

Hospitality



Creating Excellence

An Interview with Elizabeth Mullins,
General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park



The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park entrance (left) and Presidential Suite (above) and Club Lounge (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to her current post, Elizabeth Mullins served as Vice President and Area General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Washington, D.C. where she also had oversight of The Ritz-Carlton Hotels of Tysons Corner, Georgetown, and Pentagon City. Mullins began her hospitality career as a corporate management trainee at The Ritz-Carlton, Boston. She went on to serve in progressively challenging assignments at The Ritz-Carlton Hotels of New York, Washington, D.C., Hong Kong, Cleveland, Laguna Nigel, and Kapalua. She has served as General Manager for The Ritz-Carlton, Rancho Mirage, The Ritz-Carlton, Cleveland, and The Ritz-Carlton, Philadelphia, where she was Vice President and Area General Manager with oversight of three Ritz-Carlton Hotels in the Midwest. Mullins is a member of the prestigious *Chaine des Rotisseurs*, and is a sought after speaker to audiences on customer service topics.



Elizabeth Mullins

PROPERTY BRIEF Originally the site of the landmark St. Moritz Hotel, The Ritz-Carlton New York, Central Park (ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/new-york/central-park) offers all the elegance and charm of a private home in the heart of New York City. Located in Midtown Manhattan at the corner of Central Park South and Sixth Avenue, the hotel feels notably intimate and private, ideal for leisure travelers. This award-winning luxury hotel features The Ritz-Carlton Club® Lounge experience for guests seeking a heightened level of luxury and privacy. Auden Bistro & Bar, the hotel's restaurant, upholds the New York reputation for exquisite dining experiences, while La Prairie at The Ritz-Carlton Spa offers nourishment for the body and soul. Just outside their doors, the cultural, culinary, and shopping heart of Manhattan are just steps away.

What is it about Ritz-Carlton that has made this job so special?

I fell in love with Ritz-Carlton when I was five years old and my father brought me to afternoon tea at The Ritz-Carlton, Boston. I loved everything about the experience, including looking at my dad and saying "Daddy, this is what I want to do."

Six days after I graduated from college, I started at The Ritz-Carlton in Boston. I just knew this was the company for me and I wanted to create guest experiences and make people feel as I did as a child.

When I started, we had seven hotels and we'll open our 100th later this year. I was able to join a company that had this great growth trajectory and that has taken me around the world.

Our service philosophy is something I recognized from a young age and it always resonated with me. I can't imagine not coming to work every day to create excellence. I would never want to work anywhere else.

In leading this property, how important is it to continue to drive culture?

Driving culture is the single most important thing we do. I remember opening The Ritz-Carlton in Hong Kong. We were competing with some amazing hotels at the time, but we were sure we could be successful because we felt our culture was strong enough to transcend international borders and cultural differences.



The Ritz-Carlton culture is about service from the heart, we call that "genuine care and comfort." The most important thing we do everyday is lineup, which is spending time with our ladies and gentleman, talking about culture.

What did you anticipate in coming to New York and has it been what you expected?

It was a bit of a change for me. I took this job because Central Park is so iconic and special for our company.

After 10 years overseeing multiple properties in my Area V.P. role, I didn't know if it would be challenging enough at first, but it has been. Each property brings its own unique challenges and complexities.

How important is the suite component?

Having the right number of suites and the right decor and layout for them is paramount.

We're about to embark on a very large renovation and we'll be reconfiguring a number of the suites. I am excited about our "Super Suite," which will take up three-quarters of a floor and will have flexibility to extend from two-bedroom to three-bedroom. The suite will be as stunningly beautiful as its view over Central Park.

Is it important to have a strong food and beverage offering?

Yes, the luxury traveler demands a solid food and beverage offering, including 24-hour room service and a wonderful bar and restaurant experience. Food and beverage is a challenge in New York City because it's difficult to run a profitable operation. We do our very best to bridge the impact of cost vs. quality.

With such a heavy leisure guest mix, is having a spa really important?

Yes, the luxury leisure guest demands a full range of amenities and services. The spa is one of those elements that help define our success.

How critical is the investment in training for Ritz-Carlton?

There are two elements that are the most important in maintaining our service culture. The first is the selection process. We can teach people to do the mechanics of their job; we can't teach them how to provide genuine care and comfort from their heart. We have to select people who are happy to serve.

Then, second is about training them on our cultural philosophy of service, which starts from the instant they walk in the door. The first few days of employment are spent at a robust orientation where understanding our philosophy is the main objective. We train consistently at every hotel in our company.

What advice do you give young people about building a sustainable career?

I tell young leaders to truly learn the "craft of hospitality" because the craft will make them successful in their future jobs.

Today a hotelier is a balanced role – both business and hospitality. A great hotelier understands both.

Our industry is one that takes passion, endurance, and commitment. That said, our days are never boring; our ability to create memories, learn from diversity, and travel the world are unparalleled.

I congratulate young leaders who choose hospitality as their profession. I am 28 years in and cannot imagine doing anything else. ●