

Hospitality

Gold Standards

An Interview with Scott Geraghty,
Area Vice President and General Manager,
The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park



Auden Restaurant rendering (above); entrance to The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Before assuming his roles with The Ritz-Carlton, Scott Geraghty was General Manager of The St. Regis New York. He holds a B.A. degree in international relations from Lehigh University and an associate in occupational studies degree in culinary arts from The Culinary Institute of America.



Scott Geraghty

PROPERTY BRIEF The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park (www.ritzcarlton.com/centralpark) is comprised of 259 guest rooms, including 47 spacious one-bedroom suites and 12 luxury condominiums. The property offers an on-site fitness center; a La Prairie spa; a full-service, multilingual concierge; limousine and Bentley services; and a conference concierge. BLT Market, the hotel's award-winning restaurant, features the seasonal, market-inspired cuisine of acclaimed celebrity chef, Laurent Tourondel.

How does The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park differentiate itself among the competitive set?

Central Park has a number of unique situations: our location is wonderful. We are mid-Central Park; we have breathtaking views.

If you have kids, there are a number of great activities for them to engage in, be it the Central Park Zoo or out on the boat pond.

Hotels in our end of the market fall into two categories: those that are more contemporary with newer builds and those that are more classical – we are one of the pre-War buildings in the city and have a much more classical design than some of our contemporary competitors in the market.

One of the more defining items for us is our ability to provide club lounge access for many of our guests, which gives them the opportunity to sit in a reserved setting overlooking the park; we have five meal periods a day where we're able to celebrate everything from breakfast to a full luncheon to tea in the afternoon to cocktails and hors d'oeuvres in the evening, and dessert.

We have a wonderful concierge service on that level so our guests can check-in there – the concierge will provide any services the guest might need in the city.

From the spa perspective, we have La Prairie, which is a world-class spa, offering a tremendous opportunity to relax and be off the grid.

For a classical hotel in the city, we've run somewhat under the wire in that we're an intimate hotel – it's like a town house.

Is there a consistent feel among your accommodations or do some of the specialty suites stand out?

We're trying to have our suite product feel as if it were the guests own pied-à-terre in the city, so they can control their environment. There aren't a lot of merchandising items that we would generically place in those suites – it would be set up specifically for the guest.

Within the culture of Ritz-Carlton, we focus on learning how guests travel, what their preferences are during their stay, what their trip persona is, and then customizing the suite for them with, for example, the reading materials and flowers they like.

Can a hotel be successful in the food and beverage arena in a city like New York?

It requires defining what food and beverage success looks like in a hotel of our nature. Are we consistently driving an energetic area? That's what we want to provide to our guests.



Some hotels look to the financial aspect to define success. Our definition is how it adds to the whole. A hotel is the embodiment of several businesses put together. You need to have a wonderful restaurant that is comfortable, feels right, and fits within the hotel; it needs to be active, as do the bars and lounges. You have to ask, do they all fit well together? Are they all utilized? Is there a buzz?

We just opened a restaurant called Auden, which is only 50 seats and adjacent to the Auden Bar and the Star Lounge. It's an open plan and you can flow from space to space.

That energy adds to the overall appeal and desire to be within a hotel that meets all of the experiential needs we have as individuals.

How do you offer the latest technology without losing the personal touch?

We want to have the latest and greatest technology available, but it's not a substitute for our ladies and gentlemen and the role they play in connecting emotionally with guests. If we're looking for full engagement from guests, we must have that personal interaction. You cannot replace a conversation with technology.

We want guests to be in a bit of a cocoon where we take care of whatever they may need. Our concierge service makes certain that our guests' stay is easy and effortless. Services can be set up with iPads, but there is nothing like a warm smile and a wonderful handshake from someone who says, "Leave it to me."

How does Ritz-Carlton provide such a consistent customer experience?

We have a defined culture and belief system that is embodied in our gold standards. The first sentence of our credo is, "The Ritz-Carlton Hotel is a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission." Those aren't just words.

We carry credo cards and we have discussions every day with our ladies and gentlemen on the precepts and principles of these gold standards.

We have a commitment to service that is unparalleled in the industry. To understand who our guests are and what they want when they travel makes all the difference.

Has the role of GM become more about financial matters and less about hospitality?

Our ladies and gentlemen are at the core of who we are as a hotel company – they interact every day with the ladies and gentlemen that spend time with us, and if we can take care of each other well, then we can translate that into taking care of our guests.

Taking care of our owners has never been more important than it is today. The financial bumpiness of the past several years has made it ever more challenging for an owner.

Financial attributes are very important, but we need to make sure our guests are fully engaged with us as a hotel and a brand – that will lead to more business. ●