

LEADERS IN
Hospitality

The Flagship of the Brand

An Interview with Paul H.F. Nash,
General Manager, The St. Regis New York

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming his current post in March 2009, Paul Nash was the General Manager of The St. Regis Houston. He is a native of London and has more than 27 years of luxury hotel experience working at various properties within the Starwood Hotels & Resorts Luxury Collection. He has worked at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco; The St. Regis Shanghai; the Sheraton Nusa Indah Resort Bali in Bali, Indonesia; the Bali International Convention Centre in Bali; and the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit in Bangkok, Thailand. Nash received his credentials in Hotel, Catering, and Business Management in 1984 from The Ryde College of Catering Studies and Hotel Administration in Sydney, Australia as well as a Certificate of Business Administration from the University of Washington.



Paul H.F. Nash



How challenging is it to balance those two?

The St. Regis New York is firmly committed to maintaining its position in the city, which means maintaining our rates and service levels. We have been very conscious of not lowering our rates, and we learned the hard way that if you lower rates very quickly, it takes years to retrieve your prior position in the marketplace. Occupancy has dropped in the city, without a doubt. We haven't dropped as much as some and, importantly, we

have held our rates, while at the same time adding value with promotions.

In a market like New York, where many hotels find it challenging to be profitable in food and beverage, how important has the Alain Ducasse relationship been?

The Ducasse relationship has been wonderful. We were very conscious in pricing

In a luxury property, do you need to offer the true spa experience?

Yes, a luxury property needs to have a spa. The majority of our spa clientele is male, and so our spa business is primarily driven through massages rather than treatments. It is important to offer those personalized services, either in a small spa or in-room, because it is a further demonstration of our property's exceptional level of service and it is expected of a hotel of this size and stature.

During challenging times, it's even more critical to have owners with a long-term vision for the property and an open dialogue with the manager. For you personally, how important has that been?

We're in a unique position because The St. Regis New York is both the flagship of the St. Regis brand and the company, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, and is also company-owned. So Starwood is conscious of the importance this property has, not only in New York, but for the brand and the company worldwide, and they are very supportive. Starwood manages nearly 1,000 hotels worldwide and partners with multiple other owners, and they are consistently looking forward, ensuring that every property is in the best position possible to hit the ground running when the turnaround happens.

How has the role of the General Manager evolved? Do you need to be more of a generalist today, and is it challenging to find the time to still

greet guests in the lobby?

The key is having a great team around you. Most hotels have a planning or executive committee of between 6 and 10 people, and those are your key influencers. You are a generalist, because you have financial experts, engineering experts, and rooms division experts, and they run their divisions, giving you some time to be in the lobby, which I believe is very important. You have to wear multiple hats in a day, which is the great fun about this job, and a little piece of you has to be everywhere all the time. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF The St. Regis New York (www.stregisnewyork.com) is considered one of the top hotels in the world. The property offers 229 luxurious guest rooms and suites, featuring Louis XVI-style furniture, crystal chandeliers, carved crown moldings and wainscoting, marble baths, and silk wall coverings; with well-appointed meeting and events facilities; and a range of timeless dining venues. It is the flagship property of St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, one of the two premier brands – the other being The Luxury Collection – of metropolitan New York-based Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc. (www.starwoodhotels.com).

How much of an impact did the economic downturn have on The St. Regis New York, and have you seen any signs of recovery?

September 2008 is when The St. Regis, like many other hotels in the city, was most heavily impacted, but we responded quickly and nimbly. We saw business improve significantly in the fourth quarter of 2009, and we're quietly confident this is an indication things are going to continue to improve throughout 2010. New York is showing great strength and we believe that will filter out to other corners of the country.

Many in the high-end luxury segment worry about rate integrity but also have to be concerned about occupancy numbers.



Adour as a New York restaurant that guests and those living in the city and surrounding area can frequent, not just as a special-occasion destination. Our core clientele dines with us three or four times a month, not just for birthdays and anniversaries. We have a 60 percent return rate for guests of the restaurant, so I think we've hit the right balance. The restaurant concept and decor is wine-focused and our pricing strategy extends to this area. If you want to come in and enjoy a \$10,000 bottle of wine, it's a great place to do it, but we also have 150 wines under \$100, so we're consciously offering a very diverse range in price point to allow people to come more regularly.



The St. Regis New York entrance (top right); Presidential Suite Living room (top left); the King Cole Bar (center)