

BEHIND THE DESIGN

Why People's Is the Club That Revelers Never Want to Leave

Margot Hauer-King and Emmet McDermott partnered with Workstead to create the Greenwich Village anti-members club

By Maya Ibbetson
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People's, the invite-only evening club, wants to uphold the Greenwich Village space's storied pedigree. Photo: Annie Schlechter

It was the winter of last year, and Margot Hauer-King and Emmet McDermott were standing in the shell of a Greenwich Village town house that was eventually to become People's, their invite-only evening club that now woos fashion editors, music stars (including Charli XCX, Lorde, and Ice Spice) and Martha Stewart alike. But first, a painstaking historic renovation presented some unglamorous concerns. "The ceiling had collapsed," Hauer-King laughs. "There's a photo of me standing next to a pile of rubble that luckily had come down when we weren't there. And it's snowing inside. So that was a bit of a hiccup."



The owners of People's, Emmet McDermott and Margot Hauer-King.

Photo: Marissa Alper

The duo maintained a similarly cheerful attitude when their team broke doors to move furniture in, when they fought tooth-and-nail with landlords to save a fireplace, and throughout the renovation as a whole. There was

an 1880s library unit that Workstead, the AD PRO Directory firm that designed the club's interiors, sourced from Wales. The piece, which was set to be an altar-like back bar, arrived stateside by boat, broken up into around 300 different boxes. "It was the world's worst IKEA, but we didn't have instructions," Hauer-King quips.



In the gallery, an antique Welsh library unit was converted into a bar by Workstead.

Photo: Matthew Williams

Now, in the club's back room, a skylight breaks through the 17-foot ceilings, an architectural detail kept from when the space was Downtown Gallery, the first commercial space to exclusively show living American artists in a time when European fine art reigned supreme. "We actually had to rebuild [the skylight] twice," Hauer-King says. "And we had to do it during the two days we were closed," McDermott chimes in. The gallery's original one was too special to not recreate—and as an added homage, the People's backroom now functions as an actual salon, where the fine art on display rotates seasonally.

The pain was all worth it to attain the vibe they were going for: a chic place where New Yorkers could gather without having to shell out for a club membership. Instead, People's remains invite-only so that the owners can curate the vibe every night. It also helps with what they call the TikTokification of going out: "People will come into a restaurant, a bar, they'll order one drink, they'll get out the camera, they'll get out the light, and they leave and they don't come back," Hauer-King says. "The payoff of going out becomes getting the picture for social media."



The intimate front room features circular sconces, brown banquets, and a bewitching black cat painting.

Photo: Annie Schlechter

Not to say that People's isn't photo-worthy. But the brief that McDermott and Hauer-King brought to Workstead held ideas instead of swatches, thoughts about hospitality alchemy, and feelings they wanted to conjure. "We talked a lot in our early meetings with the team about the cool uncle who lets you use his apartment when he's out of town," Hauer-King says. Workstead was a just-right fit for this hyper-specific vignette because of their experience in both hospitality and residential sectors. "The space was just inspiring to everyone," says partner Ryan Mahoney, who creatively directs the firm's buildings and interiors arm. He particularly notes the proportions of the three different rooms that comprise People's. Low ceilings in the entrance, which could've been seen as a grotto-ish nuisance elsewhere, became clues for Mahoney's team to craft a more intimate front room and leave the leveled grandeur for the gallery's skylight.



A bar extends on the building's west wall, ushering guests from the front room through to the gallery.

Photo: Matthew Williams

The result is a residential quality that's "also a little bit dressed up," says Mahoney. Coppers, warm reds, chocolates, and butter yellows turn a rich feel—sans the membership fee. In the front room, the formerly insurance-hazard fireplace is rimmed with a burnt marbled surround. It's become one of the most coveted seats for cozying up with a drink, which are served in antique-looking etched glassware that blooms like tulips. Mirrored panels reflect bespoke lighting design in the vein of a Kusama Infinity room (one sconce variety with flora-printed fabric shades is particularly inspired). Underneath a brown velvet banquette, a painting of a black cat stares out at you from above. A low-slung bar serves as a sort of ushering hallway into the farthest room, where the labor-of-love skylight doesn't detract from more paintings by [Lizzy Lunday](#) and Aglaé Bassens. Hauer-King noted that one of the only issues she's accrued from her nightly staff reports is that customers don't want to get up and leave, even after hours.