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THE PLAN 53 WEST 36TH STREET

Like many tenants on the northern edge of Midtown South, the ground-floor storefronts spread across 53 West 36th Street were, until recently, among the city's vibrant quilt of garment wholesalers. But by March, when it became clear to landlord Hidrock Realty that at least three of those fabric wholesalers were unable to cover the cost of rent at the 12-story office property, principal Steven Hidary and his colleagues looked to the neighborhood's shifting commercial landscape for inspiration. What they discovered, said Mr. Hidary, was a mushrooming number of successful new bars and restaurants, each spurred on by the rise of several new hotels near Fifth and Sixth avenues. After a search that drew several restaurants and bars, including two potential fast-food franchises, Hidrock inked a transaction in July with the Keg Room, an Irish pub and restaurant, for a lease that would cover 5,400 square feet across all three former storefronts. Mr. Hidary reviewed the floor plan with *The Commercial Observer* and discussed what led to the deal.



PROPERTY SHARK

To anyone who has ever perused one of the hundreds of wholesale businesses operating across Midtown South and the garment center, the notion that some might include less-than-pristine restrooms is hardly a surprise. In Mr. Hidary's words, the three separate ground-floor lavatories near the 37th Street wall were unsavory enough to warrant building out new ones on the Fifth Avenue wall. "They were small, yucky, dirty," recalled Mr. Hidary. "We had to demolish the space, obviously. But beside those bathrooms, there were a few stairwells, and all that stuff needed to be strained out."

Because the space had previously accommodated three tenants, each with their own separate entrances, the Keg Room will benefit from an entirely new facade, said Mr. Hidary. Although details have yet to emerge, he suggested that the West 36th Street wall could be replaced with a glass facade, or something even more alluring. "It could be a full-glass front of over 40-feet long," said Mr. Hidary. "In height, I think it's about 20 feet or something so it's not double-height ceilings but it's over 16 feet so it's actually a pretty big canvas for them to do something pretty exciting."

While many restaurateurs choose to hide the kitchen away from diners' eyes, in the basement, for example, John Patrick Bohan, the architect involved in the project, designed a space near the dining room, just off from a set of booths and tables. In one regard, the plan worked in conjunction with the newly installed ventilation system, said Mr. Hidary, but it may also prove to be a reliable gimmick for the restaurant and its patrons. "They chose to put the kitchen on the ground floor to easily service the seating area and the bar, as opposed to in the basement," said Mr. Hidary. "It could've went in the basement, but they must be going for some sort of concept here—and it probably also makes it easier to serve."

Because 53 West 36th Street had never accommodated a restaurant before now, the landlord had had no reason to build out a costly ventilation system. With the decision to bring in the Keg Room, however, Hidrock Realty and the owners of the Irish pub coordinated to design a kitchen near the northern edge of the space, near where a new ventilation system would be installed. "You have to set it in the back of the building in order to run a vent to the roof without disturbing the windows that service the back of the building, and, ultimately, service the tenants in those offices," said Mr. Hidary. "By putting the kitchen in the back where the bathrooms were, they have a direct run to the rooftop for the system."

In addition to 5,400 square feet of ground-floor space, the restaurant, whose owner also operates another establishment in the outer boroughs, will benefit from approximately 3,000 square feet of basement space, something of a necessity for most businesses where food and drink is served. A freight elevator leading to basement storage, a manager's office and refrigerated walk-in spaces, meanwhile, further proved the space well suited for food service. "Without that freight entrance, people wouldn't like to bring big packages to their front doors and carry it down the stairs," said Mr. Hidary. "And that was already in place. It's a freight elevator that goes down to the basement and up to the roof, and it's great."

