



Personalized Service

An Interview with Senih Geray,
General Manager, The St. Regis New York

EDITORS' NOTE In December 2016, Senih Geray returned to The St. Regis New York as General Manager. He joined The St. Regis New York from The St. Regis Atlanta where he served as General Manager since 2012. He began his career in the hospitality industry in 1989 as a Guest Service Agent at the Sheraton Grande Torrey Pines in La Jolla, California. After much success, he relocated to New York where he first joined The St. Regis New York team as Financial Controller, a position he held for eight years. Geray has also served as General Manager at the Sheraton Voyager Antalya Hotel, Resort & Spa in Turkey, and The St. Regis Aspen Resort. He attended the United States International University in London where he received his B.S. in business administration. Geray continued his education at the United States International University in San Diego, California, where he studied hotel and restaurant management.



Senih Geray

Our group business has been exceptionally strong, especially domestically. This has been the case not only in the luxury segment, but also within the big box city hotels. We have seen compression across the city resulting in higher prices for our group business.

There is also a lot of last minute business for large meeting groups, which was unheard of a few years ago.

In banking and finance, we saw many roadshows as well.

Every sector has performed at a higher level than usual, including transient and leisure.

Will you discuss the value that the Marriott relationship has brought to St. Regis?

St. Regis was once part of Starwood where it was one of 10 brands. With Marriott, it is now one of 30 brands.

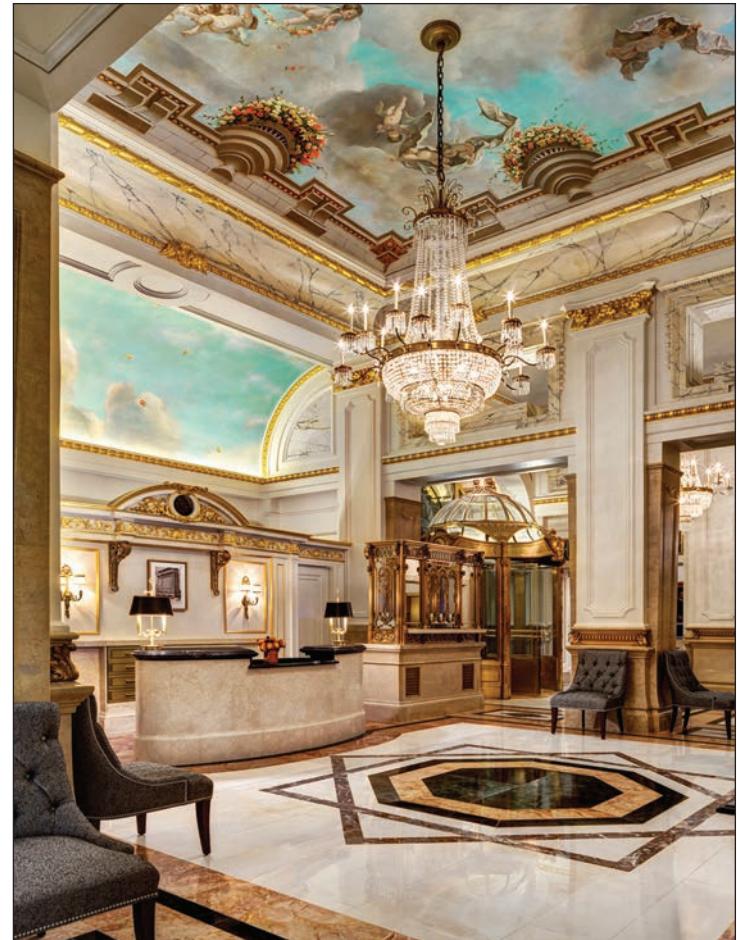
The portfolio has tripled and includes many different levels of product but, among the brands under the luxury umbrella, where we competed with Ritz-Carlton in the past, we're now sister hotels. When it comes to inventory levels, we enjoy this camaraderie because we are now able to sell both products when needed.

From the perspective of deployment of resources, when we go to certain trade shows, we can now sell New York as a luxury market very effectively with the same number of people. Our expertise has doubled in some respects because we now have the talent resources of both groups. Those additional connections have deepened our reach into the industry.

More importantly, within the Marriott brands and portfolio, we have more ability to access resources and the opportunity to buy with the mass scale that Marriott brings us which provides greater cost efficiencies.

Are you happy with where The St. Regis New York product is today?

Yes, I am. Our last renovation was in 2013 so we feel that in another two years, as we finish a seven-year cycle, we will be ready for the next renovation. Just as we did in our last renovation, whatever current design factors our guests are looking for, we will look to update. More importantly, though, on the last renovation we were very careful in trying to find a happy medium between the old classical style while



The St. Regis New York lobby (above) and lobby clock (left)

also modernizing the product so we can appeal to millennials and our future customer base.

Our suites are now more vibrant and alive, and they better reflect the tastes of our current customer base.

How critical is a broad suite offering when it comes to competing for top clientele in the New York City market?

We have one of the most elaborate suite selections in the city from entry level to designer suites and master suites.

Having 28 percent of our inventory within the ultra-luxury side of the market gives us an advantage, especially when the times are good. The ADR premium on those suites significantly affects our total revenue.

We continue to evaluate whether the suites remain relevant in terms of what we have now and to update our plans to make sure that we introduce the most important new elements when we touch these again in two years. It's always top of mind to make sure we can keep them attractive to ensure they're always in demand.

We have butler services in all rooms in this hotel. Among the competition in this city, the suites at certain hotels have butlers but they are not provided for the full spectrum of the room product as they are here.

We provide the same service levels regardless of the room someone is in. However, when one is in a suite, the elegant settings, spaciousness and options for what can be done with the room takes a more thoughtful process. We can always tailor the suites to the guests' needs, especially for long-term stays.

Our average length of stay in our suites went up in 2018, which is encouraging. Guests have told us that they like to spend more time here because they feel at home and it becomes easier to increase their satisfaction as we get to know them in-house. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF The St. Regis New York (stregisnewyork.com) offers 238 luxurious guest rooms and suites. Contemporary luxury meets classic sophistication at this iconic hotel, just steps from an exceptional Fifth Avenue shopping experience. The guest rooms and suites feature Waterford crystal chandeliers and elegant crown moldings, with beautiful, large-format photographic artwork, vibrant-hued fabrics and stunning beveled mirrors as well as marble-tiled entryways, rich color schemes, custom furnishings and state-of-the-art technologies. It is the flagship property of St. Regis Hotels and Resorts.

What are your views on the state of the hospitality business in New York City?

From what we have seen here and at our sister properties under the Marriott umbrella, 2018 was better than expected.

Some of this has to do with international travel. In 2017, we had some challenges in the international markets, especially in the first half of the year, whereas 2018 started strong and there is every indication this is going to continue through the first half of 2019.

International travelers also feed our top-level suites, so they are not only helping from an occupancy perspective, but also from a rate perspective.