



A Winning Attitude

An Interview with Winfred van Workum,
Hotel Manager, The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami



The Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami's idyllic location (above);
a pool cabana with a plunge pool (left)

EDITORS' NOTE Winfred van Workum has held his current post since September of 2014. Prior to this, he was Executive Assistant Manager-Director of Food and Beverage for The Ritz-Carlton South Beach; Director of Food and Beverage for Jumeirah Essex House, as well as at Sandy Lane Hotel; GM and Director of Operations, Fearing's at The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC; GM L'Escalier & Tapestry Bar, GM Flagler Steakhouse at The Breakers, Palm Beach; and Assistant Restaurant F&B Manager for St. Regis Hotel. He earned his B.H.A. in Hospitality Management from Hotelschool The Hague.



Winfred van Workum

PROPERTY BRIEF Set along pristine, white sand beaches and overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and Intracoastal, the Ritz-Carlton Bal Harbour, Miami (ritzcarlton.com) exudes a warm, inviting atmosphere while offering elevated services and amenities. The resort's location in the exclusive Bal Harbour Village neighborhood offers easy access to boutique shopping, exciting nightlife, outdoor adventure, and a thriving art scene. However, guests will discover that everything they desire is accessible, from ocean-to-table cuisine at Bistro Bal Harbour to waterfront treatments at the lavish spa. The beach beckons from floor-to-ceiling windows in each guest room and suite, while a European-edged outdoor heated pool offers a worthy alternative to the Atlantic.

When it comes to the leadership and strength this property has had in the market, what has made it so strong?

We have a very unique rooms product with great views and we're in a great location, and one of the unique features is we only have two rooms per floor – one is a large one-bedroom at a bit over 1,150 square feet that has balconies on both sides of the building, a kitchen – it's an incredible residential style suite.

The other room on that floor is a large 510-square-foot studio with stunning views, balconies, and a beautiful bathroom product, and it overlooks the ocean with all glass windows.

These suites also combine to make a two-bedroom suite and the guest can have a private elevator.

Another strength is our pool and beach. Our beach is semi-private. The beaches in Florida are public but our beaches are laid out to offer the inter-coastal waterway access to the ocean, so it makes them private. It's very wide and has a lot of tranquility. Though guests are in the center of Miami and close to some of the best shopping, they can have a private and tropical pool and beach experience.

Most important, however, is our service. Especially in Bal Harbour, we're focused on the individual guest needs. We're a smaller boutique property so we do extremely well in our personal service delivery. We like to customize things for guests via items in the bar or the room based on any of their preferences. Guests' comments are about feeling they're recognized throughout the property and they have a more personalized experience.

We also offer butler service for all guests. They can do everything in their rooms throughout the day.

Is luxury today really about that personalized service?

Yes. Past luxury was about a golden room and big bathrooms, but every customer today already expects a great product, so the service experience makes for true luxury. Things are changing so rapidly and becoming so impersonal today that there is a big need for the guests to have more personal contact, and we have to create that relationship with the guest.

Most of our guests are of high income and it is about customization. We want the experience to be unique to that guest.

Miami has great food and beverage, and has put an emphasis on that experience. As a hotel, how challenging is it to be successful with the restaurant?

We're working on redoing our food and beverage. There is so much competition in Miami. The beautiful thing about our industry is that it has changed a lot over the past 15 years. Before, luxury hotel restaurants reflected their luxury but as a result, were often stiff and boring.

Especially in the lifestyle segment, hotels and the industry have taken the spot that hotels had in the 1920s of being a living room, of being the social center of a community. We see this as a very positive trend, and our main objective with food and beverage is not only to

appeal to our in-house guest but to be the living room of the community and that social hub. Guests are looking for that experience when they check in.

Businessmen used to spend time in their rooms doing work, and we see that changing. They like to sit in the lobby now, so we're focused on providing compelling and market relevant concepts that are reflective of a luxury experience but, more importantly, that reflects the market needs. We're looking for a local experience with our F&B concepts.

Is your role as much about the financial aspect as it is about hospitality?

We have to do both and win in both. The classic days of being a hotelier and spending time in the lobby to get guest feedback is still critical, but we still have to be business leaders. There is definitely more of a focus on sales and marketing, and our financial picture is about being a business leader. Things happen more explosively and a hotelier is always someone involved in sales and marketing efforts today.

The pressure of communication has changed a lot. E-mail is good and bad. The times of talking to people and being with them is sometimes replaced by text and e-mail, which makes it harder. We have more of a resort setting. This helps us but we still have people who check in after we have arranged transportation for them and I will stand in the lobby to greet them. The guest may also be on a business call and walk in to the desk and put his credit card down without interacting with anyone. It's harder for us to engage so we have to do it in a different way.

The job of a hotel manager is more of a business leader, so it's a far greater challenge to not just be that traditional hotelier.

What is it about Ritz-Carlton that is so special?

It's the culture we create every day at every hotel with 40,000 employees worldwide and the focus we have on making sure that each of our people understands this culture; it's our GPS, and it's our credo, motto, and service value.

Many companies have these things but although we're growing rapidly, we're making this a key focus so that every person in the building truly buys into the vision that the most important thing we provide is genuine care and comfort to the guest.

It creates a level of passion and a winning attitude with our ladies and gentlemen that continues to make us strong. ●