



Redefining the Luxury Hotel Experience

An Interview with Shane Krige,
General Manager, The Plaza



EDITORS' NOTE Before joining *The Plaza*, Shane Krige was Managing Director at the Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas, Texas' only Five Star, Five Diamond hotel. Prior to this, he was Manager of the Grosvenor House Hotel and Residences Park Lane in London. Krige began his career with Marriott and has held senior management positions with Ritz-Carlton. He holds a bachelor of science degree in hotel management with a minor in business from Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania.



Shane Krige

PROPERTY BRIEF The Plaza reopened in March 2008 after a three-year, \$450-million renovation, and under its current owner, Elad Properties, and the management of Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, the century-old hotel was pared down from 805 to 282 guest rooms and suites. The remainder of the building was converted to private residences. The Grand Ballroom also had a facelift, and the new hotel lobby, which now houses the Champagne Bar and the Rose Club, was carved from former meeting rooms and melded with landmark sections of the building, such as the Palm Court, and the Oak Room and the Oak Bar. The Plaza (www.fairmont.com/theplaza) is the only New York hotel to be designated a National Historic Landmark.

All leading properties talk about service as a differentiator. How do you define service excellence and how has The Plaza become such a leader in this regard?

Service excellence is evaluated and defined by our guests – each guest has his own expectation of what service should look like and we strive for a memorable experience for each individual.

The industry-wide standards have changed over the years. People have greater access to luxury and the interpretation of service excellence has been altered. Guests have become more discerning than ever. There are far more options now than there were a few years ago and travelers are not only looking for luxury and value, but for an experience. It is important to present guests with a distinctive and memorable stay customized for each guest's wants and needs. People expect instant gratification and the traditional indicators of luxury, like Forbes five-star and AAA Five Diamond, mean less as guests have their own evaluation systems.

With the help of our 300-plus staff, The Plaza has been a leader in redefining the luxury hotel experience. We are focused on knowing our guests and treating everyone as an individual. Having 282 guest rooms and suites allow us the time, opportunity, and ability to focus and understand our guests.

Fabulous, engaging, and timely service is an art that needs to be worked on daily – this is what we strive to achieve.

How do you focus on employee training to ensure consistent service and a meaningful guest experience?

Continuous training, communication, and a drive for success are absolutely critical in our environment and business. Every day, there is a topic of discussion at line-up meetings where we celebrate success and stretch accountability across departments to help identify areas for improvement. Our team knows that what it takes for us to be successful and to keep all our colleagues working is to provide exceptionally authentic service, as well as having a motivated team behind the scenes.

Additionally, all Fairmont colleagues participate in a program called Service Promise training, which helps to ensure that they are engaging guests and can anticipate their needs. Also, each Concierge at The Plaza is a member of the Les Clefs d'Or, a prestigious organization ensuring that members demonstrate substantial professional experience as well as good character.

Would you provide an overview of the latest happenings at the property, including Eloise and The Plaza Food Hall?

The Plaza recently introduced the one-of-a-kind Eloise Suite, designed by celebrated fashion designer Betsey Johnson. Decor highlights include a signature Plaza chandelier fitted with pink bulbs, a white zebra-print carpet and a King-size bed made up with custom-designed bedding depicting images of Eloise. Guests who check into the Eloise Suite will receive a monogrammed Eloise bathrobe, a \$100 gift card to the Eloise shop, an Eloise camera, a framed photo of the guest inside the suite, and an Eloise book. Guests also have the option to book an adjoining "grown-up" Edwardian Suite, which includes both champagne and truffles.

Additionally, Eloise at The Plaza, a 2,100-square-foot shop dedicated to the famous six-year-old, is also decorated in "Eloise pink"

and includes a Fashion Room, a Library Room, a Beauty Salon, and a Tea Room.

The Plaza Food Hall by Todd English is a European-inspired specialty food hall offering the finest freshly-prepared gourmet foods set in a stylish and convenient atmosphere. The 5,400 square-foot space is the creation of chef and restaurateur Todd English and offers dine-in and take-away options from more than eight culinary stations, providing high-quality, affordable options to residents, guests, shoppers, and visitors to the city.

How has The Palm Court evolved as a place for power breakfasts and VIP dining?

The Palm Court is New York City's premier destination for breakfast, lunch, and afternoon tea. As part of the hotel's \$450-million, three-year restoration, The Palm Court has been restored to its original pristine beauty. The room's \$6.5 million restoration included the recreation of the original 1907 stained-glass lay light, which was covered up in the 1950s.

The Palm Court has been a quintessential New York destination since its incarnation and over the years has served as a venue for the who's who of politicians and dignitaries, celebrities, New York socialites, and locals and visitors alike.

The Palm Court is excited to offer iPads, which are loaded with an array of business and leisure applications including newspapers, magazines, and New York-specific apps catering to out-of-town visitors for use by all guests dining at The Palm Court.

How critical to the success of the property is the relationship with the owner?

Owner relations are critical to the success of any hotel or business. A great owner understands and supports the dream we at the hotel strive to achieve on a daily basis, and trusts the operators to manage the business with the same vigor and intensity as if it were their own investment. Our owners are incredibly passionate and dedicated to helping us create the dream on many levels. This is the most important relationship that a General Manager can have. However, this does not mean being a "yes man," but rather standing up for what you believe in and delivering on the results. Humility, honesty, and admitting to your faults are all key ingredients in the final recipe. ●

The Palm Court and its restored 1907 stained-glass lay light (left); Eloise Suite (center); The Plaza at Dusk (right)