

LEADERS IN

Hospitality

Creating Value for Discerning Customers



An Interview with Offer Nissenbaum,
Managing Director, The Peninsula Beverly Hills

EDITORS' NOTE Offer Nissenbaum graduated from Paul Smith's College in New York, where he majored in hotel and restaurant management, and he began his career with Helmsley Hotels in New York City. In 1986, Nissenbaum joined the Doral Tuscany Hotel in New York, and two years later he was transferred to Miami and promoted to General Manager of the Doral Saturnia International Spa Resort, which became the first spa to earn the AAA Five Diamond Award. Nissenbaum



Offer Nissenbaum

returned to New York in 1997 and joined The Plaza Hotel as Resident Manager. In 1999, he joined Omni Hotels and ultimately became Regional Vice President of Operations and the company's liaison to the Global Hotel Alliance, before assuming his current role with Peninsula Hotels in December 2007. Nissenbaum currently serves on the board of the Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce and is a member of the Rotary Club of Beverly Hills.

PROPERTY BRIEF With one of Southern California's most desirable addresses, The Peninsula Beverly Hills (www.peninsula.com) looks and feels like an exclusive private residence built in classic Renaissance style. The property offers 196 elegant rooms and suites and 16 comfortable detached Garden Villa Suites. The Peninsula Beverly Hills is a member of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited (www.hsbgroup.com) portfolio, a holding company incorporated in 1866 whose subsidiaries are engaged in the ownership and management of prestigious hotel, commercial, and residential properties in key Asian and U.S. destinations.

How have you been able to continue the property's success despite recent economic turmoil industry-wide?

We've always created value in the experience, and we continue to do so. As opposed to lowering rates, we continue to demonstrate a merciless attention to detail and personalization. The Peninsula experience always reflects the highest quality amenities and service, and ultimately, the satisfaction of our guests. When guests are surrounded by a multitude of added values, such as spa and food and beverage, that enhance their perception of the hotel experience, that creates immeasurable return on

investment, which also translates into loyalty. Now, more than ever, it's important to do that.

Are you happy with the actual product today, and do you anticipate changes down the line?

We are happy with our process – always raising the bar – but we're never content with the product. We are always moving forward with plans to improve the physical property of the hotel. We just completed a \$4 million renovation to our Roof Garden restaurant, the pool, and the cabanas,

which has received phenomenal feedback. The next project is a complete facelift of our guest rooms and suites, which will happen in the second quarter of 2009.

How critical is it to offer a true spa today?

It's of the utmost importance to cater to all guest needs, and today, the spa experience is no longer considered an indulgence. In these times, people are very stressed, and they're looking for ways to relax and unwind, especially in the context of travel. So it is very important to offer a wide variety of traditional massages, specialty services and treatments, and spiritual and holistic options.

Are you happy with the talent you have in place?

The Peninsula is a family. Our leaders truly care about their employees. They invest time and money mentoring and creating opportunities for the staff, for professional and personal enrichment. We have a strong base of individuals who are very talented, skilled, and passionate about The Peninsula experience.

In North America, you have three properties in key markets – Beverly Hills, Chicago, and New York. Is there coordination among those properties, and do you strive to achieve a common experience for the guests?

Although each property has its own unique attributes and culture, when it comes to service, there is alignment among the properties. We communicate well and share best practices. We also share a lot of the same guests, so we constantly communicate with each other to ensure consistency in service.

What made you feel this opportunity at The Peninsula Beverly Hills was the right fit for you, and has it been what you expected?

It was a unique and coveted opportunity for me to join The Peninsula organization, as the brand is truly special and distinctive in the marketplace. We're not a very large hotel company, but we're a powerful brand with a very powerful culture, which is strengthened by the commitment to excellence of our owner, Sir Michael Kadoorie. It's been everything I hoped for. I feel like I am playing in the sandbox of the highest quality there is.

How critical is it for you to be involved in the Beverly Hills community?

I strongly believe in being involved in and assisting the community in which I live and work. When I first took this position, I joined the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club. I'm also on the advisory board of UCLA's Hospitality Program, and I'm involved in different charities. In a community as small as Beverly Hills, it's critically important that the leaders of a hotel like The Peninsula Beverly Hills not only engage in the community, but give back to the community, and show a heartfelt interest in its welfare. It's vitally important to me and to the leadership committee of our hotel.

In your role, do you need to be a generalist, and how deep do you delve into each area of the hotel?

Each manager has a different style and degree of involvement. I get involved in all aspects of the operation, which may be why I work such long hours. You have to let other people get involved and empower your team and staff, but a hands-on approach to the day-to-day operations is critical. I still greet guests every day and converse with them on a regular basis. Although you can't be involved in the smallest details, you have to be fully engaged. In my management style, being a generalist just doesn't work.

The business is 24/7, but do you have the ability to turn it off?

It's the number-one challenge of being a hotel manager. You need to be accessible to your staff, and you want to be engaged and make sure people know to call you when they need help. It's very hard to turn it off, particularly because technology has made us so available. I keep striving to completely disengage, but it's very hard to do. You're always thinking about your work, something always comes up, and you want to be there for your team. That's part of your role – to mentor, to teach, and to be there. ●

A Roof Garden cabana at The Peninsula Beverly Hills