

Hospitality

In the Heart of Boston's Back Bay

An Interview with David J. Colella,
Vice President and Managing Director, The Colonnade Hotel



The Colonnade's entrance (above); Brasserie JO restaurant's lobby entrance (below)

EDITORS' NOTE David Colella is immediate past Chair of the board of directors of the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, Board Chair Emeritus of both the Massachusetts Lodging Association and the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, and a member of the Advisory Board of the Hospitality and Tourism Management Program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. In addition to his current post, which he has held since December 1992, Colella is Vice President of Hotel Operations for The Druker Company Ltd., The Colonnade's parent company. He was named Massachusetts Restaurant Association's Restaurateur of the Year in 2008, and he was recently inducted into the Massachusetts Lodging Association's and Massachusetts Restaurant Hall of Fame. Colella is a graduate of the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.



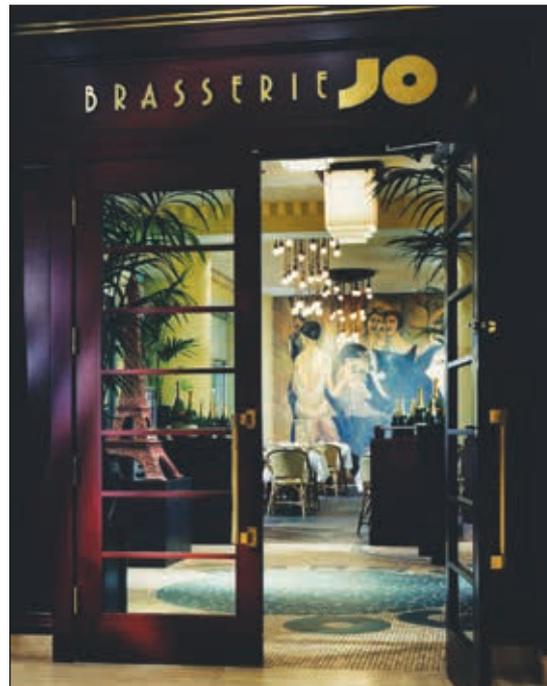
David J. Colella

We're delighted with the product that was developed during the "reinvention" of The Colonnade Hotel. Our rooms were designed with a residential theme and a functionality that's timeless. We're currently in the process of replacing soft goods in the hotel to continue the positive momentum we've achieved with our reinvention.

Brasserie Jo is 17 years young. For any restaurant concept, that's a strong full run. We're not exactly sure where it might lead, but we are currently reviewing plans to tweak the concept a bit.

How broad is your market? Is it mainly the discerning high-level business traveler or is it a broader market?

It's actually a broader market than that. Given our upscale brand appeal, and a location which has numerous demand generators, we're able to drive occupancy and rate continually throughout the year.



While our hotel product and location appeals to the high-level business travelers, this same location and breadth of amenity offerings are perfect for families. We're in the heart of where you really want to be in Boston – the Back Bay – which is within walking distance to Fenway Park and the three most major shopping venues in Boston. It's also only a few blocks from Symphony Hall and

many of the major colleges and universities. Our upscale product and superior location gives us an appeal to a broader market.

Our rooftop pool, the only one in Boston, helps drive weekend occupancies from May to September.

Is personalized service difficult to sustain at the size of The Colonnade?

It's very important to maintain a strong personalized service quotient. You can do that at 285 rooms, but it depends on the hotel's culture and the strength of the management team both at the senior and middle management level. It requires a strong service-orientation and a good training program.

It always comes down to the team you have put together and the longevity of that team. We have some pretty long-term employees here.

Size isn't the important issue but rather the structure and how you approach the service aspect, and what the offering is. We hit on all of those cylinders.

How deeply does a hotelier need to understand each of the roles within the hotel to be a good leader and what advice do you give young people looking to take on leadership roles?

It's critical to ensure that young people entering the business understand early on that they may have graduated from a terrific hospitality school, but that the learning really starts the first day of working full-time in a hotel. The summer experiences during college are terrific for building a foundation, but the hotel you choose for your first job and the position in which you start in is really where learning begins. They're now in real-life school and much of it is learning through experience, guest interaction, and interaction with fellow employees.

Seasoned hotel managers will tell you that there isn't a day of the week when they're not discovering new ways to properly handle situations and each of these are some variation of an experience they've previously seen. Hotel life is about dealing with, working with, and serving people.

There are so many moving parts to this business. It takes a good number of years before one can really be at the top of his game and be a properly seasoned executive.

I recommend that young people spend as much time as they can in each position, and before they move to the next step, make sure they have mastered the skills necessary to move on. Each step along the way is critical to ensure the proper foundation for success in senior management. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF The Colonnade Hotel (colonnadehotel.com) is an independently owned and managed luxury property featuring 285 sophisticated rooms and suites with 21st-Century comforts and amenities that are both high-tech and soft-touch. Situated in Boston's Back Bay, the property is home to the city's only rooftop pool and one of Boston's most popular restaurants, Brasserie JO. Opened in 1971 by Bertram Druker, the hotel is overseen today by his son Ronald Druker, President of The Druker Company.

How strong is the market in Boston today, and have rates come back?

There has been an accelerated uptick in the Boston market in 2014. By the end of the year, we will have hosted over 19 million visitors and visitor spending will exceed \$9.1 billion due to a recovering economy. While there's been steady rate growth since 2007, it continues to grow in single digits and not as quickly as in a market like New York. That said, we're pleased with a strong occupancy, steady rate growth at 5 to 7 percent, and a RevPAR that continues to increase each year.

Following the \$27-million renovation the property underwent recently, are there continual investments being made and are you happy with where it is today?