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Submitted by rodney on Wed, 01/18/2012 - 12:56pm

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Beto Sutter, John Blair, Brandon Voss & Tony Fornabaio

Alex Erikson, Photo: Wilsonmodels; Makeup by: Bryan Cantor

The guys behind XL Nightclub give Next Magazine a sneak peek of their soon-to-open Hell's Kitchen club space inside The Out NYC hotel.

It's a crisp, sunny Monday afternoon, and I'm heading to see the new XL Nightclub located in The Out NYC hotel in Hell's Kitchen. I walk west down 42nd Street and it occurs to me that I'll probably never be going to this place again under these same circumstances. Brandon Voss and Beto Sutter greet me outside. Voss is discussing final touches to the entrance of XL with a contractor. Sutter escorts me inside and the three of us walk through the main lobby for a tour. Immediately I realize my first thought—that I'd never be coming here on a Monday afternoon again—might have been premature. This place is much more than just a nightclub.

We breeze by the restaurant—at this point little more than a covered door—and past the hotel's lobby into the lounge area of XL. Voss shows me where videos will play on an upside-down pyramid screen above the bar during happy hour. We move to the entrance of the club where, because their neighbors happen to be the NYPD, they've devised a way for the club's line to be moved inside. They quickly show me the bathrooms. Lights still hadn't been installed—or at least they weren't on—but they seem to live up to the fish-tank enhanced johns of the old XL. Finally, we move into the main cabaret stage/dance-floor space. It's really not different than any other dance space in gay New York—except that it's enormous.

Say what you will about new version of the classic club and its accompanying hotel—and some vocal opponents have—the venture isn't what some have made it out to be. Yes, The Out NYC will probably be full of out-of-towners, but what hotel in New York isn't? Yes, the name is a little cheesy, but most of us missed the point: "out" is actually a clever reference to both the hotel's gay status and the fact that every room has outdoor access. To their credit, Beto Sutter, John Blair, Ian Reisner, Brandon Voss and Tony Fornabaio have done what so many bar and club owners in gay New York are trying to do these days: open a Hell's Kitchen location. And they've done it on a massive scale.

We find XL partner John Blair in a back room and sit down to talk about the club. There's a familial atmosphere in these back offices. Ted Arenas, who'll help manage the club, and developer Ian Reisner are in the next room discussing something, and two of Sutter's dogs bound in to greet me.

"Ian and I were out late one night and Ian said that they had the building," Sutter explains of XL's inception. "It took me a while to convince John [Blair] to come and see it. We thought, 'Oh, 42nd Street, next to a police precinct,'" Sutter laughs. But despite their initial hesitations, the space turned out to be just what they wanted. "We'd actually been looking for spaces for awhile, and we'd just about given up because of the community boards," Blair says. "You know, to get a liquor and cabaret license—[one] hadn't been issued in years." What they thought would initially be a problem—the boys in blue right next door—turned out to be a blessing in disguise: they had almost no trouble getting liquor and cabaret licenses.

After the original XL's closing in 2006, the pair knew that if they were ever going to resurrect their nightlife baby, they'd have to do something new. "John and I didn't want to do the same thing," Sutter recalls. "We didn't want to take on a project that would be just another bar or just another nightclub." And that's not what they plan to do.

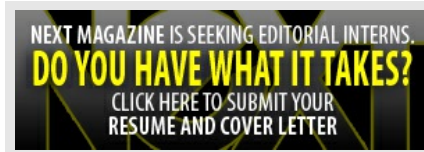
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They've installed a full lighting system on the club's vast stage, and will be able to modify the setup so that shows can be staged in different ways. They emphasize the importance of the cabaret several times, and I can tell Sutter is genuinely excited about that aspect of the club. "Beyond just the gay thing, there are a lot of really great cabaret rooms in New York, but none of them with the stage structure and lighting to do real stage shows. And that's the twist we put in on it," he tells me. Blair interjects, "We built it as if it were a cabaret and a nightclub too, not just a nightclub [that is also] a cabaret." Sutter is quick to remind me, "The shows at XL really became a staple of XL...so this [design] met both of those qualifications."

But while their location on 42nd Street seems to be a perfect fit in so many ways, the question remains: will they be able to get the cute Hell's Kitchen crowd to come the few blocks down and a few blocks west from the center of gay nightlife in that neighborhood? "You know, when we opened the original XL there was nothing—the Maritime Hotel [was] not even open, it was still the Covenant House—and everybody said [we were too far west]," Sutter says. And Voss reminds me that when he and Tony Fornabaio opened Club 57 at Providence, it was a trek for gays. "Who would have thought we could get all those gays all the way to 57th Street?" he reminisces. "I think it's time we gay up 42nd Street a little bit," Sutter laughs.

Rockit: XL Grand Opening at XL Nightclub, 512 W 42nd St (btwn 10th/11th Aves), Jan 27 at 10pm; \$10 with XL membership/\$15 general admission. Visit xlnightclub.com for more info.

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For the record.

Submitted by Sammi on Wed, 01/18/2012 - 7:07pm.

All the little bitter late ballroom queens who have bashed this club as well as the hotel need to shut the fuck up and go to hell. Nobody is holding a gun to your bitter, probably unattractive, crusty ass to go to the club. So don't ruin everyone else's good time with your miserable ass. For this place to be "so terrible" there are apparently over 3,500 people within a few blocks from the club signed up for membership cards. Just because your ugly bitter ass can't get the courage to hit the gay bars/clubs doesn't mean the rest of us are no longer interested in the experience. I'm so tired of bitter, catty fags poppin' mad shit because they have low self-esteem. Stay the fuck home because nobody wants to be bothered with your miserable ass on the dance floor. Nuff said!

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