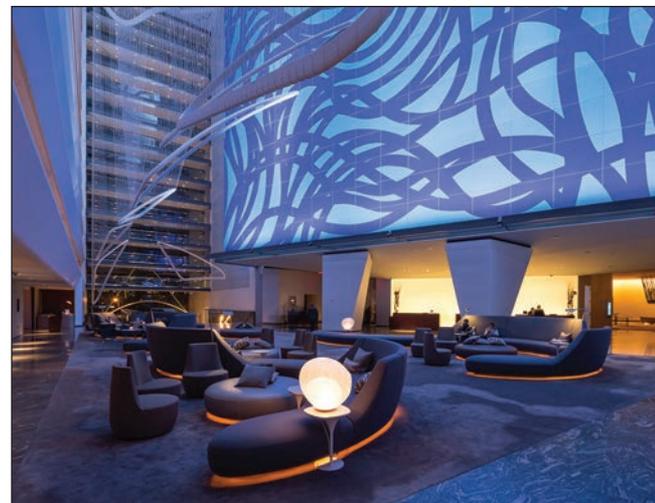




Smart Luxury

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



Conrad New York guest bedroom (left); lobby (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Rechtermann arrived at Conrad New York following a four-year run as General Manager of the Five Star, Five Diamond The 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. He holds a B.S. in hotel management from Fairleigh Dickinson University.



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 location for Conrad Hotels & Resorts, the global luxury brand of Hilton Worldwide. The Conrad New York features spacious suites, each outfitted with integrated technology, flat-screen televisions, and individual climate control. The hotel's seasonal "green roof" features a rooftop bar with breathtaking views of the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island, New York Harbour, and the magnificent Hudson River. The hotel boasts over 30,000 square feet of adaptable meeting space, including the 6,200-square-foot Gallery Ballroom. The Conrad New York was awarded a LEED Gold Certificate (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for new construction from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) for sustainable building practices and design.

How strong is the market today, and what kind of growth do you see in your segment?

We're in a fortunate position. In 2011, we started developing this asset and it reopened in March of 2012. Shortly after we launched Conrad New York, a lot of construction and redevelopment began there and it's having a very positive impact on the lower Manhattan landscape. For example, Condé Nast will be one of the anchor tenants at the World Trade Center and, within that same structure there will be a new and very modern transit hub – the third largest in New York City.

Also, we're located right next door to the World Financial Center, which will be renamed "Brookfield Place" in 2014, and it's also undergoing a huge redevelopment. When completed, among other assets, it will feature 40,000 square feet of retail space with leases signed by several very high-end brands. So, we're creating a destination within New York City in lower Manhattan. There is already the residential component there; Battery Park City is full of families and high-wealth individuals, and they are starved for luxury hotels, shopping, and restaurants.

The Conrad New York was up and running prior to these new developments being finished, and now downtown is going to explode.

What does the Conrad brand stand for?

Conrad, like many luxury brands, is tailored to be specific to a local market. In Manhattan, we have focused on art, technology, and our superb location in terms of our messaging, and that is consistent with the brand. Conrad is one of the luxury divisions of Hilton, with the Waldorf being our sister brand. The Waldorf brand is on the traditional luxury side whereas Conrad is about "Smart Luxury." Under the Smart Luxury brand, we focus on touch-points and high technology, creating a hotel experience that feels more like modern luxury than traditional luxury.

What is the basis for the strength of your suite product?

It's a little known fact that we're an all-suite hotel – there aren't too many all-suite luxury hotels in Manhattan. Given this, we're able to provide both business and leisure guests with great value. Our suites offer a separate bedroom, living area, and bathroom, and provide a comfortable area to work and relax.

We offer a total of 463 spacious suites that range in size from 430 square feet to 750 square feet, and our Conrad Suite is 1,500 square feet.

How do you stand out in the food and beverage sector?

Maintaining hotel restaurants in New York is always a challenge. We had the opportunity to start from scratch with a restaurant concept, and our goal was to create a dining destination. From the start, we wanted to achieve a smart balance and this meant that we didn't want to build a restaurant that was just a breakfast place nor overreach and involve a celebrity chef for evening dining.

What we have created is Atrio, a restaurant destination that is comfortable and inviting for all three meals. In the morning, a lot of corporate businessmen use Atrio for breakfast meetings and the same can be said about the guests we host for lunch. In the evening, and with our lobby and lounge area, we can stage cocktail parties for 50 or 60 people.

The key to a hotel restaurant's success is being incredibly flexible for the customers in terms of menu variety, but also in terms of utilizing the space in different ways.

We have a great open kitchen, along with a wonderful and four-sided wine bar. Guests often like to wander from our bar and into the lobby to admire our art collection.

We're fortunate to have several great restaurants in our building complex so our guests, as well as local residents, can enjoy a variety of excellent dining choices.

Does your meeting space appeal to large social type events as well as high-level boardroom meetings?

We can definitely accommodate both types of events, and more. We have 30,000 square feet of usable meeting space in lower Manhattan, which is very rare, and this includes two great ballrooms. They're both well-suited for corporate events and social functions.

In 18 months, we have grown to a \$10-million-plus catering operation, and have secured a range of excellent opportunities with both local and international groups. We're fortunate to have Danny Meyer's Union Square Events providing the food and service for our meetings, weddings, and events so the culture and quality of food is the best in New York City.

In a luxury segment, how do you offer the expected technology without losing the personal touch?

This is the idea behind Conrad: Smart luxury. You have the luxury of choosing to use the technology, but you also can stop by the front desk and check in or out.

The company recently introduced the Conrad Concierge, which is an app that allows you to do many things from your mobile device. You can pre-check-in; you can order room service ahead of time; you can request extra things in your room; you can request information about theater tickets.

But you can also pick up the phone and speak with someone.

So we want to offer all levels of technology to meet a guest's expectations. ●