



Looking to the Future

An Interview with Patrick Elsmie,
Managing Director, The Gleneagles Hotel



Falconry at Gleneagles (left); Shetland ponies at the hotel entrance (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Patrick Elsmie began his career at Richmond Gate Hotels in Surrey in 1976, after graduating from the Oxford Polytechnic. He moved to Hong Kong to work for Mandarin International Hotels Ltd where he underwent thorough hotel training for five years, as Assistant Manager and Food and Beverage Manager at The Excelsior, Hong Kong. He successfully moved on to become Food and Beverage Manager at The Oriental in Bangkok. In July 1985, Elsmie became Food and Beverage Director at the St. James's Club of Antigua, which led to a season at the St. James's Club in Paris. In 1986, he became the Resident Manager for The Gleneagles Hotel. In 1991, he moved to the Fancourt Hotel and Country Club Estate (then part of the Orient Express Hotels) in George, South Africa to become General Manager before moving on to The Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town. Following this, he returned to Scotland in 1994 to become General Manager of The Old Course Hotel in St. Andrews for five years before returning to Gleneagles in 1999 as Operations Director. In November 2007, Elsmie was promoted to the role of Managing Director.



Patrick Elsmie

PROPERTY BRIEF The Gleneagles® Hotel (www.gleneagles.com) is an AA Five Red Star golf and spa resort hotel set on 850 acres of stunning scenery in Perthshire, Scotland. Offering 232 luxurious bedrooms, including 26 suites, the property provides guests with an array of activities to choose from including off-road driving, horseback riding, polo, falconry, shooting clay targets, archery, and gundog training; three championship golf courses; an award-winning spa by ESPA; and Scotland's only two-Michelin-starred restaurant, Andrew Fairlie. Guests will also appreciate complimentary parking and WiFi; complimentary leisure pool, gym, tennis courts, croquet, and pitch and putt; and 14 unique and elegant event suites to meet every need. The resort, which will celebrate its 90th anniversary in June 2014, is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

How has the property evolved?

When Gleneagles opened in 1924, hotels were themselves a destination. Golfing at Gleneagles quickly became another focal point in a social calendar that included horse racing at Deauville,

sailing at Cowes Week, and shooting in Scotland in August.

Partly because of its history, Gleneagles has emerged as a place where notable events have occurred and that has created a wonderful atmosphere and a renown about the hotel. It has enticed those that want to create their own special events here, and also those who wish to experience the full range of activities that has evolved at Gleneagles as the market has changed over the past 40 years.

How do you keep the property modern without losing some of the heritage?

We have always tried to make sure that we really understand and listen to our customers, and are able to anticipate their likes and dislikes, to make sure that what we offer is what they will want in the future.

Over the past 20 years, one of the most important successes for us was the appreciation of what the family market could bring to Gleneagles. In an effort to make sure that what we provided for families evolved to suit our guests, we felt that everything an adult could do at Gleneagles, a child should be able to do as well. So if they want to go horseback riding, for instance, we offer small Shetland ponies for young children.

We also tried to keep an eye on what is going on in our industry around the world. So while we have always had a spa, it has been important to us to continue to invest in and develop this facility so that our spa remains relevant for the future market. There must be a certain amount of anticipation.

How tough is it to manage the amenities? Are they all critical?

The British School of Falconry at Gleneagles was established in the late '80s and early '90s. It was a shot in the dark, but we knew from special interest weekends we had done that there was interest.

It has since become one of the most important talking points for those that come to stay here. Although it may be a comparatively small aspect of the activities Gleneagles has on site, it's an important thing and keeps word-of-mouth flowing.

How do you define what makes a hotel successful in the food and beverage arena?

We have been fortunate to have established a relationship with Andrew Fairlie and his two-Michelin-starred restaurant at Gleneagles where clear benefits to both sides are felt.

Andrew Fairlie is a passionate chef in the same way as our Director of Food and Beverage, Alan Hill, who was also our Executive Chef at one time. Alan's passion for food and service permeates all of the restaurants we have here. He has been with this business since 1988, and works extensively with colleagues in the food industry so he can anticipate changes in the market.

What does it mean to have the 2014 Ryder Cup at Gleneagles?

Golf and Gleneagles are synonymous. When Gleneagles came into private ownership in the '80s, there was a desire to ensure that the positive position it had in the golfing public's mind was maintained.

For many years, we hosted the Bell's Scottish Open, which maintained a clear link between those that wanted to come to Gleneagles with the understanding that golf was something we would do well.

For us to continue to do well at golf, we had to make sure we always had an end game in sight, which was to attract the Ryder Cup here. It's something you get probably once a lifetime at a venue. It wasn't until 2001 that we were able to pitch hosting it, so to have it here next year is very exciting.

How critical is it to have ownership with such a long-term commitment to the property?

We have always been fortunate to have an owner that wants the property to be the best and perform as best it can and puts trust in the senior team to deliver and offer them no surprises.

So we make sure that our people understand how the business is doing. If we anticipate business conditions may become difficult, we make sure they are very aware of that. Good planning to ensure we offer no surprises and cause no difficulty is our key focus. We achieve this by performing with professionalism and also making sure we maintain a clear line of communication with the company that owns us.

Do you reflect on all that you have achieved or are you always looking ahead?

It would be a shame to never enjoy the successes. One must remember the things that we have been able to achieve by working together, and making sure we deliver all the time on the promises we make to ourselves and our colleagues. However, looking to the future is equally important. ●