

Hospitality

Growing the Conrad Brand



The entrance to Conrad New York

An Interview with Robert Rechtermann,
General Manager, Conrad New York

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Rechtermann arrived at Conrad New York following a four-year run as General Manager of Five Star Five Diamond Peninsula New York. Previously, Rechtermann held a range of management-level positions including Resident Manager of The Peninsula Chicago; Director of Operations at The Ritz-Carlton, Boston Common in 2006; EAM F&B at The Ritz-Carlton, Boston Common from 2003 to 2006; EAM F&B at the Five Diamond Hilton Short Hills from 1998 to 2003; Director of Food & Beverage at Shutters on the Beach in Santa Monica, California, from 1996 to 1998; and Director of Food & Beverage at Hilton Long Beach from 1993 to 1996. Rechtermann began his career as Management Trainee at the Waldorf Astoria New York.



Robert Rechtermann

PROPERTY BRIEF In March 2012, Conrad New York (www.conradnewyork.com) opened its doors in New York City's Battery Park City neighborhood. Rising 16 stories along the Hudson River waterfront, the 463 all-suite luxury hotel is the first New York address from Conrad Hotels & Resorts, the global luxury brand of Hilton Worldwide. The Conrad New York features spacious guest rooms that average over 430 square feet, each outfitted with integrated technology, flat-screen televisions, and individual climate control. The hotel's seasonal "green roof" features a rooftop bar with endless views of New York Harbor and Manhattan. The hotel boasts over 30,000 square feet of adaptable meeting space, including the 6,200 square-foot Gallery Ballroom.

Have you been happy with the awareness for the property?

The property has been received very well in the local community as well as the business travel community. We had some great success with press we did surrounding the opening as well as post opening. So we have been fortunate with what the hotel looks like, the focus on the design, art, etc.

But we're constantly working on ways to increase awareness. As a member of Hilton Worldwide's Luxury Brands portfolio, Conrad Hotels & Resorts is highly regarded internationally and is becoming more well-known domestically, as the brand expects to double its current portfolio size of more than 20 hotels over the next three to four years. As the world's fastest-growing luxury

hotel brand, we feel that this important new property will help reestablish the Conrad brand in the U.S. New York is a huge gateway city, so this particular destination and market is key for the brand as it continues to evolve and expand.

But part of our role in opening this hotel in lower Manhattan was to introduce this part of the world to the Conrad brand.

How are you building the brand in North America and will there be a consistent feel to the properties?

There is some consistency, but the hotels are quite unique. We don't want cookie-cutter hotels.

As far as expansion domestically, with the building of this hotel, there is even a greater interest with developers and investors to open Conrads in the U.S. Now that they have seen one successfully opened in New York City, it will help the brand immeasurably.

We have a few great hotels in Chicago, Miami, Indianapolis, and Puerto Rico. But having a hotel in New York is key, because it helps promote the brand overall.

What feel did you look to create in the rooms?

We're an all-suite hotel with 463 suites; we have a few specialty suites above that. The idea was to work with the existing footprint but to create great value.

The size of the rooms – 430-square-feet on average and up – is huge by New York standards. The building itself is only 10 or 12 years old.

Every room has a parlor with a desk, a couch, and a 42-inch TV so you can work and relax separate from the bedroom; we expanded the bathrooms so you have a wonderful walk-in shower separate from the toilet and sink area; we also have a second sink and wet bar; and the bedroom can be made private by sliding glass panels, as can the living room.

So it's the idea of creating a space that is workable if you're here for business but livable if you're here for pleasure.

We also have the latest technology with a vibrant wireless system from which you can order room service via your TV or an app on your iPhone.

In terms of what you've done with the restaurant concept and the rooftop bar, how challenging is it to be successful in that part of the business?

Running a hotel restaurant in any city is always a challenge because you're competing with great local restaurants. But we wanted to create something that was approachable for both the community and the traveler; we had one great space to work with on the second floor off of our atrium lobby – there is a lot of traffic there. You can also have drinks in the lobby. We created a concept called Atrio, named after the atrium, and we have a great chef from the Four Seasons New York hotel. It's a breakfast/lunch/dinner restaurant but there is a separate barista for coffee in the morning; the actual bar is in the restaurant as well – it's an open kitchen so you see a lot of activity.

We were fortunate to add a rooftop bar to the project called Loopy Doopy – named after the spectacular Sol LeWitt drawing that overlooks the hotel's lobby/atrium – and it offers great views of the Hudson River and Statue of Liberty, and has been wildly successful to date.

We also have great restaurants in the complex itself.

How broad is the offering for meetings?

We have about 30,000 square feet of meetings space including pre-function space. It was a focus because we wanted to bring a lot of new group business to the area, especially in light of the companies moving down here.

Aside from Cipriani's, our hotel ballroom is the biggest in the area. We have a ballroom upstairs that can seat up to 500 people and a smaller ballroom downstairs to accommodate 250 as well as several smaller studios for 10 to 50 people, and a great boardroom as well.

We've also had a few good social events and are looking to get weddings and bar mitzvahs on the books going forward.

Will LEED be the norm going forward?

Everyone expects the basics of recycling and energy conservation, but when you have the opportunity to build a new building or retrofit an existing building, you have to take advantage of the technology out there to enhance that. It saves you money and protects the environment.

Knowing via motion detectors that you've left the room so we can shut down the lights and TVs, but when you come back, your settings are recalled, is a seamless procedure but we save energy. We will be a Gold LEED-certified building.

We also have the low-flow showers and the toilets that have two buttons to flush, so we've done a lot of wonderful things to protect the environment. ●