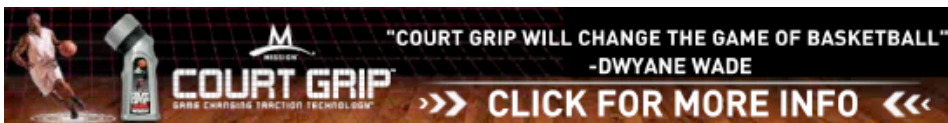


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Madison Square Garden, Transformed

MSG undergoes the first phase of its renovation.



by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

The World's Most Famous Arena is undergoing a transformation and there is no telling when the Knicks will get to experience it.

In the meantime, musical acts such as SMTown Live and Duran Duran and the NHL's New York Rangers get to open an arena that is experiencing the first of three major renovations through 2013. SLAMonline and tens of other media outlets got a walk-through of the changes October 19.

Hank Ratner, the president and CEO of Madison Square Garden, welcomed the media by telling them in a conference room inside the building that nothing like what is happening at the Garden has ever been performed. Roughly \$975 million of renovation costs lasting three years—the heaviest construction work exists during each summer—through 2013 and all the venue's tenants and expected events being performed throughout the process. "An arena still hosting two professional sports teams and the busiest concert venue in the world while it's being transformed," Ratner said.

There have been 1,200 to 1,800 workers per day attempting to complete the first phase, Ratner said. All so that the following areas can be "transformed" beginning with the 2011-12 NBA and NHL seasons: 6th floor Madison Concourse, an opening of the 8th and 10th floor concourses, 20 Event Level Suites, a massive Delta Sky360° Club, a new MSG Network studio, [Knicks](#) and Rangers locker rooms, dressing rooms for musical acts and other entertainers



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and enhanced Lower Bowl seating.

The new Lower Bowl seating won't affect capacity; in fact, no changes throughout the three-year renovation are expected to alter the Garden's basketball capacity of 19,763. But the Lower Bowl has received plusher seats and new ticket holders. The lower part of the Lower Bowl will be housed with fans who purchase the 20 Event Level Suites, which Ratner explained had been sold out. *Sports Business Journal* reported in March 2010 that the suites were going for north of \$1 million. Ratner declined to elaborate on the price.

The suites are high-brow. One media person commented that they look like studio apartments in a Manhattan luxury building. The observation isn't far off as each suite is designed differently from one another with the typical luxury suite amenities—plush couches, flatscreen TVs, bar and kitchen areas, etc.

Paintings and photography of famous athletes and entertainers who have played and performed in the Garden from artist George Kalinsky line the walls in the suites and in the hallways leading to each room. "Each of our spaces was to work with one integrated theme but to also have its own personality," Ratner said.

Eight-hundred season-ticket holders in the Lower Bowl sitting in the closest seats to the court also have access to the Delta Sky360° Club. The nearly 10,000 square-foot space features all-inclusive food and non-alcoholic beverages for the roughly 800 fortunate enough to have access. Food from Jean-George Vongerichten's restaurants, MSG's Signature Collection menu (more on that below), Delta's executive chef, Michelle Bernstein, and wine selections from Delta's in-flight master sommelier, Andrea Robinson, headline the culinary options.

A glass-enclosed walkway just outside the club enables patrons to watch Knicks and Rangers as they walk from their locker rooms to the court or ice rink. A glass partition on the other side of that walkway will house a new studio for MSG Network.

"It's another fun aspect for our customers, who are going to get to see the live production take place while they're watching it on all these state-of-the-art monitors right here," Ratner said from inside the Sky360° Club.

One technological aspect of the club: an interactive display called Touch the Future of Travel lets users travel virtually to Delta international and domestic destinations. The user selects icons that highlight facts about that destination as well as memorable Garden moments.



The Knicks and Rangers locker rooms have been architecturally adjusted. Whereas each room was rectangular before, now their shapes have become shaped like a circle (Knicks) and an oval (Rangers), at the behest of each team. The thought was that the circular shapes would inspire more team unity.

"The players and coaches wanted a change," Ratner said. "They wanted something that didn't have corners and everybody was sort of similar in location."

The eighth and 10th floors are only partially completed. The eighth expects to be fully

finished for the 2012-13 season and the 10th floor, with its Budweiser Fan Deck, is slated for the 2013-14 afterward.

The 10th floor will also be the site of the dual Chase Bridges. (Yes, MSG will be sure to maximize the sponsorship opportunities at the transformed arena.) The two bridges will be suspended on either side of the of the basketball court's baseline, although they'll hang over the seating bowl, not the playing surface. At a 500-person capacity for each bridge, the structures will give fans a view unlike that in any other arena. Ribbon boards and monitors will be placed on their sides so that fans sitting below.

Ratner said that ticket pricing for the bridges hasn't been decided, and that they aren't expected to block the views from people elsewhere in the arena, specifically in the Upper Bowl.

The largest area to get refurbished is the Madison Concourse on the 6th floor. This is the main thoroughfare for most of the fans in the arena, and it's one that has had its interior significantly re-designed. Re-finished floors, higher ceilings, more restrooms and a refashioned concession experience.

For one thing, the beer and soda system has been centralized, thanks to Perlick, MSG's primary vendor. All kegs are located on the 5th and 7th floors.

"It's a centralized system in multiple locations," said Steve Collins, the Executive Vice President of Facilities at the Garden. "We centralized not only the liquids—the soda and the beer—but also the CO2. So, the CO2 is in bulk down in the bowels of the building. Then, the lines are pumped in a bundle with glycol in one of the lines. It refrigerates the lines as it passes through the building. All that is run in conduit and a maze of tubing to the various [concession stand] locations."

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