



St. Regis's Strength

An Interview with Scott Geraghty,
General Manager, The St. Regis New York



EDITORS' NOTE *A chef by training, Scott Geraghty spent many years serving in executive chef and managerial positions in properties throughout the United States before assuming his current position as the General Manager of The St. Regis New York in June 2004. Geraghty holds a BA degree in international relations from Lehigh University (Pennsylvania) and an associate in occupational studies degree in culinary arts from the Culinary Institute of America.*



Scott Geraghty

PROPERTY BRIEF *Considered one of the top hotels in the world having been honored with Mobil Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards for 14 consecutive years, the 104-year-old Mobil five-star and AAA five-diamond The St. Regis New York offers 229 guest rooms and suites, featuring Louis XVI-style furniture, crystal chandeliers, carved crown moldings and wainscoting, marble baths, and silk wall coverings; well-appointed meeting and events facilities; and a range of timeless dining venues. It is the flagship property of St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, one of the two premier brands (the other being The Luxury Collection) of metropolitan New York-based Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. (www.starwoodhotels.com).*

Are there any major developments or renovations planned for The St. Regis New York in the near future?

The rooftop ballroom has been completed, and we are about to begin a \$1 million renovation of the Presidential Suite. The three-bedroom suite has hosted statesmen, entertainers, and leaders of industry. We're taking the suite out of circulation for about an eight-week period, in order to carry out the renovation. Most of the guest rooms, suites, and public spaces were recently renovated by New York design firm Sills Huniford Associates. Part of the renovation included a \$100,000 restoration of Maxfield Parrish's *Old King Cole* mural and the addition of a Bottega Veneta-designed suite.

The opening of the new restaurant, Adour, a partnership with Alain Ducasse, has received a lot of attention. How important is that partnership, and how has the restaurant evolved?

Adour has been a tremendous collaboration, not only with Chef Alain Ducasse, but also

with designer David Rockwell and New York-based artist Nancy Lorenz, who created the restaurant's mural. It is in five panels and uses gold gesso fused with lavender tones and inlaid mother-of-pearl details to create a glistening, rich surface. It depicts the Adour river, which flows near Chef Ducasse's hometown in France, where he grew up.

David Rockwell and the Rockwell Group took people's comments and thoughts and turned them into a great unfolding story for the restaurant. In each of the sitting areas, the experience

is quite unique. If you're having a business dinner in the right bank or the left bank, which can be very private, you have a very different experience than you would have in the wine vault room, which has interactive technology so individuals can explore Adour's extensive wine list. Through the interactive tasting notes, guests can learn about each of the varietals, where they're from, and a little bit about the winemakers. The main dining room, on the other hand, is a great place to be with other people. So each perspective is a little different.

How critical is a complete spa offering today, from a guest's perspective? Is it important for The St. Regis New York?

We have our own proprietary spa that we developed with Remède. About three years ago, we converted some space to allow for a full spa on property. Previously, we featured only a health facility. I believe it's critical for a luxury property to have that capability. New York can be a stressful town to live in, to play in, and to do business in, so it's wonderful when you can come back at the end of the day and go downstairs for a treatment. You can truly relax and get ready for the evening ahead. It's wonderful on weekends as well. We see both business and leisure clientele seeking those services. It's almost mandatory that you have those services in this day and age.

Is it challenging to offer the latest technology to hotel guests while still maintaining the all-important human touch?

This goes back to our heritage. When John Jacob Astor developed this hotel in 1902, he built it within a residential neighborhood. More than anything else, he wanted to rival the finest hotels in Europe. So the hotel became very well-known for its modern conveniences. This is the first hotel that had a telephone in every room and a centralized fire alarm system, and it was

the first air-cooled building in the United States. We've really tried to keep that spirit alive. What we do is give everybody an opportunity to use the hotel in the manner with which they're most comfortable. Some individuals are very comfortable in the world of advanced technology; others would rather have a personal experience. We have 24-hour butlers, so there's an individual at your beck and call all the time. This allows for a tremendous level of technological support, but at the same time, it's very personalized.

This is an industry known for its high turnover of staff. Are young, talented individuals still excited about coming into the business? And what is it about The St. Regis New York that makes it a place where employees want to stay?

It's a wonderful hotel with a life and a heritage. The old girl is 104 years old, and it continues to get better as time goes on. It's a special place to work. This is the 12th hotel I've worked in, and it's an incredible place to come to every day. In addition, employees tend to stay in their jobs longer in the luxury segment. A hotel such as this offers people an opportunity to be a part of something that will live on. So there's great pride associated with working in an establishment like this, and that goes a long way. I believe our turnover rate is phenomenally low for an industry that has always had very high turnover.

How challenging is it to turn the business off? After all your years in the industry, have you found the right work/life balance?

To a great extent, you get into this business only if you're really enamored of people. Do I ever turn it off? No, because it is part of who I am. Whether I'm entertaining at work or entertaining outside of work, I'm always entertaining groups of interesting people. At the end of the day, hoteliers just enjoy seeing people who are happy. They enjoy bringing people together. More business deals are done in hotels than one would ever imagine, and a lot of our success depends on our ability to put people in a very comfortable environment. So when you want to see someone outside the boardroom, our hotel is a great place to do so.

Of course, finding the right balance in life is very important. It keeps you on an even keel at work. But this is what we do. Hoteliers tend to find that, even within their own social groups, they're still hoteliers at the end of the day. ●

The St. Regis New York wine library in the new signature restaurant, Adour