

# Hospitality

## An All-Suite Product

An Interview with  
Edward Costa, Jr., General Manager, The London NYC



The London NYC entrance (left); MAZE restaurant by Gordon Ramsay

**EDITORS' NOTE** In December of 2013, Edward Costa assumed his current position after a stint at The London West Hollywood. Prior to joining The London West Hollywood, he served as Executive Director of food and beverage for the legendary Waldorf Astoria New York. Previous positions include Director of Operations/Hotel Manager for the Regent Boston at Battery Wharf, Partner and General Manager of the downtown restaurant, lounge, and wine bar Vinalia, and Manager of the luxury five-star Boston Harbor Hotel, among other management work in Massachusetts.



Edward Costa, Jr.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The London NYC ([thelondonnyc.com](http://thelondonnyc.com)) is the perfect blend of glamour and function that is relevant and true to the essence of its gateway city, New York. The London NYC embraces the vibe, energy, and cosmopolitan style of the city of London, situated exactly at the intersection of commerce and culture. The David Collins-designed hotel features all-suite accommodations, intuitive service, and sophisticated ease complimented by the cuisine of the culinary team of Gordon Ramsay.

**When the opportunity presented itself to lead this property, what excited you about it and has it been what you expected?**

It has definitely been what I expected. New York is the place to be if you're in the hotel business. To be in a big and prominent hotel like this, I could not ask for anything more. It was a shock to have the opportunity presented to me but there was no question this is where I want to be.

It's sometimes more challenging than I thought it would be because it's New York. The last two places where I was the GM were in Boston and L.A. I have worked in some great places with the same company, and it was easier to fix things and impact change more quickly; in New York, everything takes longer.

**Are you happy with the state of the property? Are there changes on the horizon?**

Everybody has been happy with it but a lot of change has occurred, although these are changes that the guests wouldn't necessarily

see. We just found ways we could do things better and be more productive – things that people didn't pay much attention to because the hotel does so well and it's such a great property.

When I came in, I didn't look at how it had performed; I looked at what I could do to make an impact going forward.

**How critical is the suite offering and is that a key differentiator for the property?**

It's critical. I don't think in the past that we've done as good a job as we could have, so I've emphasized the importance of talking about the all-suite product, which a lot of people don't realize we have. We need to make people more aware of that because they are surprised when they see it. It really makes a difference when you try to drive rate.

**This hotel is large, but when you enter, it has a very intimate feel.**

That is one of our advantages as well. It doesn't have the feel of a big hotel. It has 562 rooms but it was designed to feel intimate at 54 stories. On any one floor, there are no more than 13 rooms. It has a very residential feel and privacy, which a lot of people like. We do a lot of celebrity business as a result.

**Is food and beverage an area where you can be profitable?**

It's difficult. You need a big banquet operation to offset some of the à la carte, which is the challenging part, especially in New York. We're fortunate to have the Gordon Ramsay name, which brings a lot of people in, so we do a strong business day and night – the bar is always busy. But it's challenging not having a big banquet operation to make the overall operation profitable.

**How broad is your competitive set?**

It's located throughout the city. We compete with certain properties for many different reasons, and we compete both on our four-star comp set and five-star.

A lot of the competition is based on location. If you have a group in town, they often want to be in certain areas of the city. We're centrally located between Central Park and Times Square in an area on the West Side that has come a long way. There are more hotels

here now, which makes it more challenging, but it's an ideal location for many people.

**With the amount of supply coming on-board, do you worry about the demand side?**

We worry, but it's New York – it's always busy so the demand is going to be there. More competition makes it more difficult and we're all going after that same business, but you have to try to set yourself apart.

**Has it become more difficult to forecast bookings?**

It's difficult. We look over the trends year over year, but the patterns change so it makes it more challenging. It makes forecasting more difficult but we have a lot of history to review, which helps.

**Does rate integrity really exist today?**

It definitely exists. To maintain the brand and the quality, you need that rate integrity. We don't rely a lot on the online travel agencies. You have to maintain rates and not sacrifice them, although sometimes that is difficult.

**How do you define the true luxury experience today?**

We rely on our training, because if you're not on top of people, especially in New York where it can be more challenging, standards can easily drop. You have to train continuously.

Our luxury experience is more personalized but with more of a residential feel. The hotel has that design, and we mirror that from a service point of view as well. People don't want stuffy luxury – they want a comfortable atmosphere and to feel like they're at home. We have a lot of repeat guests who return because of that feeling. They see the luxury as an experience that is like coming home, because many of them have a luxurious home life that they also want to enjoy when they're away.

**Has the role of GM become more about business and, if so, how do you avoid losing the hospitality focus?**

For me, it has always been about finding a balance. It's definitely about ensuring luxury and service as it relates to the guest experience, but it's also a business, and financial is at least 50 percent of my job. My job is to balance those two elements without sacrificing the guest experience.

**What do you tell young people who are looking to build a career in this industry?**

I tell them to take their time and experience as many different aspects of the business as they can – going through the various operations of the property is very important. ●