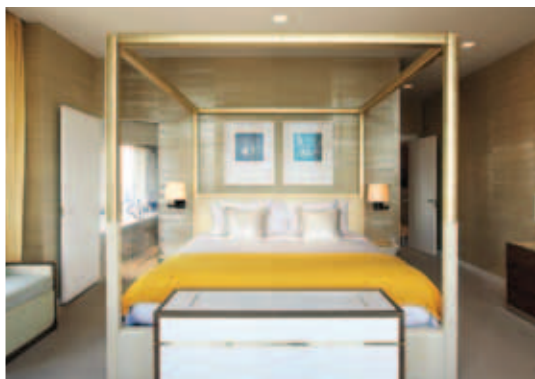




All About Value

An Interview with Dominique Piquemal,
Managing Director, The London NYC



EDITORS' NOTE Following a five-year stint as Director of Banquets and Special Services for The Peninsula Beverly Hills, Dominique Piquemal joined Starwood Hotels & Resorts' Luxury Collection in La Jolla as Food and Beverage Director. He then left for the University of Southern California to become Director of Retail. Rejoining Starwood, Piquemal moved east to the Westin Copley Place in Boston as Food and Beverage Director and was later promoted to Hotel Manager. After four years in Boston, he went to the Four Seasons in Houston where he served two years as Hotel Manager before joining Blackstone in New York on the opening team of The London NYC as Managing Director.



Dominique Piquemal

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated steps from Fifth Avenue shopping, Broadway theaters, Carnegie Hall, and Central Park, The London NYC (www.thelondonnyc.com) is located at 54th Street between 6th and 7th Avenues, a spot that affords rare and stunning views of the iconic city skyline. The accommodations, some of the largest in Manhattan, are comprised of a variety of suites that are both glamorous and range in proportion and appointment, from the 500-square-foot London Suites to the spectacular duplex London Penthouse. The London NYC fuses sophisticated style and livable comfort with interiors by renowned designer David Collins. All dining – from restaurant to room – is from the culinary team of Michelin-starred chef Gordon Ramsay, offering a complete and consistent culinary experience. The London NYC represents style from coast to coast with its counterpart, The London West Hollywood located in Los Angeles.

Over the past 24 months of challenges facing the hospitality industry, how was The London NYC positioned and where is New York today in regard to hotel growth?

The demand is increasing, which is a great thing to see in New York – it keeps the city vibrant. But supply has also increased. There are a number of new hotels coming online in this market. So we have to be sharp about what we do.

The biggest element coming out of the downturn in the economy is the perception of value and the necessity to promote the value of what we offer. Especially as the property is predominantly comprised of suites, it becomes increasingly relevant to clearly convey the hotel's unique value propositions while simultaneously staying true to the brand.

Is there an effective understanding today of that value proposition for The London NYC?

Undoubtedly, space is our number one attribute. It's also about working with guests and being as efficient as possible. This idea of efficiency has gained increased value in this hectic life as well as the personalized service of remembering who you are, your needs, and what is important to you.

All hoteliers talk about the need to manage costs. How do you cut back without the guest noticing?

First, you communicate with your staff about the current market conditions and the goals as a team. That allows you to establish a common understanding that the key for us is preserving the guest experience while driving profitability – not cutting costs. That might mean being as efficient as possible or being the first to go to market with an idea or promotion and adapting to that market. Those are the keys to making us successful.

Many times, people equate value with a lower price, but in reality, a high price generally provides greater value. Is that understood today?

I've always said that value is more than just price. The notion of value represents different things to different people. Value can be created from reducing the time to check in, to asking what you need, to making sure you receive it in a timely way.

Some guests associate room size and comfort with value. I believe it is our responsibility to provide transparency when it comes to communicating value – making the consumer's choice an easy one.

Is technology a key enabler in that area and are you able to show efficiency without losing the personal interaction?

It's always a balancing act when you're dealing with technology and guest touch points.

Technology has assumed a pivotal role in everyone's day. However, it is essential to maintain a personal level of communication. This entails going 'back to basics' when interacting with guests, identifying how you can improve your service levels and executing them efficiently.

Have you been happy with how your relationship with Gordon Ramsay and MAZE has driven clientele? How challenging is it to be successful with a hotel restaurant in a city like New York?

Anywhere you open a restaurant, it is going to be challenging. We're fortunate in that we have talented chefs, outstanding cuisine, and a great name with Gordon Ramsay.

Our chef de cuisine, Markus Glocker, and our Pastry Chef, Ron Paprocki, are both recent winners of Star Chef and have developed a strong following within the food community to come back and try us repeatedly.

Gordon Ramsay's name and the consistent product provides a key advantage in this area.

Many in the luxury segment talk about having to offer a true spa and fitness experience. Will you discuss The London NYC Club's position?

People are into fitness more than ever before. I think having a great fitness center is a key to a great stay.

Spas are nice, but people on the go want a great workout before they go out or conduct business. They want to maintain the workout routines that they establish at home. So it's important to have a great facility with state of the art equipment and enough of it to ensure that their workout does not delay them for a scheduled appointment or meeting.

Is there consistency within your suite offering or is there a different feel suite to suite?

There is consistency in our London Suite and London Vista Suite product, which is appreciated by our guests. We do have a customized Luxury Suite Collection that offers one-of-a-kind experiences and spectacular views.

As guests experience them, they find particular favorites they request, giving them that personalized, at-home feeling when they stay at The London. ●

The London NYC Exterior (left); Penthouse Suite Bedroom and Bathroom (right)