

Luxury in Lower Manhattan



An Interview with Robert Rechtermann,
General Manager, Conrad New York

A river-view suite bedroom (left); the lobby (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Robert Rechtermann arrived at Conrad New York following a four-year run as General Manager of the Five Star, Five Diamond Peninsula New York. Previously, Rechtermann held a range of management-level positions including Resident Manager of The Peninsula Chicago; Director of Operations at The Ritz-Carlton, Boston Common; EAM F&B at The Ritz-Carlton, Boston; EAM F&B at the Five Diamond Hilton Short Hills; Director of Food & Beverage at Shutters on the Beach in Santa Monica, California; and Director of Food & Beverage at Hilton Long Beach. He holds a B.S. in hotel management from Fairleigh Dickinson University.



Robert Rechtermann

PROPERTY BRIEF In March 2012, Conrad New York (conradnewyork.com) opened its doors in New York City's Battery Park City neighborhood. Rising 16 stories along the Hudson River waterfront, the 463 all-suite luxury hotel is the first New York location for Conrad Hotels & Resorts, the global luxury brand of Hilton Worldwide. Conrad New York features spacious suites, each outfitted with integrated technology, flat-screen televisions, and individual climate control. The hotel features a seasonal rooftop bar with breathtaking views of the Statue of Liberty and New York Harbor. Conrad New York boasts over 30,000 square feet of adaptable meeting space, including the 6,200 square-foot Gallery Ballroom. The hotel was awarded a LEED Gold Certificate for new construction from the U.S. Green Building Council for sustainable building practices and design.

Where does the market stand today and, for Conrad New York, how has the business progressed?

The New York market continues to progress, especially with many exciting, new developments. Even though the demand is there for New York City, the inventory is rising and it continues to be a challenging market.

We're fortunate to be in Lower Manhattan, which is an incredibly evolving market with all of the new businesses and companies that are moving their offices downtown. The interest is great in what is happening with the World Trade Center, the opening of Brookfield Place, and the planned opening of Westfield in 2016.

Our location and product is well suited to meet increasing demands.

Is the market for Conrad more of a niche at the high end or is it broader?

It's a niche at the high end. We're not necessarily trying to compete with Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, and Peninsula, as we cater to a different clientele, but there's definitely a place and a need for our type of luxury. There are so many new travelers and definitions of luxury and we meet a very new category of smart luxury

travel.

How critical is being an all-suite hotel?

It is an incredible advantage for us because all of our rooms start at 430 square feet, which is highly unusual for Manhattan. It is a great competitive advantage not just for the business traveler who is getting a suite when he or she is traveling into Lower Manhattan but also for any traveler during the week, as well as on the weekends, and it's great for families.

What are the key ingredients to being successful as a hotel restaurant and how challenging is it to drive revenue in that part of the business?

The restaurant business in any environment is challenging. There are so many choices for people to make and a hotel restaurant is trying to be something for everyone in many cases.

We are focusing on providing great ambiance, great food, and great service at all meals. But with all of the new restaurants coming into New York, it's a challenge so we have to keep it fresh and inviting. We recently launched a successful kids menu at ATRIO Wine Bar & Restaurant and launched jazz brunch as part of our new offerings. The restaurant is also extremely popular for Power Breakfasts.

How broad are the offerings for meetings and conferences, and are you looking to do all range of sizes?

We have some great meeting space and it's a huge competitive advantage for us, and not just in the Lower Manhattan space. We have the most meeting space in Lower Manhattan, but we also cater to high-end meetings and events within New York City.

We're competing with the great New York City properties, not just within Lower Manhattan,

but luxury hotels across the city, and our partnership with Union Square Events is a great advantage for us, as Danny Meyer's team is incredibly innovative when it comes to not only the dishes but presentation. It is wonderful for us to be the only hotel to offer USE catering services in New York.

In leading a property today, has it become more challenging to forecast with booking windows getting so short?

We still look out as far as we can but sometimes when we look too far out, we get a gut check. It's nerve-wracking because the booking patterns have changed, but at day's end, we meet and exceed our pace and focus on an increased market share.

Would you talk about the art component and how that ties into the property?

We have 2,000 pieces of art throughout the hotel, which really sets us apart from other luxury hotels in the city. We have a partnership with the Public Art Fund in New York where we bring in, on occasion, artists traveling to New York City and, at the end of their time here, they present a postcard-sized art piece as a reflection of their stay.

It's a great story in terms of creating a unique brand for Conrad New York and it's apparent throughout the hotel. For those who truly enjoy art, they really appreciate the hotel and spend time in our lobby and some of the other public spaces, as they would in an art gallery or museum.

At 463 suites, how do you maintain an intimate feel in a hotel of this size?

It's challenging with the size of our lobby alone. We have the same, if not more, staffing around than many hotels might have but we're quite spread out in the lobby. This makes it important for staff to be out there and visible, and practice aggressive hospitality to a certain extent. We have to go to the guest as opposed to the guest coming up to us.

Are you surprised to see how much of a destination Downtown has become?

Having been in and around New York most of my life, I have seen how the city has evolved from different areas that only housed warehouses before to where they are residential now.

Eventually, it was clear that New York was going to expand back into Lower Manhattan and that the dynamics would shift from the financial district to a vibrant area where families are moving to by the thousands. ●