You may not know developer Andrew Zobler, but you definitely know his hotels. As head of acquisitions for North America for Barry Sternlicht, he helped bring the W brand to life. He then expanded Andre Balazs’ empire as CIO with Standard hotels in Miami and Manhattan’s Meatpacking District.

Since founding the Sydell Group in 2006, he has helped redefine—or some argue, define—New York’s untapped wholesale district, the unnamed area south of Macy’s, north of Madison Square Park, and east of Chelsea, first with the Ace hotel, and more recently with the NoMad one block away. “We fell in love with this neighborhood—the building stock is incredible, the location is extremely convenient, but it was really stubborn to gentrification,” he says. The hotels, as well as the Ace in Palm Springs, done almost at the same time as its East Coast counterpart, were collaborations with GFI Development, a partnership between Sydell and Allen Gross.

Both have been instant successes for different reasons. The Ace, designed by Roman and Williams, fast became a local hangout thanks to its massive, welcoming lobby. “It was something of a watershed in lifestyle hospitality in the sense that we thought about the hotel as a great house,” Zobler says.

Meanwhile, the NoMad, housed in a 1905 Beaux-Arts building, is something
of another era: it celebrates romance with a design courtesy of Jacques Garcia (Stonehill & Taylor handled the architecture and historic restoration) that melds French luxury and downtown sensibility, an eclectic mix of found items and reproductions. “We felt that there should be a place to go that’s perfect for a date, to fall in love, to ask someone to marry you. There are a lot of romantic moments, public spaces that are more intimate in scale.” Those include a ground-floor and in-season rooftop restaurant from Will Guidara and chef Daniel Humm, the team behind much-celebrated Eleven Madison Park restaurant.

Outside of New York, he and the Sydell Group also launched a new budget-friendly hotel concept with Joie de Vivre dubbed the Saguaro. The first two locations in Scottsdale and Palm Springs (the first hotel commissions for veteran firm Stamberg Aferiat) have made a lasting impression: getting the okay to ignore standard building codes where neutral desert hues prevail, both are decked out inside and out in bold color inspired by the surrounding fauna.

“Most people who operate and develop hotels tend to develop a widget, a brand that they do over and over again. We have much more of a real estate view; we’re long-term investors,” Zobler says, adding that it is all about collaboration. “We are an idea factory for attracting talented people—it’s about other people’s personalities and not about us at all.”

And he is just getting started. Next up is a hotel in Koreatown in Los Angeles, which will boast food by gourmet truck guru Roy Choi, as well as a series of hostels, the first of which will open in Miami later this year.