

Creating Experiences

An Interview with Jonathan Knudsen, Chief Executive Officer, Concrete Hospitality Group

EDITORS' NOTE Jonathan Knudsen's expertise is founded on strong business acumen, budget and forecast preparation and management, profit and loss critiquing, and hotel management. Growing up in New York, Knudsen's passion for hospitality was rooted in a line of family-owned and operated establishments. Knowing he wanted to make this his life's work, he enrolled in Johnson & Wales University, earning a double degree in restaurant management and hospitality management with a concentration in entrepreneurship. Knudsen has extensive industry experience bringing projects to market with hotel openings, concept development and execution. Groomed by global hospitality leader Starwood Hotels & Resorts, he led multiple teams from Southern California to the Caribbean to New York City before joining boutique hotel pioneer Morgans Hotel Group as an executive operational leader directing the renovation and operation of the iconic Hudson Hotel New York and its regional portfolio of New York City properties.



Jonathan Knudsen

What have been the keys to the success of Concrete Hospitality Group and how do you define the Concrete Hospitality difference?

Our recipe for success is to combine the creation of a differentiated product with delivering attentive and friendly service and anticipating guest needs. We believe this leads to customer satisfaction and a sustained level of loyalty. For our hotel partners, we deploy a strategically flexible approach – which therein lies another key pillar of success to date.

Operating as an extension of a hotel's team, CHG is able to create additional value through its food and beverage offerings. We bring an industry expertise that a hotel property would not otherwise have, including our integration of marketing, activations, programming, and strategic partnerships.

Where do you see growth opportunities for Concrete Hospitality Group?

We're lucky to have a presence in an industry that's ever-changing and evolving – creatively, operationally, etc. We built Concrete

Hospitality Group with the mission of laying the foundation for the future of our industry, hence the name Concrete. We see this "future" in many forms, such as employee connection, supporting employee growth – not just within hospitality – genuine care and concern, transparency and enhanced communication. The future also includes embracing artificial intelligence and the tools that AI provides, so that should not be overlooked. The growth opportunities are aligned with the consistent expansion of new and existing hotel properties and an ever-growing expectation from guests for unique and exciting food and beverage experiences.

How important has it been to build the Concrete Hospitality Group team?

Extremely important. Myself, along with our co-founder and COO Josh Pendley, made a very intentional decision to set out with the mindset of building a hospitality company where people actually mattered, and the measure of success was not just financially motivated, but rather creating a company where people could come work and feel good about their decision, where work-life balances were actually encouraged, where time-off was respected, our

COMPANY BRIEF Concrete Hospitality Group's (concretehg.com) core business is operational development, management, owner representation and conceptual consultancy across various hospitality verticals; hotels, restaurants, resorts, and membership driven clubs. Its methodology delivers a long-term sustainable model for owners, guests and employees.

How do you define Concrete Hospitality Group's purpose and mission?

Concrete Hospitality's mission is simple, to lay the foundation for the future of hospitality. Our purpose is to create experiences worth paying for, which are experiences you cannot recreate yourself. Concrete Hospitality Group also passionately believes in the power of "brand" through storytelling.

Will you provide an overview of Concrete Hospitality Group's capabilities?

Concrete Hospitality Group's core model is developing unique and exciting food and beverage concepts for hotel partners. Additionally, the Group has developed a list of award-winning independent hotels, bringing those boutique properties to market. Secondary services include consulting, owner representation and project management across various hospitality verticals from hotels and restaurants to member driven clubs.



Recreation at Moxy NYC Downtown



individualities were respected and celebrated, and we collectively embraced a common vision of mission and purpose. In total, our portfolio employs over 350 talented associates and is growing daily.

Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit?

Yes, and my upbringing is a large part of that. I grew up outside New York City and my passion for hospitality is rooted in a line of family-owned and operated establishments. Knowing I wanted my life's work to revolve around hospitality, I dedicated my education to this focus – earning a double degree in restaurant management and hospitality management at Johnson & Wales University, with a concentration in entrepreneurship. From there, I had the opportunity to build a solid foundation of extensive industry experience spending over a

decade at the property and above-property levels for Starwood Hotels & Resorts and then boutique pioneer, Morgans Hotel Group, before venturing out independently to create Concrete Hospitality Group.

What has made the hospitality industry so special for you?

I was fortunate to realize at a young age that joy in my life came from witnessing the joy of others. It wasn't until later in life that I realized this exact feeling was in essence hospitality at its core. My passion continued and so naturally I chose for this to be my life's work. This is when I developed the phrase "experiences worth paying for are those you cannot recreate yourself" which would later become the purpose for what is now Concrete Hospitality Group. On top of that I now get to shape the future through my own organization and share with others the simple beauty of hospitality.

What are your priorities for Concrete Hospitality Group as you look to the future?

My priorities for Concrete Hospitality Group are to continue offering a place to work where people can share in the simple joys of life. I want to give people the opportunity to make a comfortable living, to be proud of what they are doing, to learn, to grow, to educate, and to help people reach their potential, whether that is a long career with Concrete Hospitality, or just a stepping stone to reach some other goal in life. We are a business, however, and businesses need to make money in order to survive, so that is not lost on us, and we ensure that message is delivered with clarity and transparency as well. But our priority is not to be the biggest – it's to be the best. ●



Royalton Park Avenue rooftop pool (top left); Rooftop Terrace (top right); Ivy Bar (bottom left); an Ivy cocktail (bottom right)