

LEADERS IN *Hospitality*

A Culture of Gracious Service

An Interview with Alan J. Fuerstman,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Montage Hotels & Resorts

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to launching Montage Hotels & Resorts, Alan Fuerstman was the Vice President of Hotel Operations at Bellagio in Las Vegas, Nevada. Previously, he served as President and Managing Director of The Phoenician resort in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he was also responsible for IIT Sheraton's Luxury Collection properties, St. Regis Aspen and St. Regis Houston, and all IIT Sheraton properties in Arizona. Before this, Fuerstman served as General Manager of the El Conquistador Resort and Country Club in Tucson, Arizona. He began his career with Marriott International. In 2007, Fuerstman received the award for Resort Executive of the Year from Ypartnership, the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAD), and the University of Denver's School of Hotel, Restaurant & Tourism Management. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania.



Alan J. Fuerstman

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 2002 by Alan Fuerstman, Montage Hotels & Resorts (www.montagehotels.com) is a hotel and resort management company designed to serve affluent travelers and homeowners. The company features an artistic collection of distinctive hotels, resorts, and residences in stunning settings that offer comfortable elegance, a unique sense of place and spirit, impeccable hospitality, and memorable culinary, spa, and lifestyle experiences. The company's flagship oceanfront resort, Montage Laguna Beach, was opened in the vibrant arts community of Laguna Beach, California, in 2003; Montage Beverly Hills, the company's second hotel, opened in Beverly Hills in 2008 and is the first Gold LEED-certified hotel and residences in Southern California. Additional properties under development include Montage Deer Valley in Park City, Utah, scheduled to open in 2010, and an oceanfront resort and residences with championship golf course coming soon to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.

What is the focus for the Montage Hotels & Resorts brand?

Montage is focused on operating the finest hotels & resorts in luxury markets around the globe. We aspire to be the enduring places where families create traditions, where business is conducted, and where generations come

together to celebrate and enjoy one another.

Is there a consistent feel throughout Montage properties, or is it about what works in a specific locale?

Destination and location are essential. There will be a residential aesthetic at each property reflecting the lifestyle of each location as interpreted by Montage. We focus on great attention to detail without the pretentiousness or stuffiness that used to be associated with old-style luxury.

With challenges across all industries right now, especially in hospitality, how difficult is the environment, and have you had to rethink some of the future plans for expansion?

Luxury hotels are not immune to economic fluctuations, but we're located in some of the most robust luxury markets. Great hotels have enduring qualities that will weather the economic cycles. I'm actually encouraged by the growth of our business. In Beverly Hills, each month is getting better and better. Laguna Beach has rebounded nicely, and we're now seeing our business levels dramatically up from where they were. Travel volume is down for weekday business, so we have introduced value-added services, amenities, and packages, but we're trying to avoid the deep discounting that so many of the luxury operators have resorted to.

From the development side going forward, our industry will see a slowdown in new developments. Montage is also likely to see opportunities to acquire existing properties, and that should lead to additional growth opportunities for our brand.

What is the approach to the food and beverage product for Montage?

As a company, one of our great passions is food, and I've always thought that culinary and spas are two great ways to distinguish our brand. We have been able to lead the market in food and beverage in Laguna Beach with our signature restaurant, Studio, and we are very proud of the strength we have in our restaurants at Montage Beverly Hills.

Are you partnering in the spa area or running that independently?

Managing spas is one of our real core competencies, in part because of my personal

background in having operated spas for so many years within the properties I managed. It's an area where we can distinguish ourselves as leaders in the industry. Spa Montage Laguna Beach was actually the very first Mobil five-star rated spa, and we continue to design and create exceptional spas and spa programming in every destination we're developing.

With the focus now on offerings like express check-in/check-out and various in-room gadgets, for Montage, is it challenging to put all the technology in that's needed and not lose that personal service side?

Technology is not a replacement for the human touch, but it can complement the human touch beautifully. Montage Beverly Hills is a great example of where we have incredible Control4 technology in the guest rooms. We offer automated drapes and air-conditioning and you can control everything through the television. Most importantly, guests value the relationship with our staff and their personal touch.

What did you see in the market that made you feel there was an opportunity to build a brand like Montage?

When I started the company nine years ago, the luxury landscape was being dominated by Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton, who were doing well but were getting large. I felt there was an opportunity to be at the ultra-luxury level with a niche that could compete very effectively if we stayed extremely focused on premium locations and properties and built a culture of gracious service. With a great resort start in Laguna Beach and a great urban hotel in Beverly Hills, we are well positioned to be in the top markets around the world, with a new brand that resonates very well with the luxury traveler.

Looking back to when you founded the company, has it been what you expected, and from the beginning, did you know it would work?

I was very confident starting Montage, but it has exceeded my expectations in how powerful and recognizable the brand has become. What I'm most proud of is the connection Montage has made with our guests, how passionate they have become about our hotels and the incredible effort made by our staff on a daily basis. ●

Montage Beverly Hills (top left); Montage Laguna Beach (top and bottom right)