

# Hospitality



## “Aim For The Stars”

An Interview with Daniel A. Hostettler,  
President and Group Managing Director,  
Ocean House Management



Ocean House's beachside location (left);  
the Tower Suite (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Appointed to his current post in 2009, Daniel Hostettler has been instrumental in the development, growth, and management of the Ocean House and its sister property the Weekapaug Inn. Previously, he served as President and Managing Director of Lajitas - The Ultimate Hideout; as Managing Director of La Posada de Santa Fe Resort & Spa in Santa Fe, New Mexico; and the Summer Lodge Hotel and Spa in Dorset, England. He also held a variety of positions with Meadowood, Napa Valley, and was part of the opening team of The Peninsula, Beverly Hills. His education includes a B.S.B.A. Hotel & Restaurant Management, University of Denver; B.S.B.A. Finance, University of Denver; G.M.P., School of Hotel Administration, Cornell University; C.D.P., The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania; and Certified Hotel Administrator, American Hotel & Motel Association.



Daniel A. Hostettler

It was a labor of love, so we wanted to honor the traditions of inn-keeping and hospitality. We aimed for a five-star designation and focused on delivering high-level service, because we had all the bells and whistles in terms of the physical product. We achieved our fifth star in our second year of operation.

We're entering our fourth year and we've been very successful. Ocean House Management was formed to manage not only the Ocean House but the Weekapaug Inn, a hotel near us that we purchased, renovated to its original 1939

footprint and opened in 2012 as our second Relais & Châteaux property.

**You currently have a third property in development, which is expected to open in 2015. Will that property be attractive to a similar clientele?**

Yes, 70 percent is New York, Connecticut, and Boston, because those are our largest drive-in markets, and about 30 percent is a mixture of the remainder of the country and the world.

Ocean House is at the highest end of the spectrum – our average rate last summer was \$1,550 per night. The Inn was designed to be a bit more of what we call barefoot elegant. It is less grand than the Ocean House, still appealing to the same geographic marketplace but a different market of guest.

At the Ocean House, our signature is food: we have five restaurants for only 62 rooms, so it's a very big food destination. We created a position called the food forager, which began as a culinary liaison because I'm passionate about farm-to-table and the agricultural region of this part of New England. We wanted a chef that we could task with being the liaison with small farms and fishermen, and bringing products to our chefs on a weekly basis.

As we evolved, we found that guests enjoyed going out with the food forager to the farmer's markets and it became a resort activity that guests embrace.

At the Inn, because we're located on a salt-water inlet, we employed a full-time naturalist who does everything from stargazing in the evening with guests to clamming or kayaking.

**How well has the culinary focus been received?**

We have a three-meal-a-day restaurant that is our formal dining room at the Ocean House. The restaurant at the Inn also practices farm-to-table.

I researched this area when I arrived and found out that Rhode Island and this part of

Connecticut has a strong agricultural background. So we wanted to educate the guests on that.

When we were conceptualizing Seasons, which is our formal restaurant, I wanted to make it farm-to-table and to ensure that there is a dictate that 80 percent of every dish comes from within 150 miles of the property.

Our spa changes their menu four times per year to reflect the season, so an apricot salt scrub in the spring might be a pumpkin scrub in the fall.

We have tried to take that culinary idea and weave it throughout the entire property, and we have been successful with that.

**How important is it to offer the spa?**

The OH! Spa has its own Forbes Five Star designation, so it was important from the beginning that it not be branded as a hotel spa but that it evolve to have its own identity.

Speaking to our vision, OH! Spa is an amenity for resort guests in the summer, and a destination unto itself during other parts of the year. We've remained focused on achieving that.

**How have you put systems in place to make sure you're meeting all the desired standards?**

In an independent property, the challenge is that you don't have the brand standards and the training staff that chain properties have.

We decided that our mission would be “Aim for the Stars,” and every employee hired from the very first day would be told that the objective would be to be one of the 77 Five Star hotels in the world. That mission would permeate throughout everything we do.

We got hold of the 565 Forbes standards and determined they would be the main standards for the hotel. We then added to those standards to deliver what we hoped would be an even higher level of service and utilized that in all of our training. We constantly reinforce consistency of product.

We have a dedicated full-time training director and invest a quarter of a million dollars per year in training. The owners believed in our vision that if we delivered the service, we would be able to push the rate. We had an ADR in our first summer of \$700, which isn't bad, but to double it over the past two summers by virtue of being awarded the fifth star and delivering the guest experience we have preached shows the merit of early and constant investment in training.

Forbes standards are focused on the service product, the delivery, and the hospitality. We are always asking, how can we push those standards higher? ●