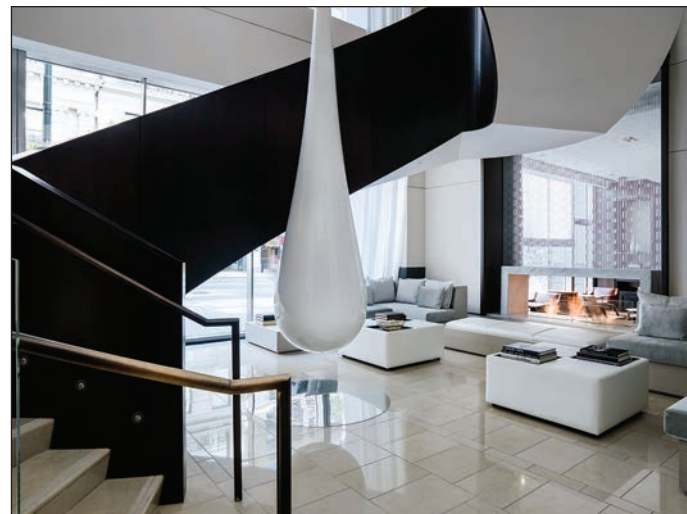




The Art of the Stay

An Interview with Richard Bussiere,
Managing Director, Langham Place, New York



Al Fiori restaurant (left); Langham Place, New York lobby (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Richard Bussiere assumed his current post in August of 2015. Most recently, he served as Managing Director at The Langham, Boston. He spent the majority of his career managing hotels in Asia, Australia, and the South Pacific. Bussiere earned an Associate Degree in Hotel & Food Service Management from Manchester Community College and a Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Management at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Following graduation, he was recruited by IIT Sheraton



Richard Bussiere

as a management trainee, serving at the Sheraton at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, where he worked his way up through the ranks to Assistant Front Office Manager before transferring to the pre-opening team of the Sheraton Grande, Los Angeles. He was then transferred to the pre-opening team of the brand's first internationally managed hotel in Shanghai, China—the Hua Ting Sheraton. He went on to hold various management positions at hotels in China, New Zealand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. In 2001, Bussiere was named Area Managing Director of Indonesia for Starwood; two years later, he was transferred to Fiji as Managing Director of three properties. In 2007, he moved back to Australia to be the General Manager of The Westin Melbourne. He then returned to China in the same role at The Great Wall Sheraton Hotel in Beijing, followed by a post as pre-opening General Manager of The Westin, Chongqing.

PROPERTY BRIEF Langham Place, New York (langhamhotels.com/new-york) boasts 214 guestrooms and suites that are among the largest in the city and feature THE DUX® Bed by DUXIANA®; Nespresso machines in every room; a selection of well-planned spaces for executive meetings and social events; and attentive, around-the-clock guest service. Guests can enjoy Measure, a stylish and comfortable lounge featuring a menu of American and British comfort food reimagined with a modern twist by Chef David Vandenabeele; a seasonal drink menu deeply rooted in classic cocktail culture; and an extensive selection of both Old and New World wines and a craft beer menu. Langham Place, New York is also home to the Michelin-starred restaurant Ai Fiori by the Altamarea Group, which features a menu that celebrates the French and Italian Riviera, courtesy of Chef Michael White.

Is this a challenging time for growth in the New York hotel business?

At the luxury end of the scale next year, we're projecting 1,430 rooms coming into the supply. There will be a huge hit as far as supply outpacing demand over the new year.

Even so, financial markets and corporate activity remain strong, and it will come down to value, service, and consistency, as well as driving loyalty among regular customers.

By the end of next year, demand will make up for this new supply.

How do you perceive your location given this new supply?

We're looking at it as an advantage because we're right in the middle, and the city is moving towards us. We're the only luxury product sitting where we are in Midtown at the moment.

We're attracting our own new customer base that loves being in this part of the city. On our guest feedback forms, probably three or four out of 10 say they love our location, and how it's walking distance to great tourist attractions, Penn Station, and Times Square.

How critical is the suite offering for the property?

We have an inventory of 57 suites out of 214 keys so we have the largest suite inventory of any hotel in the city, and each one is residential-inspired from a design perspective and has gorgeous city views.

They all have large bathrooms, marble countertops, soaking tubs, and rainfall showers. Quite a few suites have sleeper sofas, so they are convenient for a couple with a child or two.

The combined living area of our three top suites, which we call the penthouse category, is up to 1,900 square feet with two full bedrooms, two full bathrooms, a combined living and dining area, and a kitchen.

It can also be sold just as a two-bedroom suite and there are also two other connecting one-bedroom suites, so one could have four suites connected into one for a large high-end client.

We have three of those on the 25th, 26th, and 27th floors and the plan going into 2016 is for each of these suites to be completely redesigned and fitted with all new furnishings.

What is the secret to the partnership with Chef Michael White, and how challenging is the food and beverage part of the business in New York?

The relationship has been nothing but positive and extremely successful since the building opened five years ago.

Altamarea and Michael White have made the restaurant what it is today, and they attract not only our customers but they bring in their own customer base.

Food and beverage is generally a challenge. However, with Measure, we offer a combination of European fine-dining and a venue for drinking, which means we can offer more than one experience for our guests.

In a city like New York, do you need to offer the true spa experience?

We're in the process of redesigning our spa, which we expect to reopen mid- to late 2016.

When the hotel opened five years ago, it was quite an extensive all-day spa and had nine treatment rooms and day facilities, which appealed to a certain customer base.

However, the spa business is a difficult space in which to provide a proper return, so we've decided to reimagine the space on the fourth floor where the spa was and we're going to reintroduce a new facility late next year, which will be a slimmed down version.

With all you are doing with the physical side of the hotel, is it difficult to also maintain a focus on your people?

Success comes from a balance of having a great product, and something that is unique and different. We're an ultra-modern choice for someone wanting to come to New York City and we meld that physical aspect of the product with unique design elements, resident-style suites, and a good location. Our owner recently purchased a collection of Alex Katz artwork including 11 originals and we're putting these throughout the hotel, so that stands out as a differentiator from a product perspective.

This all means nothing, however, without the people to create the ambiance and atmosphere that make guests want to come back.

We focus most of our effort on the people side of who we are and try to ensure that everybody is comfortable and able to project themselves, and engage with each customer in a professional fashion. We call it, The Art of the Stay. It's individual customer loyalty, which sets us apart. ●