



Recreating The Colony

An Interview with Thomas List,
General Manager, The Colony Palm Beach



The Colony Palm Beach patio and lawn (above);
poolside at The Colony Palm Beach (left)

EDITORS' NOTE *Thomas List assumed his current position in 2018. As a third-generation hotelier, List grew up in New York City, living and working in hotels his father managed. At age nine, he began washing pots and pans in the hotel's main kitchen and continued to hold a hotel job every summer from then on. List began his career at the Plaza Hotel in New York City and has since managed upscale, boutique properties including The Inn at Little Washington, Virginia; Woodstock Inn and Resort, Vermont; Congress Hall and Star Inn in Cape May, New Jersey; and Williamsburg Inn, Virginia, among others.*



Thomas List

PROPERTY BRIEF *As guardians of a treasured icon, The Colony Palm Beach (thecolonypalmbeach.com) faithfully preserves its legacy of gracious hospitality while ensuring continued relevance to a new generation of modern, well-traveled and discerning guests. The 89-room property provides unique, curated offerings for guests of all ages delivered with best-in-class ultra-boutique service. Much more than a hotel, The Colony is a state of mind – a place to connect meaningfully and authentically with one of the world's most storied destinations, steps from both Worth Avenue and the Atlantic Ocean. Aware of The Colony Hotels' singular place in the hearts of long-time Palm Beachers, the hotel is dedicated to maintaining a rich tradition of culinary excellence in a vibrant social setting that is both welcoming and refreshingly unpretentious.*

Will you discuss the history and heritage of The Colony Palm Beach and how the property has evolved?

The Colony is 71 years old and has had a presence on Palm Beach in an active way for many years. Anchoring Worth Avenue and just steps from the beach, The Colony holds one of the best locations for a hotel property on the island. Our location is unique and unparalleled.

The '40s, '50s and '60s were the heyday for Palm Beach and its thriving social scene. The Colony was a very active player in what was happening on Palm Beach, with a large

number of international guests as well as the 'Rat Pack' crowd. The bar and restaurant scene was big – a few of our employees with a long history on Palm Beach and the hotel have fun stories about frequent visits from Frank Sinatra, Marilyn Monroe and JFK. The legacy of our guests and The Colony Palm Beach is very interesting and one we are proud of.

The hotel has great bones, a great history and a bright future ahead, something I'm happy to be a part of. Having managed historic properties that are individually owned my entire career, I'm looking to emulate The Colony's history of gracious hospitality as we work on our future plans. Now offering live music seven nights a week in The Restaurant at The Colony, our focus is to pay homage to the property's 70-plus years of entertaining Palm Beach society and guests alike.

How important was it to engage the employees as you assumed your role at the property?

The hotel had gone through a year of transitioning prior to my arrival, and I was aware that it had been a year of more change than progress.

Verbally conveying a strong sense of mission and hospitality as well as service first and foremost, I wanted everyone to know what the expectations were and are. Through time, we unrolled a plan for the processes that would aid in making the changes to allow us to elevate not only our systems but also our levels of service.

In a market with great food and beverage offerings, what is the key to being successful in this area on Palm Beach?

It's important for The Colony to stay "culinarily centric," as the demographic on Palm Beach is very social and active.

Staying ahead of the curve is essential in terms of our product and service, as well as the styling of food down to plating and the design aesthetic of The Restaurant. We are focused on sourcing local products and have recently added an on-site herb garden that provides fresh ingredients for our culinary offerings. We resource the garden for recipes including our soups,

saucers and the herb butter we serve with our fresh bread, as well as cocktail garnishes.

Is there a consistent feel from room to room within the property and how valuable is the suite product that The Colony offers?

We will be redefining our suites to differentiate them from the standard rooms. With 17 suites and seven villas, we're currently in the process of upgrading the amenities for those guest accommodations. Additional upscale offerings and services associated with the guest suite and Villa experience will allow us to provide a stay that is exceptional.

Is there a focus on the spa and wellness side of the business?

In recent years we have refocused our efforts specific to spa and wellness offerings. All complimentary to our guests, we currently provide fitness classes every day of the week in our solarium. Just a short walk from the hotel, we also have a partnership with Palm Beach Fitness, a fully equipped fitness center. As for spa and beauty, we offer in-house massages, manicures and blowouts from a few local salons on the island. If a guest is looking for additional treatments, we can also set up appointments and provide transportation to any spa or salon the guest prefers.

The hotel has complimentary beach cruisers, an outdoor pool and new 'healthy choice' menu options such as smoothies to accommodate our health-conscious guests.

We focus on the things we do have. In our quest for excellence, we have become very centered on the service in-house, at the pool, as well as our restaurant, all of which we aim to deliver with the best-in-class ultra boutique service.

How important is it to have owners willing to invest in the property with a long-term vision?

Without a well-focused owner, we would not be able to achieve our dream of being the best hotel on Palm Beach. It's not to cast doubt on how other properties operate, but I feel fortunate that the direction of this hotel is to bring The Colony Palm Beach to a point of recognition and to a place where all our staff can be proud and our guests can experience something unique and memorable. ●