



Genuine Service

An Interview with Jonathan H. Crook,
General Manager, The Peninsula New York



The Peninsula New York entrance on 55th Street (above);
the rooftop indoor pool (left); the Peninsula Suite living area (below)

EDITORS' NOTE In April of 2011, Jonathan Crook was appointed to his current post. He most recently served as General Manager for The Peninsula Manila. Prior to that, Crook served as Hotel Manager of The Peninsula Tokyo and Resident Manager of The Peninsula Beijing. He began his Peninsula career in North America within the food and beverage departments at Peninsula hotels in New York and Chicago. He attended the University of Gloucestershire in Cheltenham, U.K., where he received a Higher National Diploma in Hotel and Institutional Management. He furthered his studies via the Executive Development Program with the Kellogg School of Management at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and Harvard Business School. Before joining The Peninsula Hotels, Crook worked at Dorchester London and other leading international resorts and hotels.



Jonathan H. Crook

Are you able to incorporate the Asian culture into a property in New York and is that important?

Our strong sense of heritage, with our Hong Kong roots, is a key element of our culture. The Asian sense of service is extremely important to us, which we can replicate in all of our 10 hotels around the world. Next year, we will be celebrating 150 years as a luxury hotel company, which makes us the oldest luxury hotel company in the world.

With this rich sense of history and the commitment from the Chairman, Sir Michael Kadoorie, with his passion that flows through our hotels, a unique culture has been developed that supports our respective teams to pro-



vide superlative service to our guests, which is genuine and provided with a sense of humility. We don't have scripted responses or ways in which to react to guests needs. There is no need for employees to have a luxury background, but one must understand how to provide genuine service.

How do you show differentiation in this market?

Part of staying at a Peninsula will be the personal experience. A company can put out beautiful photography and, hopefully, guests do get to enjoy the facilities when they arrive. However, there are many new hotels in our neighborhood in the luxury set that provide real competition.

That's where the human touch really comes through. This relies on the company culture, how it's run from the top and flows through, and how employees embrace the Peninsula idea. Even in New York, our heritage is still felt.

In a hotel like this, which has a lot of competition, it's about the experience the guest has in the lobby, seeing the same faces that recognize the guest and that can cater to a guest's personal needs.

Is it critical in the luxury segment to have a food and beverage offering, and how hard is it to make that work?

We invested in the restaurant Clement two years ago. We gave a fresh look to the dining experience. We're a small hotel – and our one restaurant needs to cater to our guests throughout the day, but we wanted also to generate a design, interior, and cuisine that represents New York.

What is a luxury hotel experience today and is it more about personalization?

There's the physical experience, the aesthetics of the building, the lighting, and the ambiance, to give that feeling of comfort without creating stress in the traveler's life.

The Peninsula DNA has developed the staff to encourage them to be genuine in their service, and to be a step ahead of the needs of their guests. They make sure the guests' requirements

are met in a seamless way without them having to ask twice for anything. They make it a home away from home.

When it comes to hiring talent, is personality more important than experience?

It's always an advantage to employ someone with experience or an understanding of the business. It's also very rewarding to find people who don't necessarily have the skills that should traditionally be sought out but who can be trained into the role, and more importantly who show humility, genuineness of character, and the understanding of how to look after guests.

I don't like to use the word "service," but it's about getting joy out of seeing the reaction on someone's face when we go the extra step. We are creating something unique for our guests and the reward is seeing a guest return because of that connection the team has made with them. ●

PROPERTY BRIEF The Peninsula New York (newyork.peninsula.com) occupies an elegantly restored, 23-story, Beaux-Arts landmark building on Fifth Avenue in the heart of Manhattan's prestigious shopping, cultural, and business neighborhoods. Featuring 239 rooms and suites equipped with state-of-the-art technology, a glass-enclosed spa and health club, rooftop bar, and the popular Fives restaurant, the property is the recipient of the AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five Star ratings. The hotel was recently awarded number-one hotel in New York City by the readers of Condé Nast Traveler. The Peninsula New York is managed and owned by The Peninsula Hotels (peninsula.com), a division of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited.

How challenging is the market and with so much new supply, is there opportunity for growth?

It has been a difficult year for all of the Midtown properties with a lackluster economy and increased supply of rooms in the city. Opportunity remains as we go through economic cycles and there are markets traveling more to the United States that continue to be our focus, such as South America, the Middle East, and China.