

Hospitality

Inspiration and Creativity

An Interview with Peter Shaindlin,
Chief Operating Officer, Halekulani Corporation

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining Halekulani Corporation, Peter Shaindlin was Founding Principal of Lotus Luxury Group; Vice President, Caribbean for Rosewood Hotels & Resorts; and previously managed properties such as Rosewood's Little Dix Bay, the Boca Raton Resort & Club, the Stanhope Hotel and Grand Bay Hotel in New York City, and acted as Assistant General Manager of Food & Beverage, United Nations World Headquarters in New York.

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1980 and headquartered in downtown Honolulu, Halekulani Corporation (www.halekulanicorporation.com) is comprised of two primary assets in the heart of Waikiki, which together comprise Hotels & Resorts of Halekulani. Both hotels are internationally recognized luxury hospitality establishments. Halekulani Corporation completely redeveloped the legendary Halekulani in the early 1980s, and directly manages both hotels. The company has been long recognized as one of the city and state's leading supporters of local arts and cultural institutions and initiatives. Halekulani Corporation is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsui Fudosan Co., Ltd.

How has the global economic crisis affected the travel and tourism business in Hawaii and what impact have you seen for Halekulani?

Like virtually every worldwide destination, Hawaii has been significantly affected by the global economic crisis. From a leadership standpoint, I recognize that at times in business, things are going to go wrong for the industry; the important question is, what are we going to do about it? There are two common forks of approach: proactive or reactive. Unfortunately, in most industries, the latter is more often chosen, but not by us at Halekulani. When business volume decreases, inspiration and creativity become our most powerful tools. We revisit our programs and services and we ask our loyal guests if and how their preferences have changed. We spend more time with staff redesigning services and reminding them of the paramount importance of service. With these values in mind, Halekulani has been able to continually lead its marketplace in occupancy, rate, and return percentage despite the economic environment.

Would you highlight some of the projects taking place at Halekulani that guests

can expect in the coming years?

Halekulani is bustling with new programs and services. Regardless of any periodic blips on the economic radar, we have a long-term obligation to provide our guests with innovative and unparalleled experiences and that's happening right now as always at the hotel. We recently unveiled our new, stunning Orchid Suite, set on the edge of the sea. This is a lovely, intimate new member of our Premier Suites collection that also features The Vera Wang Suite and the Royal Suite. And our guests are enjoying our new elite fleet of automobile masterpieces, dubbed "Art in Motion:" a collection of Bentleys, Maseratis, Lotuses, and other exquisite moving works of art. These are designed in alignment with our brand pillars, which include excellence and timelessness.

Halekulani has one of the leading restaurants in the market with La Mer, as well as other highly regarded food and beverage offerings. In a market such as Hawaii that has a number of first-class restaurant offerings, is it challenging to be successful as a hotel restaurant?

While there are many fine restaurants in Honolulu, La Mer offers unparalleled levels of service and culinary artistry on a world-class level. By espousing the values and pedigree of Halekulani-inspired service, our hotel is regarded in Hawaii as housing the finest restaurants in the Pacific and beyond. And our executive chef Vikram Garg's artistry transcends ethnicity; it is truly a global cuisine.

Many leading luxury properties today have placed a major emphasis on offering high-end spa/fitness facilities. Has this been a major emphasis for Halekulani and would you provide an overview of SpaHalekulani?

While SpaHalekulani enjoys many accolades for service and its indigenous treatment program, it differentiates itself from other luxury spas – not just in Hawaii but around the world – by founding its programs on a concept of wholeness versus simply wellness. While wellness addresses the cumulative aspects of physical health, wholeness seeks to achieve a holistic and rhythmic balance between body and mind. Accordingly, our

staff's approach towards therapy is to include and incorporate a rebalancing of the client's overall energy via treatments designed with this philosophy in mind. As Thoreau pointed out, "Good for the body is the work of the body, and good for the soul is the work of the soul, and good for either is the work of the other."

Halekulani recently announced a partnership with The Imperial Hotel in Japan. Would you highlight the partnership, and what made you feel that the Imperial was the right partner for you?

Halekulani and the Imperial Hotel of Tokyo share certain fundamental core values as well as brand attributes within our alliance: more than just luxury hotels, they are in fact legacy hotels. They share long, fabled, and fascinating histories with baroque levels of guest experiences. They are both celebrated for service and are both iconic independents. In addition, we already share many of the same guests – these guests having shared values in terms of expectations, quality in service, originality, product, and consistency. A guest with either one of the two hotels now has a new home – and a 'family' of professionals to look after them – in both locations now rather than just one. One of the early initiatives is on the wedding experience: in Japan, the ultimate wedding experience is realized at the Imperial; now those newlyweds can be transported into a seamless, precious honeymoon experience at Halekulani. The possibilities are limitless.

As you look to the coming year, what are the key priorities you are focused on for the property in order to make sure that you retain your leadership position in the industry?

It's no different than driving one of our "Art in Motion" cars. When you're fortunate to be in the lead position, everyone is chasing behind you and they will try and do what you're doing in order to catch up. But at best, that can only give them an unstable, temporary positioning. By continually evolving our vision, innovation, and pace we intend to remain the trendsetter for the rest. We never look back, only forward. ●

Peter Shaindlin in an "Art in Motion" vehicle (upper left); the view from the Orchid Suite (top); the pool at dusk (bottom)