

SLEEPER

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Leven

MANCHESTER

Brothers Joshua and Ben Senior join forces with Wellbrook Hospitality to launch the first in a series of hotels designed for living.

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Photography: © Mariell Lind Hansen (unless otherwise stated)

Having recently been named the third best city in the world by Time Out – beaten only by Amsterdam and San Francisco, and surpassing London in 13th place – the Northern Powerhouse of Manchester is on the up. Its hospitality scene too has seen dramatic growth in recent years, with new openings popping up left, right and centre.

Many of these openings have been conversions of heritage buildings, with developers looking to preserve the region's rich architectural history while creating urban hubs fit for the modern day. Such was the case for local entrepreneurs and brothers Joshua and Ben Senior, who – under their investment vehicle Branco Capital – purchased a 20th century building in the Gay Village nearly a decade ago with the aim of one day transforming it into a hotel.

Situated on the corner of Chorlton Street and Canal Street, the structure dates back to Manchester's industrial past and was first used as a cotton warehouse, before later taking shape as a brewery and comedy club. To reimagine the site, the brothers went in search of a partner that could help breathe new life into its walls while retaining a sense of character and charm. Enter Wellbrook Hospitality, the brainchild of industry innovators and former colleagues Timothy Griffin, PJ Kenny and Shanthan Balakrishnan, who cumulatively spent 20 years as senior leaders at Ennismore. Together, they have created design-led brand Leven, with Manchester marking the first in a global network of sites.

Taking its name from the Dutch phrase 'to live', Leven was born out of the notion that there is nothing more important



© Heiko Prigge

The lobby features green velvet sofas and soft leather armchairs, together with a brass-topped bar encased in emerald green scallop tiles and backed by steel shelving

than the current moment in time. So, it seems fitting that the group’s debut builds on the former life an existing property, retaining its red brick walls, cast iron columns and timber beams while bringing it up to date through slick materials and lighting.

“We crafted a design that not only honours the fabric of the building but has an essence that is scalable to future Leven sites,” says Griffin. “The interior space planning was informed by the original locations of the windows, historic entry points and direction of natural light.”

The journey through history begins from the get-go, with guests passing through an entrance that occupies the loading dock of the former warehouse before reaching the lobby. Here, they can kick back on green velvet sofas and soft leather armchairs, grab a coffee, or order a cocktail from a brass-topped bar encased in emerald green scallop tiles and backed by a blackened steel shelving.

Across the hall, a walkway leads to a lounge area geared towards co-working and socialising,

with a canteen-style wooden table anchoring the space and a corner sofa in turmeric velvet sitting beneath original artworks by Lillie Bernie. And it isn’t just here that art plays a key role in the visual narrative, with around 300 individual pieces displayed across the hotel.

“The use of art was two-fold,” Griffin explains. “Firstly, our selections represent the spirit of Leven – curating spaces that welcome a community of individuals, each unique in who they are – meaning the artwork is eclectic, inspiring and at times unexpected. Secondly, its mindful use adds a layer of atmosphere that is distinctly residential, putting guests at ease.”

This residential feel is most evident in the 42 rooms, which are split into four types: Life Size (standard bedroom); Living Space (one-bedroom suite); Living Large (one-bedroom duplex penthouse suite); and Living The Dream (two-bedroom duplex penthouse suite).

Accessed via corridors clad in floor-to-ceiling timber panels and painted a charming Farrow & Ball Card Room Green – which complements



soft textured carpeting and an industrial mesh ceiling – the rooms blend the structure’s industrial bones with sleek modern amenities, bringing together calming colour palettes, tactile fabrics, and materials like natural wood and stone to harmonise with the Victorian fabric of the former warehouse.

All feature oak parquet or timber floors, bespoke furniture and bathroom amenities by Grown Alchemist, whilst Naturalmat has supplied its 100% natural Barle mattresses, Skinny Salcombe bed base, pillows and duvets. Some rooms also boast freestanding bathtubs, while others have fully-equipped kitchens, with every appliance housed behind cabinetry. Those who would prefer to skip the cooking can even hire a private chef to do the honours as they cosy up in their complimentary, limited-edition Leven socks and take in the views of the city through Crittall-style windows.

“The interior design needed to be consistent with the brand pillars,” explains Griffin. “Our spaces are stylish and sophisticated but warm,

relaxed and homely – meaning they can be enjoyed on guest’s terms. We embraced the juxtaposition of raw materiality and more calming layers.”

Despite the transformation, working with a historic building meant the team were presented with a handful of unexpected challenges along the way, from the painstaking preservation of a six-storey façade – which at one stage, says Griffin, required more scaffold than any other project of its kind in the UK – or the elaborate moisture protection required in the sub-basements given the building’s proximity to the adjacent canal.

Come Spring, these sub-basements will be reborn as a restaurant and speakeasy-style cocktail bar with soaring ceilings, bringing yet another culinary hotspot to the Cottonopolis. For now, however, Leven is staying true to its ethos of living in the moment by using the space to showcase the work of nine Manchester creatives through a programme of subterranean exhibitions. A fitting way to continue its story.



EXPRESS CHECK-OUT

Owner: Branco Capital
Operator: Wellbrook Hospitality
Architecture: Halliday Meecham
Interior Design: Timothy Griffin, Joshua Senior
Lighting Design: By Form
Art Consultant: Wellbrook Hospitality
Procurement: Aro Procurement
Landscaping: Verde Green
Main Contractor: Seddon Construction
Project Manager: CBRE
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