

# Hospitality



## The Next Phase of Trump SoHo

An Interview with Gary E. Schweikert,  
Managing Director, Trump SoHo New York



The Trump SoHo tower (left); the King's Table, part of the Trump SoHo's versatile meeting space (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Gary Schweikert was appointed to his current post in September 2014. Schweikert most recently served as Founder of Strata Hospitality Group and its sister company Arambys Inc. Previously, he was President of Jumeirah Hospitality and Leisure USA, and concurrently General Manager of the Jumeirah Essex House. His career also includes nine years as the Regional Vice President of Fairmont Hotels and Resorts and Managing Director of New York's historic Plaza Hotel, and senior management positions within Hilton Hotels including at the legendary Waldorf Astoria.



Gary E. Schweikert

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The first full-service luxury hotel in the neighborhood, Trump SoHo® New York's ([trumpsobohotel.com](http://trumpsobohotel.com)) 391 spacious guest rooms and suites feature floor-to-ceiling windows offering unparalleled views of the city's spectacular skyline and the Hudson River. Trump SoHo currently offers hotel condominiums for purchase. Owners and hotel guests will enjoy world-class dining at Koi SoHo, a signature cocktail lounge, the seasonal poolside Bar d'Eau, and the utmost in personal service with signature Trump Attaché service. The Spa at Trump® with its two levels of pampering services provides New York its first authentic luxury Hammam. The property is a member of the Trump Hotel Collection portfolio.

**Did you immediately know this role was the right fit and what excited you about the opportunity?**

What excited me most was the opportunity to work with the talented team of people at the Trump Hotel Collection. The number of great, new, and exciting initiatives that are going on with the brand, the growth opportunities, and the quality and style of the properties that are being added to the collection are phenomenal.

I'm known for working with large, historic, luxury hotels in Midtown, but downtown is where all of the innovative hotel development is taking place. So when this opportunity arose, I seized it.

**Is it well understood that you can provide five-star service in a downtown setting?**

I don't think it is well understood that this service level can be found downtown, but the word is getting out, as each of our guests becomes an ambassador. Travelers expect Trump SoHo will be edgy, but the five-star service and luxury amenities and accommodations take them by surprise. The combination sets the tone for them to have a wonderful stay with us.

Part of the fun of staying downtown is that you can have this luxury experience and still be immersed in the trendiest part of New York City.

**In coming to the property, your vision was to provide the best service. Were you happy with the team and how critical was it to communicate your vision for where the property is going?**

The team is a very talented group of professionals. They are as committed to taking care of guests as any group I've ever worked with or experienced in the world.

The part of communicating my vision for the property is straightforward. The role of the GM has changed over time. Now, the ability to interact with team members on every single level, in a very flat hierarchy, is the way in which you can be most effective.

The team here understands the fact that they're involved in the next phase of Trump SoHo. Their innovation and dedication to personalized service will ensure that we continue to dominate the market share here.

**Is true luxury today more about customizing the guest experience?**

Guests of luxury hotels today expect that their stay will be personalized. At each Trump Hotel Collection property, we have an entire department dedicated to guest needs, Trump Attaché. The team works with the travelers from the time of reservation to identify as many preferences as possible. Once on site, our associates are keen to take note of the individual guest preferences in anticipation of their next stay at any Trump Hotel, so no request has to be repeated twice.

**This has the feel of a new property in many ways. Are you happy with the product today? Are there changes planned?**

The hotel has retained its contemporary design and still sparkles like new. As we are approaching five years in operation, we are starting to explore the next design phase of the guestrooms. Having said that, we have a very strong replacement program that has always been in place here, so the condition of the property is excellent.

**How critical is the suite product as a differentiator and is there a consistent feel throughout?**

Of 391 guest rooms, we have 142 suites, so that's a significant number and one of our supreme advantages, especially with our eight penthouse suites. The suites have unparalleled views that no one can compete with. The value of our penthouses is incredible, especially compared to those of similar size in Midtown.

Our entertainment clients are especially fond of these great suites, and with so many companies moving to downtown, we're hosting high-level board meetings and the executives appreciate our suite product as well.

**How challenging is it to be profitable with the food and beverage component?**

First of all, you have to make sure you have the right offering. There is always a market for great food and beverage, and certain hotels have chosen to go with partners that are famous for a particular style of cuisine. This was the decision that was taken here for Koi. The company started in Los Angeles as a fantastically popular restaurant and now there are six locations total, including two in New York, with more to come.

Finding the right partner is key in terms of delivering a unique, interesting product to the guest.

**Is having a spa a must in the luxury segment?**

We have 11,000 square feet of space with nine treatment rooms. It's one of those things that differentiates us from other hotels. We're downtown, so the proliferation of day spas hasn't hit this neighborhood as of yet. When Trump SoHo opened with such a grand spa and unique treatments that aren't found elsewhere, it differentiated us. Hotels have spas, but ours is different in terms of what we offer, the location, and the size, and about 40 to 50 percent of our spa guests are not staying in the hotel. ●