



Merciless Hospitality

An Interview with Offer Nissenbaum,
Managing Director, The Peninsula Beverly Hills



EDITORS' NOTE Offer Nissenbaum has held his current post since December 2007. Prior to joining Peninsula, he was Regional Vice President of Operations for Omni Hotels, based in New York City, overseeing eight properties on the East Coast. He concurrently served as Omni's corporate liaison to the Global Hotel Alliance, which includes international luxury brands like Kempinski, Pan Pacific, Dusit, and Leela. Most recently, Offer was awarded the coveted "Hotelier of the Year" Award by Virtuoso, the prestigious global organization of luxury travel specialists.



Offer Nissenbaum

PROPERTY BRIEF Having celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2011, The Peninsula Beverly Hills (www.Peninsula.com) is the only AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five Star hotel in Southern California for 18 consecutive years. The iconic luxury hotel offers 193 elegantly appointed rooms, including 36 suites and 16 private villas, nestled among lush tropical gardens in the heart of Beverly Hills. The property is home to The Belvedere, the only AAA Five Diamond restaurant in Los Angeles for 16 consecutive years, and also features The Living Room, where the legendary Peninsula Afternoon Tea is served daily, The Roof Garden for al fresco dining, and The Peninsula Spa.

The Peninsula Beverly Hills has undergone major renovation. What has been done?

Our guest room renovation started in late 2010 and it finished December 2011. We refreshed all of our accommodations – soft goods, case goods, new technology. So while there was no construction, there was a major facelift of the property; this is critical for a hotel – particularly in the ultra-luxury category – to continually address its physical product before the guest can observe it becoming tired.

We undertook this \$20-million renovation before we embarked on our 20th anniversary, as we want to hold onto our competitive edge in the marketplace. We have always been the leader and are determined to hold that standing. Having the right product contributes to that success.

Was it important to retain the feel of the property?

It was critical to maintain the same feel of the hotel, while evolving some elements to retain a contemporary but timeless setting. That is

why it took us over a year and a half and a progression through six sample prototype rooms to come to terms with the perfect, refreshed look rather than a different look.

Our guests told us not to change anything. So we wanted to retain the DNA of the property to make sure the guest that walks into our hotel immediately recognizes, it's Peninsula but it's refreshed and renewed.

How has this property retained its consistent leadership in the market?

There is no doubt that the associates of The Peninsula make our hotel. There are certain elements of our service that no one else can deliver and that gives us a distinct edge over the competitive set.

We've taken every aspect of the guest experience and tried to enhance it, and we do that through the Innovation Committee that I've put together. We meet on a regular basis to talk about what we can do next to wow the guest. The list never shortens, because we always think about the possibilities – there are always new ways to improve the guest experience.

We're focused on innovation but we also provide merciless hospitality – that's done on a consistent basis, day in and day out.

How do you find the right balance between offering technology and maintaining the human touch?

The key is providing convenient technology in the guest rooms: accessible, understandable and easy to navigate. The hotels that can balance what is necessary without going over the top are the ones that understand what the consumer needs. When you're tuned into what guests need and desire, that focus eliminates any possibility of extreme amenities and going overboard.

What is the secret to your success in the food and beverage area?

On the catering and banquet side, the client is very fortunate because only one client can have an event at the hotel at a time. The focus is exclusively on that single client and not just on the service side but also in the kitchen.

With regard to our restaurants, we have been incredibly successful with our Roof Garden restaurant because we have found that people like the casual, sophisticated ambiance; its location next to the spa and pool fosters a great experience given the relaxed atmosphere of these amenities. That, coupled with delicious,

fresh California cuisine, has made the Roof Garden a huge success for us. It's becoming a popular dining escape for hotel guests and locals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

The Belvedere restaurant, located off our lobby, has done well, especially because the atmosphere is so conducive to having a conversation. There are few restaurants in LA offering such a sense of serene space, where you can sit with no distractions and talk without yelling. The Belvedere has a long-standing tradition for being a place where people go for special occasions and business meetings.

Peninsula is a brand with high recognition but it has only three properties in North America. Does it surprise you how strong this brand is and do all the properties have a consistent feel?

It does surprise me how strong the brand is, given that we only have nine hotels – 10 hotels after Paris opens. Our presence has been elevated due to our renown for quality versus critical mass. Yes, there is a concerted effort to grow the company, but development opportunities have to make sense. When the right opportunities come about, you will see expansion in the United States in the right markets, as well as internationally.

At every Peninsula hotel, there is an extraordinary focus on the guest experience, and that upholds our company's reputation. One of the main reasons our hotels are so successful is that Peninsula owns all of its properties, unlike other companies who only manage for the different owners respective to each hotel. We have the biggest benefit because our parent company, The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited, own the hotels they operate. We have some partners in other hotels, but every Peninsula hotel has equity associated with our parent company – that allows us to be in control and influence the destiny of our hotels, and to make better decisions on their behalf.

The three hotels in the U.S. (New York, Chicago, and Beverly Hills) work closely together – we share a lot of our guests. Although each property is unique in style, location, and market, we share a passion for the guest along with a top-to-bottom organizational focus (from the GM to line employees) that centers on the guest experience. We help each other because we want our guests to be brand loyal, and in the end, that also benefits each of our hotels. ●

The Peninsula Beverly Hills front entrance (left); California Suite living area (right)