Hotel, which opens this spring, it will burn brighter than any blaze for miles around. This neighbourhood is not known for its homely feel, its tourists or its connection to nature – and both hotel and fire are original additions to the area, occupying the first six floors of the 42-storey Manhattan Loft Gardens skyscraper.

“Stratford is an industrial modern cityscape needing to be humanised,” says Peter Bundgaard Rützou, co-founder of the Danish architecture practice Space Copenhagen and the creator of the hotel’s interiors. “Nature is absent and the hotel lobby is enormous, with huge-scale windows. It needed to be anchored.” So, the real, crackling fire in a cold glass lobby is a grounding act. “When we stare at an open fire, we connect to something fundamental to our wellbeing,” adds Signe Bindslev Henriksen, Space Copenhagen’s second co-founder.

The pair, who have worked together since 2005, have created hotels with hygge before. Last year signalled their renovation of Copenhagen’s iconic Radisson Blu Royal Hotel, a 1960s timepiece by the late Arne Jacobsen, and their 11 Howard hotel in New York – all soft tones, tactile textures and materials, propped up by a crowd-pulling bar – has the pulse that other famous Manhattan haunts such as The Carlyle or The Chelsea once had. It’s one of the reasons

why Harry Handelsman, the visionary property developer and founder of the Manhattan Loft Corporation, chose them for The Stratford.

Manhattan Loft Gardens, a serrated, double-cantilevered skyscraper, is Stratford’s highest landmark by far. The views from the very top stretch as far as Richmond Hill, Crystal Palace and Alexandra Palace, with Essex and Surrey beyond. The views from the hotel, however, are less impressive; its neighbours are the Westfield shopping centre and the rather dreary remnants of the 2012 Olympic village. “The interiors scheme incorporates natural materials, a subtle palette and softer elements to counteract its surrounds,” explains Henriksen.

Sited above the hotel there are 248 apartments, ranging from £15m penthouses to £495,000 studio flats, as well as furnished lofts that can be rented nightly, weekly or monthly. “Because people are also living in the building, The Stratford has to accommodate residents as well as guests,” says Bundgaard Rützou. “The interdependency between the two throws up exciting possibilities.”

A destination restaurant, Allegra (run by the team behind Chiltern Firehouse), and the ground-floor Stratford Brasserie are required to provide spaces for all-day, all-mood socialising, while 24-hour room service, private catering and concierge services, meeting rooms and the hotel gym need to reach residents too. Likewise, hotel guests get to meet the locals, either in the bars and restaurants or sitting around the fire pits in the three sky gardens. Another talking

*Words*

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Facing page  
Signe Bindslev  
Henriksen and  
Peter Bundgaard  
Rützou of Danish  
architects Space  
Copenhagen





Facing page  
Space Copenhagen's oak, bronze and leather bench, and a mirror whose frame has been colour-matched to the walls to blend in  
*Image by Rich Stapleton*

Right  
One of the 42-storey building's three sky gardens

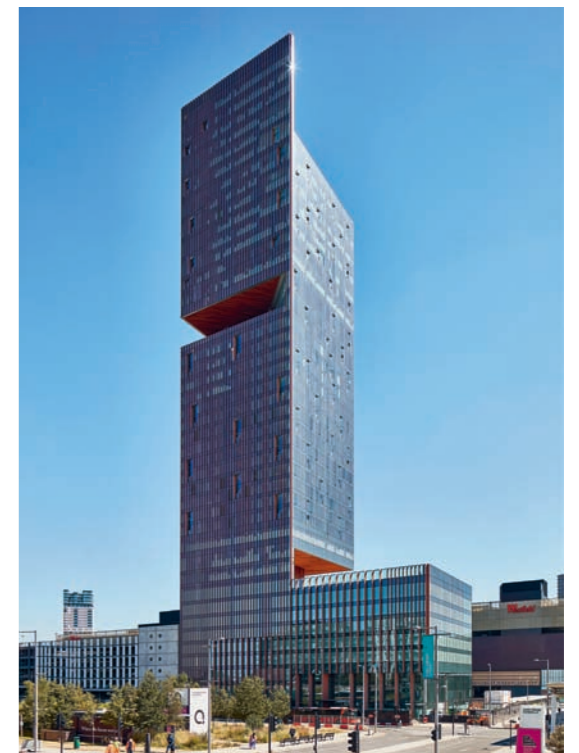
Below  
Architects SOM designed the double-cantilevered tower



point is a unique artwork by British designer Paul Cockside, consisting of 218 pieces of "paper" – which are actually made from solid-surface material – floating down from on high.

Handelsman bought the site in 2009, before Westfield and while the Olympic Park was still a pile of bricks. "The stereotype of a high-rise tenant is someone who lives in isolation, who doesn't really populate the building," he says. "Tenants at The Stratford Lofts are encouraged to get to know their neighbours; the entire building has been specifically designed to fuel social interaction, to make guests and residents feel part of a community."

Bundgaard Rützou says that "Harry's ambition of creating a community in the building is extremely interesting" – but it's a challenge, too. "Copenhagen also has its share of soulless developments; Ørestaden is an area of the city not dissimilar to Stratford, which 15 years on, is not seen as a success," he says. "It was badly planned and lacks personalised space – those small bike shops and coffee shops





Left  
Bindslev Henriksen  
and Bundgaard Rützou,  
who have worked  
together since 2005

Right  
A suite at The Stratford,  
which features a bed  
custom-designed by  
Space Copenhagen  
*Image by Rich Stapleton*



that create a sense of belonging and connect people. A lot of forward thinking has gone into Stratford, though, so I'm sure it will succeed." Connections to the rest of London are excellent and culture has also arrived in the area. When the Victoria & Albert Museum's V&A East opens in 2021, followed by a second Sadler's Wells, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and campuses for University College London and the London College of Fashion, an expected 1.5m more visitors will come to the area. The Stratford will be there to accommodate them.

"The fluidity between hotel and residential projects is a trend going both ways," observes Henriksen, citing Space Copenhagen's design

work on a residential project in Washington DC that will include some of the amenities of a hotel. Ongoing collaborations with furniture manufacturers such as Gubi, Stellar Works and Mater ensure that there's no shortage of elegant pieces, all with their trademark Scandinavian twist, for the interiors.

"We first saw the site of The Stratford three years ago. It was a cold, overcast day and the whole area looked uninhabited, except for one gigantic mall," says Bundgaard Rützou. "Now when we are there, we feel an overwhelming sense of the future. It's good. The collective debate needs to be about what's next, not what we have lost."