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## Going south: BD Hotels brings New York attitude to West Palm Beach with The Nora Hotel

By [Guest Contributor](#)

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Pulling a new neighborhood out of the ground is not for the faint-hearted, something the partners involved in cultivating the nascent destination known as The Nora District in downtown West Palm Beach, Fla., know full well.

Collaborators on the 40-acre project include NDT Development, Place Projects, Wheelock Street Capital and, notably, BD Hotels, which has stepped outside its New York City comfort zone, where it has transformed and owns some two dozen exceedingly Instagrammable hotels ranging from economically trendy to look-at-me luxe.

While its West Palm Beach foray signals a geographic pivot for BD Hotels, led by principals and long-time compadres Richard Born and Ira Drukier, whose fathers were also partners in real estate, trends in and around its “home base” made the jump into the Nora project an appealing one.

“We were attracted to do something in West Palm Beach because of the massive demographic shifts that had slowly started before COVID but were certainly accelerated by COVID,” said Born, who—post-surgical residency—famously jettisoned a career in medicine in the 80s to instead pursue real estate. [There’s been] an enormous migration from the Northeast—a lot of it New York based—into the area; major business owners buying major estates on Palm Beach Island, moving divisions of their offices; and then followed by legions of young professionals to work in the area’s hedge funds, insurance companies, other financial services.”

“It seemed to be a natural shift into the kind of neighborhood area that we’re comfortable with, we’re familiar with, having done so many projects in New York,” he continued. “What we’re actually building is a neighborhood. We’re trying to accelerate or jumpstart the urbanization of West Palm Beach into a sophisticated environment that New York has always represented, that Palm Beach has represented for the super-rich, but not for the fairly affluent. West Palm Beach is now becoming that kind of neighborhood.”



*The Nora Hotel in West Palm Beach, Fla., slated to open in 2026, is BD Hotel's first new-construction project outside of New York.*

### **Palm of Their Hand**

Emerging in two phases via both adaptive reuse of warehouse/industrial buildings as well as new-builds, The Nora District, along North Railroad Ave., will be pedestrian-friendly and encompass retail, restaurants, residential, office, hospitality and wellness offerings and the flagship The Nora Hotel, BD Hotel's first new-construction project outside of New York.

Though BD Hotels is well-known for transitioning iconic properties into hotels, Born explained there was nothing existing at the site that could have been turned into a hotel, just a series of one- and two-story industrial buildings and modest homes running east of the railroad tracks. It wasn't a bad neighborhood, Born said; rather, a "sleepy" one, he called it. The industrial part was largely vacant, but the residential part was largely occupied. North of that were several plots of empty land, so they decided to buy everything they could that was adjacent to it. Place Projects and NDT, ultimately, assembled 16 acres of land, said Born, adding that the entire Nora District project is about two million square feet [and] the entire project to build out will cost more than a billion dollars.

Born said Wheelock Street Capital, with which his firm partnered on revamping the iconic Hotel Chelsea in Manhattan, asked BD Hotels to specifically develop the signature Nora Hotel. BD Hotels is a minor investor in the district, but substantial partners in the hotel element, which it's leading—from design, development, ownership and operations.

The hotel is slated to open in August 2026 and coincides with BD Hotels' 40th year in business. The debut of the 201-room property will unveil Born's vision for what he is characterizing as a "four-plus-star hotel," and which became a passion project for him in terms of creating a design story that delivers an elegant and serene experience for guests and the community.

BD initially grappled with the design approach. "We first looked at doing something in brick that might look like a project we may have done in New York, [but] that seemed out of place in West Palm Beach," Born said, before looking at and considering more contemporary glass, modern structures. Out of frustration more than anything else, Born went analog, taking a page out of Home Economics class. With the aid of a copy machine, scissors and tape, he pasted together a building he envisioned [architect] Addison Mizner may have built more than a 100 years ago. "To be a classic Mediterranean Palm Beach-y style building [that] I thought was really appropriate," Born said. (He layered cut-up printed images of Mizner's iconic façades over the Nora Hotel plans). "Even though it's classic for the neighborhood, it really is something that's not being rebuilt in large volume and has not been for decades," he said. "We hopped upon the idea of 'Let's build what Henry Morrison Flagler would have built at his railroad stop in this place in 1895.'"



*At the groundbreaking ceremony for The Nora Hotel, from left: Cathleen Ward, district commissioner for West Palm Beach; Timothy Mullen, managing member at Commercial Mortgage; Joe Furst, founder/managing principal of Place Projects; Ned Grace, co-founder/managing partner NDT Development; Richard Born, BD Hotels; Keith James, mayor of West Palm Beach; Timothy Hodes, managing director/head of hotel acquisitions, Wheelock Street Capital; Damien Barr, co-founder/managing partner, NDT Development; Keith Manning, director, Wheelock Street Capital.*



## In Company

New York-based Gachot Studios, led by principal Christine Gachot, is curating the hotel's interiors while sustainable design and engineering firm Stantec is serving as design architect and architect of record. In describing the interior design and its hoped-for impact on guests, Born characterized it as serene and residential. "When you're in the hotel rooms, you will feel like you're in your own bedroom rather than in a cookie-cutter branded hotel. It's really geared toward comfort and relaxation," he said. BD's long-time project partner, Sean MacPherson, is also fully involved in the design process.

An outpost of famed New York food haunt Pastis will be on the hotel's ground floor. STARR Restaurants will provide in-room dining services and collaborate on the hotel's rooftop restaurant and lounge, where there will be access to a garden dining area, two bars, a pool and private cabanas.

Born pegs the total cost of the approximately 150,000-square-foot hotel at just south of \$200 million or close to \$1 million per key.

Born sees a customer mix of leisure customers traveling to South Florida for vacation and business travelers coming to the burgeoning business district that is being built. "West Palm Beach is one of the few places in the U.S. where people are actually building and renting out office buildings—and they're renting out completely," Born said. "You read about so many urban centers that have enormous vacancy rates; West Palm Beach has none."



*Reception area at the soon-to-come Nora Hotel.*



Born also sees the hotel as a unique differentiator in a market crowded by franchised, branded hotels, which he called out as “plain vanilla.”

“You go around West Palm Beach and there’s a Marriott, there’s a Hilton, there’s a Days Inn,” he said. “We’re going to be a community center akin to a lot of the things we’ve done in New York, whether it’s The Mercer Hotel in SoHo or The Greenwich Hotel in Tribeca, where our hotels are situated on strategic corners that suddenly become neighborhood fixtures.”

The hotel will also have a certain degree of built-in support from the community and what’s being phased in. Born noted that there will be four blocks of retail—one- and two-story buildings—that will be on a cobblestone street immediately south of the hotel. Just west of the hotel will be two large residential rental buildings with about 800 units, and north of The Nora will be two to three condominium towers with about 250 units.

The groundbreaking of the hotel brought out the personages of West Palm, including the mayor and other public officials. “Everybody was saying, ‘We’re so looking forward to getting the cool kids on the block,’” Born said.

It’s not the streets of New York, but you can’t knock the hustle.

*Story contributed by [Stefani C. O’Connor](#).*