

## Adding to the Quality of Life

An Interview with  
Izak Senbahar, Alexico Group LLC

**EDITORS' NOTE** Izak Senbahar moved to the U.S. in 1977 to attend The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. After graduating with a B.A. in mechanical engineering, he moved to New York, where he earned his master's degree in finance from New York University. Before he entered the real estate market, Senbahar was a Gold Trader for the French financial firm *Sucre et Denrées*.



Izak Senbahar

**COMPANY BRIEF** Based in New York, Alexico Group LLC ([Alexicogroup.com](http://Alexicogroup.com)) is a real estate development firm with a portfolio of projects including The Mark Hotel, The Laurel, 165 Charles Street, and 56 Leonard. Alexico Group partners, Izak Senbahar and Simon Elias, collectively have more than 50 years of experience in development, construction, ownership, and management of Manhattan real estate. They are recognized leaders in their field with a portfolio that has included some of New York's most prestigious properties.

**Where is the real estate market today and is this a time of opportunity or a time to wait-and-see?**

The residential market is strong. The hotel market is also strong in New York and especially in Manhattan. So it's time to step in.

In terms of land prices and purchasing hotels, they're fully priced – I think at this point when you're buying something you're paying full price, so the opportunities are what you make out of a certain property; there are no bargains out there.

**Is financing being offered?**

The biggest challenge is the banks – they're still extremely risk averse.

**How have you consistently offered quality properties at the highest level?**

The strongest part of the market is where the product hits it on all four cylinders, meaning it has the location, the quality of construction, views, and design.

We're about to start construction on 56 Leonard Street, which will become a future landmark – it's a Herzog & de Meuron building. It's 57 stories in Tribeca and it's going to be an exquisite building that will be strictly residential.

**Are you surprised when you see how some of the neighborhoods that were previously undesirable in New York City are now coveted areas to live in?**

It is surprising, but it's a fact. Mayor Giuliani and Mayor Bloomberg, did a great job in making New York the most livable and civilized city. It always had the culture, the theater, the jazz, the ballet, etc. Add the quality of life and historically low crime rates where you can walk from one end of the island to the other without worrying about anything; you create livable real estate everywhere in Manhattan, and that is a beautiful thing for the city.

I'm still surprised that somebody who is looking at the The Laurel on the East Side on First Avenue will likely have also seen something on the West Side Highway or Downtown. People are more flexible in terms of location than they were before because almost every location has a lot of positives.

**Is it a given that new development will be LEED certified and sustainable and how much of a focus will that be for Alexico?**

That's the future; it's not a fad, and everybody has to contribute to this ecosystem.

Right now, we are switching to LED lighting, which uses only 15 percent of the power used by a regular bulb; also, the LED bulbs can last 10 to 15 years and don't generate any heat, which helps your HVAC systems and expenses.

So all of these things add up and the whole industry is going towards that. LED lighting is an expensive proposition but it's worth it.

**On the hotel side, there is a lot of new development. Are there opportunities for Alexico in that part of the business?**

Yes, I've moved more towards the uber-luxury hotels, like with The Mark, and I'm looking to build on that name in different cities.

In terms of occupancy and average daily rate for The Mark, we've been breaking records. So that is the part of the business I like – the uber high-end. I'm concentrating on the branding with the likes of Jean-Georges, Frederic Fekkai, and John Lobb, and taking that whole product to different destinations.



The Mark Hotel, designed by Jacques Grange

**Have you been happy with how The Mark has evolved and the impact it's having?**

We are pretty secretive about our clientele and database but we are Hollywood- and fashion-centric, as well as Fortune 500-centric. The elegant, chic European feel of the hotel has hit the spot.

**Is New York City the primary focus for Alexico or do you foresee opportunity in other parts of the country or the world?**

We have looked at Miami, but I like Manhattan – there are still more opportunities here. So Manhattan is 95 percent of our focus, and once in awhile, like for The Mark, we will look nationally or internationally.

**Despite the many challenges, you stay focused on opportunity. Is that just a part of your nature?**

Every era has its own challenges. It has never been easy to do business. At this time, banks and financing are the challenging part of our business and that's the nut you have to crack.

So you have to come to work every day and think about how to resolve or deal with the challenges of the day or of the year. We're in business to overcome these issues and build beautiful buildings, and add to the quality of life.

**When you walk by your properties, are you appreciative of what you have achieved?**

The day comes when we can touch, see, feel, and enjoy the work we have put in and that is important. So I do walk by or through my properties and see if there is anything to improve or if everything looks okay.

**What keeps the business so fresh for you? Is it still as exciting as it was early on?**

Every building is labor intensive, capital intensive, and design intensive – it takes a long time, but you're creating something that adds to the city and its quality of life. That's what gets me up early in the morning. ●