



## The Personal Touch

An Interview with Steve Sasso,  
General Manager, The Benjamin



The Benjamin exterior (left); views from the patio of the Benjamin Suite (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** In January of 2014, Denihan Hospitality Group named Steve Sasso to his current post. Sasso joined Denihan three years ago as Hotel Manager of Affinia Manhattan, followed by General Manager assignments at Eastgate Tower, Affinia Gardens, and Affinia Dumont. Previously, he served as Hotel Manager of the five star and five diamond rated Acqualina Resort & Spa on Miami Beach. His extensive experience also includes Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, and Interstate Hotels and Resorts, where he held various positions in Boston and New York City. Sasso conducted his undergraduate studies in New Hampshire and Switzerland, and attended University of Massachusetts Amherst working toward his M.B.A. and M.S. degrees. He also completed the 2014 General Manager Program at Cornell University.



Steve Sasso

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Situated in an ideal Midtown Manhattan locale near Rockefeller Center, MoMA, and Fifth Avenue, The Benjamin ([thebenjamin.com](http://thebenjamin.com)) is a luxurious boutique-style hotel designed by famed architect Emery Roth. The beaux-arts gem promises to help guests be at their best with newly redesigned accommodations by Lauren Rottet, and thoughtful services and amenities such as restful solutions by sleep expert Rebecca Robbins and Winks' Kidzzz Club for families. Room types range from guestrooms with kitchenettes to one-bedroom terrace suites. The National Bar & Dining Rooms by Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian is housed on the first floor and showcases modern bistro cuisine in a chic grand café, in-room dining, and meeting space. The Benjamin, an AAA Four-Diamond Award winner, offers more than 2,200 square feet of space for meetings, small weddings, private dining, and special events. In addition, world-renowned stylist Federico Calce presents Federico Hair & Spa at The Benjamin.

### What has been the secret to the success of this property?

The property was named after Benjamin J. Denihan, Sr. who had an unwavering commitment to quality and service. That foundation and the team's focus on it has been a key component of our success. We have continuously

invested in our product and service, and have also put in place some excellent partnerships and programming including The National Bar and Dining Rooms with Chef Geoffrey Zakarian, our Rest & Renew Sleep Program with Dr. Rebecca Robbins, and Federico Hair and Spa with Federico Calce.

### What are the secrets to a successful hotel restaurant today and does it always come back to having the right partner?

It definitely helps. Having a partner that shares our commitment to quality and service has been a great fit for us. To be able to provide a top notch food and beverage option within the hotel is something we greatly value, as it helps to exceed guest experiences. We receive lots of favorable feedback on the atmosphere and overall experience in The National Bar and Dining Rooms, and it is one of the things that sets us apart from other hotels.

### How important has the strength of your suite product been when it comes to your accommodations mix?

Nearly 50 percent of our 209 rooms are one-bedroom suites, which start at 450 square feet and all provide a separate living room with a pull-out sofa bed. Our 13 one-bedroom balcony suites and four one-bedroom terrace suites offer great outdoor space and are very popular, especially during the warmer months of the year. The Benjamin Suite, with over 1,600 square feet of living space, is perfect for high-level executives, honeymoon couples, and special occasions including entertaining small meetings or events. Ultimately, all rooms within the hotel are quite large by New York City standards and all feature a kitchenette, which is a big strength for us.

### Is a luxury hotel experience today more about personalization?

We have strong systems and processes in place to get the basics right combined with an exceptional team to execute them. As a result we are able to look after the details and, yes, make sure a guest's visit is personalized. Our Les Clefs d'Or concierge team are experts at tending to a tailored stay and hold the key to a great experience, partnering with everyone in the hotel and the city. Given our high repeat guest ratio at The Benjamin, we are continuously striving to perfect and improve in all areas to provide the best possible luxury hotel experience.

### How do you see the market today and is it challenging to grow the business?

It is no secret that there has been a huge amount of new supply in New York City over the past 18 months or so. Given that we have a good loyal customer base and that we have an extraordinary team, we have been very successful in overcoming this challenge. We have definitely had to be more nimble, adapt to more change, and seek out opportunities for new business and grow our year-over-year base business, but this has paid off in terms of our overall performance.

### Are meetings at The Benjamin primarily high level with smaller numbers?

We have 2,200 square feet of meeting space with beautiful bay windows that is popular for business meetings, but also intimate gatherings. With exceptional menus provided by The National Bar and Dining Rooms, we receive great feedback from our guests on our meetings and have had an excellent year and holiday season.

### Would you talk about the strength of being a part of the Denihan collection and having the backing of the leadership within that organization?

Denihan recently celebrated 50 years in the business and our uniquely personal and guest centric approach to hospitality has assisted us in our continued success. We have a great senior leadership team that helps when needed, and our exceptional properties have great teams in place that can deliver upon our quality and service promises.

### Do you worry that the demand can be there for all the new supply coming in?

New York is a great city, and each year we see the numbers increase in terms of visitors. NYC & Company does a great job in terms of getting the message out about the city, and we have a top notch Sales and Marketing team to help keep our existing business and capture new business. We know new supply in New York has been greater than other cities, but we are also optimistic about demand. We have a goal of making sure everyone can "Be at your best." while staying at The Benjamin and we know that by working day in and day out to do that, we will continue to be successful and overcome any challenges out there, including new supply. ●