

Hospitality's Global Impact

Consistent Quality

An Interview with Maria Razumich-Zec,
Regional Vice President, USA East Coast, The Peninsula Hotels,
and General Manager, The Peninsula Chicago



EDITORS' NOTE Maria Razumich-Zec has served as General Manager of The Peninsula Chicago since March 2002 and assumed her current post with The Peninsula Hotels in May 2007. Prior to joining the property, she served as Managing Director and Hotel Manager at the New York Palace Hotel. Before this, she was Resident Manager of the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, and also held positions at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, the Waldorf=Astoria in New York, and the Hilton at Short Hills (New Jersey). Razumich-Zec holds a B.S. in business management and a B.A. in French from Purdue University.



Maria Razumich-Zec

PROPERTY BRIEF Recognized as a premier property with both Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001, The Peninsula Chicago (www.chicago.peninsula.com) boasts 339 luxurious guest rooms and suites furnished in a contemporary yet classical style. The hotel offers a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, and four distinctive restaurants and a bar, as well as 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and seven additional meeting and event rooms. The Peninsula Chicago is managed by The Peninsula Hotels (www.peninsula.com), which operates luxury hotels throughout Asia and the United States.

How much of an impact has the global economic crisis had on The Peninsula Chicago?

The travel and hospitality industries were among the hardest hit. That said, our management team was persistent in evaluating every aspect of our operation to see what we could do to save money and generate new streams of revenue. This produced significant savings and new revenue streams. We cross-trained our staff members in various areas so that we would keep them working and we brought some of our outsourced work back into our operation and consolidated our vendors. As a result, we are one of the only hotels in Chicago that never laid off any staff. We were able to accomplish this without compromising our service levels and the quality of our product. We believe the worst of the recession is behind us and we are cautiously optimistic that the economy will continue to improve.

Where do you see the industry today in regard to recovery?

We have seen significant signs of improvement in business levels at the end of 2010. 2011 will be a challenge for Chicago as it is not a great convention year, so our focus will be on building our group base and driving transient business within the Midwest. We think 2012 will be a great recovery year. There are more conventions slated for 2012 than there have been in recent years, and thus more travelers coming to the city.

At Peninsula Chicago, you continue to enhance your offerings. Would you highlight some of your new developments?

At the end of 2010, we launched a new service at both the New York and Chicago properties: the introduction of two MINI Cooper S Clubman cars available to our guests who reserve a suite; they will have use of a chauffeur-driven MINI Cooper for three hours.

The Peninsula Chicago is celebrating our 10-year anniversary in 2011. We have a number of initiatives to commemorate this milestone, including special offers for our loyal guests, recognizing our invaluable employees who are reaching their 5- and 10-year anniversaries, and numerous charitable initiatives. On June 1st, our actual anniversary, we will celebrate with a grand gala.

In terms of physical improvements, we are constantly refurbishing the hotel to ensure it looks as fresh today as the day we opened. In 2011, we have plans to totally refurbish one of our Grand Suites and all of our Grand Deluxe Suites.

Have you been happy with the impact of your restaurant Avenues and how do you attract the local community to the restaurant?

At The Peninsula Chicago, we offer four unique dining options that appeal to our guests and the local community, which provides 80 percent of our restaurant business. It's also what helps to build the brand and reputation of the hotel overall.

We position all of our restaurants with a freestanding approach and each one has developed its own successful reputation.

Shanghai Terrace features Shanghainese and Cantonese delicacies together with authentic Chinese specialties in a 1930s Shanghai supper club setting; The Lobby boasts 20-foot

floor-to-ceiling windows, and serves Peninsula's signature Afternoon Tea and Sunday Brunch; Pierrot Gourmet is a European café featuring freshly baked breads and wines by the glass; The Bar is an art deco environment offering the Gentleman's Retreat Tea, cosmo-lini's, and ports; and Avenues features contemporary American cuisine from an exhibition kitchen that also serves as The Chef's Bar, allowing for an interactive dining journey. Chef de Cuisine Curtis Duffy serves artistically presented menu items showcasing fine ingredients in his progressive contemporary menu format. He sources all of his ingredients from nearly 200 vendors, most of which are sustainable and organic farmers. The restaurant is 80 percent sustainable and is striving to reach 100 percent.

Late in 2010, Michelin Guides came to Chicago for the first time and Avenues received a two-star rating.

Would you provide an overview of the spa facilities at Peninsula Chicago?

Our 15,000-square-foot spa is located on the top two floors of the hotel. A few years ago, we renovated The Spa just as we were entering our partnership with U.K.-based ESPA.

The Spa offers eight treatment rooms and suites, more than 30 complimentary fitness classes per week, a fitness room with state-of-the-art Free Motion equipment, and a yoga and Pilates studio. Our main attraction is the half-Olympic-size swimming pool with 20-foot floor-to-ceiling windows and a sundeck that stretches the length of the hotel.

The treatment menu features Ayurveda and specialty treatments as well as half-day and full-day spa journeys.

We have been rated among the top spas in *Travel + Leisure*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, and on SpaFinder.

As an industry leader, what excites you about the industry and how has the role of the general manager evolved?

I love working in the hotel industry because there is as much personal as professional gratification. I love meeting and talking to our guests and I love developing our staff. My goal is to ensure that we leave our hotels in better shape than we found them including financially, physically, in terms of staff morale, and in relationship to the community and the environment. ●

Spa Relaxation Room (center); Terrace Views at Night (right)