

## Electric Lemon Equinox Hotel

NEW YORK

For its inaugural hotel project, Equinox has teamed up with Starr Restaurants to create an innovative F&B programme perfectly suited to its fitness-focused fans.

Words: Heleri Rande • Photography: Courtesy of Equinox Hotels (unless otherwise stated)

One of the pioneers of the fitness-as-lifestyle movement, Equinox was founded back in 1991 and now boasts dozens of gyms across the US and internationally, but until up until this point it has never run its own hotels. That has all changed with the opening of the inaugural Equinox Hotel at Hudson Yards, an ambitious 212-room property, which the brand confidently asserts will represent the dawn of a new era in luxury travel. The goal is to provide a 360-degree lifestyle experience ‘for those who want it all’, a holistic philosophy intended to run throughout every touchpoint.

Electric Lemon, as fresh and vibrant as the name suggests, is the main restaurant space, serving up breakfast, brunch, lunch and dinner to the brand’s fitness-focused fans whenever they want to refuel. It is conceived and operated by F&B trailblazer Stephen Starr and Starr Restaurants (which is also behind New York favourites such as Le Coucou, Upland and Buddakan), a collaboration that reflects the hotel leadership’s determination to find partners capable of delivering on the Equinox ethos of high performance.

The venue resulting from this dynamic partnership is located on the 24<sup>th</sup> floor of the hotel, and the Executive Chef leading the troops is Kyle Knall. Hailing from the South – a native of Birmingham, Alabama to be more exact – his resumé includes places such as Big Apple institution Gramercy Tavern, which he keeps referring back to during our conversation, and Maysville, named after the purported birthplace of Kentucky bourbon. “What I love to hear from my guests is that this feels very much in the moment,” he explains. “I want our customers to sense that they are in New York, have the best ingredients on the plate and are enjoying the energy that is here.”

Equinox calls this ‘light, balanced and bright mid-Atlantic cuisine’, and what is particularly noticeable is the strong emphasis on sourcing high-quality ingredients. Indeed, Chef Knall has built up personal relationships with many farmers, giving him and his team the opportunity to experiment with the best that each season has to offer back in the kitchen. “What you see on the plate is what is available at the market,” he says. A great example is the Somewhat Simple Salad, comprising seven







different vegetables, sunflower seeds and lemon vinaigrette; in addition to feeling like eating from grandmother's vegetable garden, the symphony of colours on display also delights the eye.

Equally important to the brigade is a laudable desire to make full use of every ingredient, with both the food and drink programmes adhering to a zero-waste philosophy. Beverage Manager Natascha Patterer and her colleagues, for example, work with the culinary team to create a range of bespoke cocktails, often using unexpected ingredients like chive flower, sorrel and sweet pea shrub along the way. Notable creations include current signature serve Electric Gibson, which combines Bertha's Revenge Gin, dill aquavit and brined chive flower, and the chef-inspired Kyle Knall, Y'all, utilising Mezcal Noble Coyote Espadín, Xila Ancho, sorrel and sal de gusano.

Electric Lemon's elegant dining room, designed by Rockwell Group, is complemented by an 8,000 ft<sup>2</sup> terrace that includes a herb

garden and private dining room spaces, with plenty of cosy nooks to sneak into with a hot beverage from the bar menu. Whilst the first impression arising from all this grandeur is that the venue may appeal primarily to a somewhat selective clientele, the reality is actually very different. "This is not a niche restaurant for special occasions only, we want our guests to feel welcome every day if they enjoy the menu, and leave feeling fresh and energised," reflects Ara Dalzell-Patterson, Vice President of Food and Beverage at Equinox Hotels.

The handcrafted plates by Jono Pandolfi are something that immediately catch the eye as Chef Knall brings out some of his creations, and that is certainly not accidental. "This plateware is made by artists who I always wanted to work with, their earthiness comes through in the touch and feel, and that perfectly complements my dishes," says Knall. Similarly, quality is again the watchword when it comes to serving the drinks, with the restaurant choosing to use elegant glassware by Nude. Meanwhile, the



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sleek uniforms have been designed by Lady and Butler, a women-led company whose clients span hotels, restaurants, retail and museums, working closely with celebrity stylist and creative consultant Kate Young.

Interestingly, the entire room service offering – frequently a tired and uninspiring part of F&B operations elsewhere – has been completely reimagined at the inaugural Equinox Hotel. The team has put a lot of effort into upgrading, and in some instances completely changing, the service delivery, and also tweaking elements to satisfy the needs of their high-performance guests; taking into account factors such as time of day and function, menu items range from jet lag-reducing smoothies to grass-fed beef burgers and grilled cheese sandwiches. “The balance between comfort and health was very important to us,” explains Dalzell-Patterson. “There is nothing wrong with indulgence if that is what our guests crave. The common thread here is the freshness of it all.” Whether delivered in a customised gym bag, a bespoke tiffin box

or a purpose-built vehicle for entertaining larger groups, this is definitely a room-service experience like no other, and it is perhaps telling that the menus have all been developed together with Chef Knall and his team.

Entering the hotel market with a new luxury lifestyle brand was never going to be easy, and nor was trying to provide an equally compelling F&B programme. However, by innovating in the areas that desperately need it – and keeping the concept simple, approachable and tailored to guest needs – the teams at Equinox Hotel and Electric Lemon have seemingly hit upon all the necessary ingredients to succeed in the ultra-competitive New York market and beyond.



#### IN A BITE

**Owner:** Equinox Hotels

**Operator:** Starr Restaurants

**Architecture:** Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

**Interior Design:** Rockwell Group

**F&B Consultant:** Ricca Design Studios

**Executive Chef:** Kyle Knall

**Beverage Manager:** Natascha Patterer

**Glassware:** Nude

**Uniform Design:** Lady and Butler

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