



## A Secret Gem

An Interview with Kate Martin,  
General Manager, Hotel Chandler



A Deluxe Queen guest room (left); the newly renovated library (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Kate Martin has been employed by Triumph Hotels since September of 1999. Born in Greece, where she began her career working in five-star resorts, she relocated to England to take up her studies in Hotel and Catering Management. In England, she worked with Inter-Continental Hotels of the World at several of their London-based properties. Upon completion of her degree, she continued on to Toronto, Canada, to complete a one-year course in Hotel Management. She then joined the Five Diamond Rigma Royal Hotel in New York (now Hotel London) as Assistant Front Office Manager. In late 1999, Martin began working with The Iroquois New York hotel as the Front Office Manager. She has progressed within Triumph Hotels through various management positions. In September 2010, she rejoined Hotel Chandler as General Manager, nine years after being part of the original opening team at the same property.



Kate Martin

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Located in the New York City's Flatiron District, Hotel Chandler ([www.hotelchandler.com](http://www.hotelchandler.com)) provides easy access to corporate offices in midtown Manhattan and to must-see attractions like Bryant Park and the Empire State Building. This Small Luxury Hotel offers 148 rooms and suites and each of the accommodations at Hotel Chandler serves as a calming oasis in the heart of New York City, and boasts an array of luxury amenities including Molton Brown toiletries and Frette Italian linens. Guests can enjoy a seasonally evolving menu from Michelin-starred Chef Shaun Hergatt at the hotel's newly opened Juni restaurant, and may finish with a nightcap at the brand new bar.

### How has this property evolved?

We opened in 2001 and have undergone a major renovation to get to where we are now – the physical property has changed.

We have also made a huge investment in the services we provide, upgrading our amenities and adding those personal touches that our guests were looking for, since we knew we would need these to join Small Luxury Hotels of the World.

The biggest change has been the food and beverage enhancement with the addition of Juni. This changes the clientele and the way we're approached.

We have always prided ourselves on being a secret gem with a great location and phenomenal service, but the restaurant will elevate our status even more.

### How do you classify your guest?

New York City has a good balance of guests. It's a huge tourist destination, but we also have a strong corporate base: there are a lot of big corporations in the neighborhood.

We have a good balance between the two. At day's end, corporate drives the market, and when it's busy, it demands the rates.

Small Luxury Hotels is mostly leisure driven and with joining that organization, we have seen an increase in leisure travelers.

### Would you talk about the work that has been done on the accommodations side?

Many hotels in our neighborhood have a modern feel to them, and a lot of their visitors aren't hotel guests. They have a strong focus on creating a "scene" in their public spaces. But we're hoteliers – we want to make sure our hotel guests are comfortable.

When we underwent the renovation, we decided on a residential feel so that when guests walk in, they feel welcome. We're always considering who the guests are and keeping their needs in mind.

With the design, we wanted to do something that was timeless, that would appeal to everybody and have modern elements to it, but also be warm.

### How far do you need to go with the technology, and how do you avoid losing the personal touch?

Technology needs to be there, especially when it comes to connectivity. Our guests want to be personally welcomed and recognized. Because we're small, guests are never waiting in line.

I believe in sending e-mails but there is nothing like a personalized phone call.

We have our concierge call guests ahead of time to find out what they might need. We review who is coming in and how we can best accommodate them. You can't do that if you're fully technology-focused. You lose the opportunity to get to know your client and make a difference in the experience.

### What do you look for in terms of attracting employees?

You can teach skills; it's the personality that will lead to success in this business. Either you have it or you don't. It's a grueling career at the entry level, so you have to love this business to keep growing.

With the front office team, we like to challenge them and bring in different personalities. It's about finding a balance. Can they connect? This is

a marathon, not a sprint; it's about taking it slowly. As long as you're personable and approachable, you can succeed.

### There are six properties within the group. Is there close coordination among them or are they independent?

We were independent but we're in the process of branding the properties under Triumph Hotels.

We don't want the hotels to be cookie-cutter; we want each property to maintain its own unique approach, characteristics, and style. Our owner puts faith in his general managers and gives us leeway to make the necessary decisions to better service our guests.

We're developing the brand, and the idea is to be different than other boutique hotel companies in the city. The main element tying each hotel together is service and our unique historical buildings.

### As occupancy has come back, have rates also come back?

Yes, for the Chandler in particular, because our focus is on driving rates as we transition the property. We sacrificed occupancy; however, this enables us to better maintain our building as a heads-in-beds approach undoubtedly wears on the physical property.

Our rates have grown dramatically, but that has been with careful planning and the addition of new amenities and services.

### How do you view your competitive set?

Even though New York is not big geographically, there are so many hotels. Some hotels we're competing with are in midtown and some are in our neighborhood.

We're reassessing that competitive set. It depends. Some hotels we share accounts with because we're in the same geographical location; other hotels are similar at the offerings and price point, but not in the geographical area.

People are looking further out, and technology is now available to print a report and see what our competitive set is doing.

If leisure travelers are looking for accommodations in New York City, they have a completely different list of credentials than what corporate travelers are looking for.

### How did you know this was the career you wanted to pursue?

I was always curious about hotels. I started behind a front desk at 15 and fell in love with the business. I can't imagine doing anything else – it's like home to me. ●