

Anticipating the Needs of Guests

An Interview with
Amy Finsilver, General Manager, XV Beacon

EDITORS' NOTE Amy Finsilver was named to her current post in September 2008. Finsilver got her start in the industry in 1989 at Boston Marriott Long Wharf Hotel, enjoying an eight-year run as Director of Guest Services that included her induction into Les Clefs d'Or USA. She moved on to Chief Concierge at Four Seasons Hotel Boston. Finsilver first joined XV Beacon as Assistant General Manager in 1999. She then moved on to Director of Sales & Special Events at The Olive Group, operated by Chef Todd English, in Charlestown, Massachusetts. Prior to rejoining XV Beacon, she most recently served as Marketing Manager at The Sports Club/LA at Ritz-Carlton. Finsilver lends her expertise outside the hospitality realm as well, consulting on customer service and sales for companies such as The Rallye Motors Group in Glen Cove, New York; Herb Chambers in Boston; and Healthworks in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. Finsilver earned a B.B.A. with a focus on Finance from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and a Master Certificate from Cornell in Ithaca, New York.



Amy Finsilver

PROPERTY BRIEF The 63-room luxury boutique hotel XV Beacon (www.xvbeacon.com) is beautifully set in a turn-of-the-20th-century Beaux-Arts building on Boston's historic Beacon Hill. Each of the hotel's rooms is individually designed with Italian-inspired decor. Guests can enjoy either queen-size four-poster beds or king-size beds, 42-inch flat screen TVs, surround sound stereo, iPod/iPad docking stations, whirlpool bath tubs, heated towel racks, in-room fireplaces, complimentary Wi-Fi access, 400-thread-count linen sheets, complimentary Lexus sedan service, and museum-quality artwork throughout. Moo... Restaurant and its subterranean Wine Cellar are not to be missed—the latter holds an immense collection of 2,800 selections and 31,000 bottles of fine and rare wines dating from the 1700s to present day.

What makes this property special and how have you maintained a loyal following?

It's privately owned and the foresight of our owner was to create a property that was beyond any discerning traveler's expectations in quality of product and service.

When I talk about quality of product, it means that nothing here is commercial grade – everything

was either individually selected by our designer and owner or custom-made for the property from our artwork, which we had commissioned, to the carpeting and the fixtures, to exude a feeling of sophisticated warmth and comfort. Those who travel here feel they're peacefully sitting in their own homes.

We provide a level of service that is proactive and perceptive. We build profiles on each of our guests so if you stay with us once, thereafter, we will know your likes and dislikes. Luxury to us is for the guests not having to ask; it's

knowing what is wanted and expected, and preparing their stay according to their preferences.

We train and require each of our staff members to uphold our service standards but also to use their own personalities to relate to the individual using creativity and enthusiasm. The people we hire have a sincere appreciation for helping others.

How do you differentiate your restaurant product in a city with so many great stand-alone food and beverage offerings?

When we first opened the hotel, The Federalist was our restaurant, which was excellent. We rebranded in 2007 with Jamie Mammano, our executive chef and culinary expert, who took over the food and beverage operation. Chef Mammano is one of the celebrity chefs in our city, so our hotel restaurant, Moo... also has that stand-alone appeal. We have a private entrance for hotel guests and a street entrance for the public.

Due to his expertise, his background in the hotel business, and his concern for our standards of service, we have been able to maintain a great reputation for wonderful food and have created a spectacular design for the restaurant. It provides outstanding fare for our three-meal-period, 24-hour room service, and our private events. Our phenomenal chefs, who understand the needs of working in a hotel and the 24-hour-a-day demands of the guests, help make it successful.

How do you keep up with technology without losing that personal touch with guests?

It takes a lot of relationship building. We have a 70 percent guest return rate. People stay with us because they trust us and rely on our team for all types of assistance. I try to reach out to all of our guests, which one can do in a smaller property. There is continuous communication between my staff and myself – we all are in the loop about who is coming to the hotel and what they need.



We have superb technology available to our guests but a lot of them are accustomed to having personal assistants, so we work with them to assess their specific needs. For instance, we give our return guests who constantly use the hotel's complimentary Wi-Fi their own individual passwords or have files e-mailed to us to have them printed and arranged prior to arrival.

We try to make technology seamless but we will never let the human touch go.

How critical is it for you to have a common vision with the owner?

It's imperative. I opened the hotel in 1999 and came back in 2008 when the owner called me. He's a brilliant real estate developer and, of course, wants to make money, but also to have the best product available. Without his support and financial backing, we wouldn't be as phenomenal as we are today. We want to have top-of-the-line technology and not charge for it; so, he wants to make sure that is available. We take rooms out of order every year for two weeks at a time to make sure everything is perfect. If we didn't have the owner's support and the same vision of having the best quality of product, service, and staffing, we would not be where we are today.

Does the GM now need to be more of a generalist than in the past?

The role has evolved to some degree. A general manager needs to be more involved with daily operations and be responsive to his or her guests. In today's market, there is much competition. Most can offer a beautiful room, service, a bed, and a spa, but people come back because of the service they receive. Yes, it is a "generalist" position, but a GM has to be more involved than just with asset management and dealing with owners. Engagement is essential with both guests and employees. At a small property, a GM needs to have a deeper understanding of operations and a strong working knowledge of each department because one does not have the layers of management to fall back on.

Are there strong opportunities for women at senior levels within the industry?

There have always been opportunities for both genders. Women sometimes stop working to have families or put their careers on hold – this may be one reason why you haven't seen as many females becoming general managers. There is opportunity along with a variety of other paths females can choose to take in their professional and personal lives. ●

The front facade of XV Beacon (top right)