

Hospitality

Ferragamo Hospitality

An Interview with Valeriano Antonioli,
Chief Executive Officer, Lungarno Collection



Portrait Firenze (left), soon to open in Florence; dining on the Arno River at the Borgo San Jacopo restaurant at the Hotel Lungarno in Florence (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Valeriano Antonioli has held his current post since October 2010. He was formerly the Chief Operating Officer for Lungarno Collection. He has been a member of the CEO Committee of the Global Hotel Alliance since July 2011, as well as a member of the COO Boutique Advisory Board since January 2012, and the Marketing Board for Gruppo Marketing. He was previously Managing Director of InterContinental Montelucia Resort & Spa, as well as General Manager of W Los Angeles-Westwood and Diana Majestic-Milan, and is a graduate of Cornell University.



Valeriano Antonioli

COMPANY BRIEF The Lungarno Collection (lungarnocollection.com) is inspired by the profound values of the Ferragamo family, infused with their continuing and un-failing spirit of innovation. Creative and profound Florentine craftsmanship and impeccable locations inspire the style of their hotels on the most romantic stretch of the River Arno in Florence, the fashion street of Via Condotti, the Spanish Steps in Rome, and onboard a Swan yacht along the charming Tuscan sea. The Lungarno Collection includes: Hotel Lungarno, Gallery Hotel Art, and Hotel Continentale in Florence; Villa Le Rose in Tuscany; Portrait Roma; Marina Di Scarlino Yacht Club & Residences; Swan Sailing Yacht in Tuscany; two restaurants in Florence – Borgo San Jacopo and Fusion Bar & Restaurant; prestige venues for events and meetings such as Palazzo Capponi; and the new Portrait Firenze set to be unveiled in May 2014.

What is the vision for the Lungarno brand?

In 1927, Salvatore Ferragamo moved back to Italy from the U.S. When he arrived, he was seeking the proper place to produce his shoes with a level of quality that he knew he could only achieve in Florence. He established headquarters there because it was the place in Italy at that time with the highest number of artisans.

After the war, he became the shoemaker of the stars, creating custom-made shoes and making a name for himself. He welcomed Brigitte Bardot, Sophia Loren, and many more of Hollywood's elite for the sole purpose of preparing their shoes.

In 1995, Leonardo Ferragamo, the son of Salvatore, created our company with the vision of collecting a hand-picked selection of unique hotels with a very strong personality, conveying the hospitality of his family combined with a sense of style, but with the purpose of keeping every hotel different from the other.

What opportunities are there to expand the collection?

We are expanding our collection with a concept called Portrait, which is about feeling at home, and through our carefully designed spaces and impeccable service, creating an experience that is a direct reflection on the guest depending on his or her preferences, down to the smallest detail. Each suite is a luxurious and extremely personalized space, designed for sophisticated and stylish travelers. We become friends and build an itinerary for them. We're not just a place to sleep, but rather a companion during their travels, building bespoke itineraries for their stay in the city.

Portrait Roma is situated on Via Condotti in Rome, with every high-end fashion brand literally at your doorstep. To achieve this, you need to have the right location and, in Rome, there is no one else with an address like ours. This is fundamental for all of our Portrait properties.

At the beginning of May, we're opening Portrait Firenze, bringing the same concept to Florence. The 34-suite luxury property is a homage to Florence as the birthplace of fashion and Italian craftsmanship, evoking the original glamour of the city in the 1950s where a lot of Italy's top fashion houses claim their roots.

We're not a hotel – we're a pied-à-terre for the affluent traveler. We offer exclusive and carefully curated experiences for our guests within and beyond the property, with a dedicated "Lifestyle Team" available for assistance at any hour.

After we develop and open Portrait Firenze in Florence, we can focus on finding the right investors to partner with us and continue the growth of our brand.

What type of suite product will Portrait offer?

The Portrait brand is an all-suite product. The suites are all at least 430 square feet and can be connected with other suites to accommodate

families or friends traveling together. We also have a lavish 2,939-square-foot Portrait Penthouse floor with sweeping views of the city.

It's not only the unmatched service and luxurious space but also the privileged location of our Portrait properties. When you pay 1,000 Euro for a suite, you have to be able to go downstairs and be in the heart of the city.

Are there consistent characteristics that help a guest know he's in a Lungarno Collection property?

Nothing has been purchased in the supermarket – everything is handcrafted from our furniture to our fabrics. In addition, our properties display a variety of art from classics to more contemporary pieces – all carefully curated and handpicked.

Of course, we are best known for our service, which is heavily tied to the Ferragamo's long-standing history of exceptional hospitality. This has become the DNA of all of our hotels. We approach each customer as an individual, and we try to tap into why they came to visit our city and how we can make their stay unique and unforgettable.

In areas with such great stand-alone food and beverage offerings, how do you compete?

In Florence, we have our signature award-winning restaurant, Borgo San Jacopo, offering classical dishes and innovative, seasonal menus.

We have made it successful as a result of its cuisine, prime location (the restaurant also has a terrace overlooking the Arno and Ponte Vecchio), its interior design, and the superior service we offer to all of our guests. In Europe, you go to a restaurant because it's where you're treated like a friend. This is the key.

How have you utilized the technology to run your hotels without losing the human interaction?

It's about setting up technology intuitively for guests, but we also have a knowledgeable and helpful team to assist guests with all of their needs. In room, we offer all of the amenities, including flat-screen TVs, Bluetooth systems offering an entire library of music and films, or the possibility to synchronize all your multimedia content with an e-butler available to assist in all multimedia requests as well as complimentary iPads, docking stations, stereo systems, advanced temperature controls, and WiFi. ●