

GANT

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The New Creative Headquarters

By Staff Writer



New York's NeueHouse, where an elite group of entrepreneurs and innovators interact, is slowly redefining the boundaries between the home and the office.

James O'Reilly, a trim, 32-year-old Irishman and **NeueHouse** founding partner, sits at a long table in the basement of his member's club and co-working space. Just outside the boardroom's glass wall is a screening room, a bar, and various arrangements of couches and leather armchairs. On the library-esque main floor, meanwhile, thirty-somethings in nice jeans and borrowed pairs of the club's \$400 headphones, type away at their laptops. Waiters from the café shuttle back and forth carrying avocado toasts and espressos. On the upper floors, desks and cubicles conjure a more familiar work environment, albeit one whose décor (cozy and post-industrial, somewhat "elevated bohemian," is courtesy of the Rockwell Group) might supply ample inspiration for a dream downtown apartment.

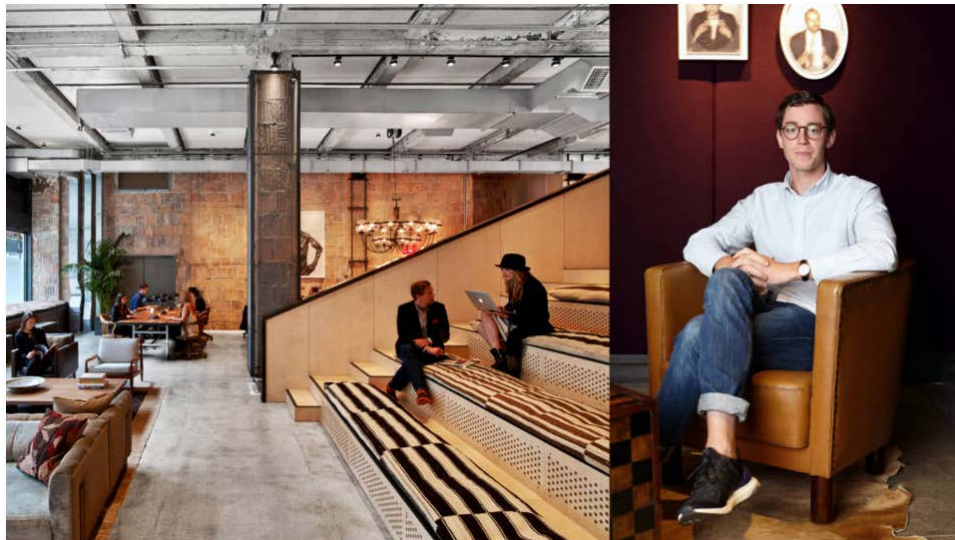
All 600 or so members of this shared workspace in Manhattan's Flatiron District pay a monthly fee to be based there. O'Reilly describes this crowd as "a concentration of very ambitious, motivated and creative people," one that ranges from 'solopreneurs' to small teams; but a typical tech incubator this is not. Those members with start-ups are likely to be on their third or fourth,

or to have spent a decade or more in a related industry before branching out. You'll find no rooftop pool or Ping-Pong table here, or anything as gauche as an unprompted swapping of business cards between two strangers. Neue House – led by its founders Joshua Abram and Alan Murray, both seasoned tech entrepreneurs – seems to consider 'networking' a dirty word.

O'Reilly offers up some analogies to describe this concept. Imagine the vibrant coffeehouses of seventeenth century London, he says, or an eighteenth century salon in Paris, where a bishop might discuss with a theater actress. Think of the freewheeling innovation at Bell Labs in the middle of the twentieth century. Think, in short, of "a vibrant dialogue. We think good things happen when ideas collide – you get something much more than one plus one," O'Reilly explains. Put the right people together, he adds, and the fermentation naturally takes place.

Of course, the club's lineup of cultural programming is hardly the product of a laissez-faire policy. A given evening may feature such notable individuals as Mark Hyman, the wellness guru or the iconic filmmaker Werner Herzog. Such encounters, O'Reilly says, provide "mental nourishment" and add to the feeling that NeueHouse members are much more than mere tenants.

With the opening of branches in Los Angeles and – soon – London, and laying the groundwork for a global network of properties, O'Reilly (whose background is in commercial real estate) explains that one of the important balancing acts for people today is finding a sense of home, belonging and professionalism with the newfound freedom to work virtually anywhere. "There's this idea among a lot of the brightest younger people now – of being independent, rather than tethered to an organization. The only limitation is your ideas."



NICHOLAS COBLENCÉ

After ten years of, more or less, nonstop working, Nicholas Coblençe took a month off to do some thinking. "I asked myself, 'What makes me the most emotional?' Music. I can be listening to a song or watching a performance – music inspires and elevates," he says.

Born in New York to French art collectors, Coblence says he “grew up in concert halls.” With a professional background in luxury marketing and arts administration, Coblence received his master’s degree from Columbia and lists MoMA and the Guggenheim on his résumé. His grand idea? Cords for Music, a lifestyle brand that currently specializes in simple bracelets, giving a large portion of its proceeds to music education.

“Only 17% of public schools in America require students to take music,” Coblence points out. “Look at students’ grades and their overall motivation level. There is a need for children to be uplifted and inspired. Our next generation is going to have to save us at some point.”

He soon discovered that his idea was a unique one, especially with his bracelets being sourced from nearby. All of Coblence’s metal is made in Rhode Island, with raw materials from the U.S. The cotton is made in Japan, but acquired in New York, and his leather is sourced from a shop in the garment district, an easy walk from his home.

And, as it turns out, from NeueHouse. Coblence’s workaday world is fairly compact. At his desk he has little more than a laptop and a chest of drawers. Already, though, his office environment has heavily informed his venture. “I’ve basically built my business through my relationships here,” he says. He met the woman who would become his public-relations rep in the elevator. The designer of his latest collection is a gallery member. And not long ago he got some great takeaway from a recent NeueHouse event featuring a neuroscientist who moonlights as a DJ. It boiled down to: “Rhythm, it’s our heartbeat. And our tone of voice, that’s melody. Music is in us.”



ANDREA MARCUCCI

Throughout her working life, Andrea Marcucci has often served as a creative connector, one who has helped fashion photographers get into filmmaking or feature film directors into commercial directors. Eight years ago, she launched a company of her own that connected artists with brands – a venture she admits now was “ahead of its time.” Before joining the agency world, she was a ballet dancer and an actress. Pivoting and taking on new roles, she says, is almost a necessity.

“I’ve always liked to reinvent. I think it’s something you have to do to stay ahead or, at least, stay interesting to yourself.”

Marcucci is a tech entrepreneur now, although her latest reinvention isn’t exactly the total about-face as the name may suggest. Her app, LastLook, is designed to streamline the image-approval process for photographers, interior decorators, wedding planners, and the like. The idea came to her, she says, while dealing with a recurring problem on shoots: “People asking, ‘Why wasn’t this red shoe approved for set?’ and you can’t follow the email chain and it’s all very chaotic. The more creative types I spoke to, the more they complained about the same thing.”

Her mobile app is currently in its soft-launch phase, and Marcucci will soon be unveiling a web/desktop version. There is a learning curve, of course, particularly when it comes to bridging the gap between even the most capable developers and LastLook’s intended audience. At one point, Marcucci organized a focus group in the NeueHouse boardroom—of architects, makeup artists, and fashion designers – so that her CTO could get a feel for prospective users. “I said, ‘You’re going to chat with every person in this room and hear what they have to say, because you’re building this product for me and you need to know what their needs are!’”

Naturally, Marcucci is a believer in technology’s ability to solve problems; but she has a soft spot for old-school working methods, too. “I love a crisp, clean sheet of paper,” she sighs. “I love writing things down and I like to scribble.”



MICHELLE MITCHUM

When Michelle Mitchum takes you on as a client, the process generally goes something like this: a complete health assessment, accompanied by a month-long full-body detox. Mitchum, a certified herbalist and holistic nutritionist, monitors your diet and administers herbal therapies to “quiet the excess” in your life. She’ll outsource trusted experts for acupuncture and other hands-on procedures – including meditation – although she herself is a teacher, leading a class a few times a week for her fellow NeueHouse members.

“It can be a complete lifestyle change,” she says. “I tell people it’s not just about right now—it’s about the rest of your life.” Many clients see satisfying results in just three or four months, the time it takes Mitchum to treat diabetes. She can get psoriasis under control in two months. Obesity and fatigue, two of the most common ailments she treats, may require her services for up to year.

Originally from Brooklyn, Mitchum previously worked in the music industry – most notably for Lauryn Hill – and holds multiple degrees in health sciences and public health. She worked as a science teacher and then as a hospital administrator, which helped her to understand the contemporary patient’s problematic experience of Western medicine. “That kind of health care is a business more than it’s about prevention, even if you encounter some passionate doctors,” she explains. “I didn’t want to support that, and to be honest, I didn’t trust my health in that system.”

The alternative therapies Mitchum recommends, since she launched her consulting business, Orange Moon, in 2014, are aimed at preventing hospital visits. Her solutions are not always exotic. “Instead of Tylenol for a headache, maybe I’d give you devil’s claw – or, depending on the type of headache, just a cup of coffee.” Her work environment, Mitchum says, beats hotel lobbies for client meetings and brings an added bonus. “I’m definitely more a creative than I am a business woman. But just by being here, I can rub shoulders with people who offer good advice.”



ANTHONY FIELDMAN & CHRISTIAN KOTZAMANIS

A slightly banal way of describing RAFT, a New York-based architecture firm, would be to say that it has a portfolio of very sophisticated projects in New York and the Middle East. The list includes universities, hotels, private royal residences, and even a police academy, many of them in Persian Gulf states where an abundance of funding and an absence of red tape, among other factors, make for a unique building environment. Also on the firm’s docket: the global expansion of Neue House.

Construction and design of the physical edifice is just the beginning, though. Part of the progressivism of RAFT – led in New York by principal Anthony Fieldman – is to get rid of outdated specializations in return for a more holistic, idea-driven approach. “I think we’re in a bit of a renaissance, in architecture,” Fieldman explains. “That we draw pictures of a space that somebody else engineers, another party builds, another party programs, yet another party brands and yet another party markets – that idea is collapsing.” Aided by a connected planet and the demystifying effects of digital platforms, big-thinking practices like his own – “experts in process, not product” – are handling elements of new buildings that it might never have touched as recently as just a few years ago.

This all-in mentality raises the firm’s sense of ownership, Fieldman says; he also admits it makes RAFT pickier about its clients – a luxury to be earned, no doubt. But it’s also a solution of sorts to the frustrations Fieldman and Christian Kotzamanis, the senior architect at RAFT, felt at the traditionally structured corporate firm where they previously worked together.

The firm’s buy-in is significant with NeueHouse; RAFT is a shareholder, which Fieldman says helps both parties focus more on “the larger success of the operation.” Original residents of the New York workspace, RAFT has since outgrown those offices and moved offsite. But Fieldman and Kotzamanis know as well as anyone that a Romanesque-archway isn’t as right a portal for the London branch as a discreet back-alley entrance would be. They can play with the idea, as Kotzamanis put it, of the brand maturing into “a real-life social network,” and accept that more progress can be made over Boulevardiers (Fieldman’s cocktail of choice) at a well-mixed party than in a week’s worth of scheduled meetings.

“My social life is my work life, and my work life is my social life,” Fieldman states, quoting a hospitality mogul he knows. “To be perfectly honest, when you’re an entrepreneur that’s the default. I don’t turn off at night, or in the morning. Your life is your work, and if you’re good about it, you make your work your joy.”

Photo: Frances Tulk-Hart Words: Darrel Hartman

