



Approachable Luxury

An Interview with Shawn Hauer,
Managing Director, The Knickerbocker

EDITORS' NOTE Shawn Hauer, a 30-year hospitality veteran, has held various executive leadership positions across Loews Hotels and Resorts for the past 16 years, including Area Manager, Managing Director, and Hotel Manager at Loews Miami Beach. In his most recent position as Vice President of Operations for the East Coast region of Loews Hotels, Hauer oversaw operations and profitability for nine properties throughout New York City, Boston, Washington, D.C., and Canada. Prior to his tenure with Loews, Hauer led several food and beverage programs within the Hyatt Hotels and Resorts collection.



Shawn Hauer

PROPERTY BRIEF With roots that read like a glittering history of New York City's golden age, The Knickerbocker (theknickerbocker.com) is a legendary landmark reborn. A member of the prestigious Leading Hotels of the World luxury collection, all that The Knickerbocker stands for is indigenous to its namesake city of innovation. Originally opened in 1906 by John Jacob Astor IV, welcoming the glitterati and dignitaries of the time, the hotel was officially registered as a New York City landmark in 1988, and its legacy stands on the foundation of an illustrious history. The Knick is ideally situated on the southeast corner of 42nd Street overlooking Times Square, between Broadway and Bryant Park. Its 330 guest rooms, including 31 suites and its four newly unveiled Tribute Suites – each individually inspired by an icon that was integral to its history – support an elegant, luxury lifestyle experience. Critically acclaimed Chef Charlie Palmer is at the helm of The Knickerbocker's highly regarded food and beverage program. Guests can enjoy breakfast, lunch, dinner, or cocktail service at Charlie Palmer at The Knick. A signature lunch may include a classic martini, which is said to have first been stirred-up at the property by Martini di Arma di Taggia for John D. Rockefeller. Additionally, artisanal café fare is available at the lobby level coffee shop, Jake's @ The Knick, and distinguished lounge service is offered at the plush St. Cloud rooftop bar and terrace, which opens to extraordinary views of Times Square. Hotel amenities also include a state-of-the-art fitness center curated by famed NBA star Larry Johnson and a 2,200-square-foot event space for up to 160 guests.

What excited you about coming to this property and made you feel it would be a great fit?

Since the careful restoration and reopening of the hotel, I've seen the tremendous growth and rebirth of this legendary landmark as a fixture in the heart of the city. The Knickerbocker continues to set the standard for luxury hotels in NYC and is uniquely positioned as the first and only five-star hotel in Times Square. It is exciting to have this opportunity to build upon this momentum and use this great history to inspire a new age of innovation. My goal is to bring about this revolution by pioneering exceptional programming and through consistently engaging service.

Times Square is not always equated with luxury. How do you communicate that your service standard holds up to the highest luxury standards?

We are at an exciting juncture in which seemingly every industry and paradigm is being disrupted by innovators. Shifts in opinion are happening quickly and dramatically every day, and we are playing an integral role in the redevelopment of Times Square. To be avant-garde, one must be bold enough to literally stand at the front lines and make way for something new. That's exactly what we're doing. Whether staying in one of our premier Tribute Suites, stopping by for cocktails at St. Cloud amid a panorama of New York City's vibrant skyline, or dining in our world-class restaurants by Charlie Palmer, extraordinary venues are matched with unparalleled service. Guests get the classic 42nd Street Country Club experience that The Knickerbocker was known for in the 1900s, but with an inviting, contemporary appeal.

What type of suite product do you offer?

We have four Tribute Suites, and they all reference the history of the hotel. The Cohan Suite is attributed to George Cohan's legacy as a guest here. The Caruso Suite, which is the largest signature presidential suite, presents elements that commemorate our most noteworthy guest. The Martini Suite is of course named after the famous drink that was invented here, so legend has it. Finally, the Parrish Suite is named after Maxfield Parrish – the artist who painted the famous "King Cole" mural, as commissioned by John Jacob Astor IV for the hotel and sold after the property's original closure in 1921. An additional 31 stylish and spacious suites are the perfect retreats for families.



St. Cloud rooftop bar (left); the living area of the Caruso Suite (above)

How broad is the competitive set for you?

The entire luxury segment is our competition, though it really depends on the customer. During midweek, our guest base is comprised of mostly corporate travelers. Our close proximity to a myriad of headquarter offices makes The Knick especially convenient, but this central location near both Times Square and Bryant Park also attracts a great deal of leisure travelers on the weekends, being steps from Broadway.

How difficult is it to drive food and beverage profit in a city like New York and what is the secret to being successful?

It goes back to creating food and beverage offerings that are compelling not just for the hotel guests, but also for New Yorkers. We have amazing venues, led and curated by Charlie Palmer, that have received rave reviews from critics and publications. These outlets have shown a high rate of returning customers. The experience at St. Cloud rooftop cannot be duplicated. From the views of Broadway to the New Year's Eve Waterford Crystal Ball just 150 feet above the hotel, it's a sight that everyone should see at least once. Moreover, we strive to expand our program by incorporating initiatives like the \$45 "Martini Lunch" at Charlie Palmer at The Knick.

Is the meetings focus primarily high-level but more intimate?

With an unrivaled location and 2,200 square feet of dedicated meeting and event space, plus fine dining by Charlie Palmer, we can host intimate board meetings as well as unforgettable receptions. Due to our strong corporate business, we can leverage much of that into group business, as well as meetings and events.

In the hotel space, how do you define a true luxury experience?

The first impression of luxury is always aesthetic, which we showcase in all touch points. But the way I would characterize luxury lies more in service, and here at The Knickerbocker, we are achieving that through what I call "approachable luxury." We offer great service by anticipating and delivering on the wants and needs of our guests before they have to ask. We have quickly developed a tremendously loyal repeat-guest base because we have taken the opportunity to get to know our guests personally. It's a fresh approach to service that makes our guests feel comfortable and catered to in an authentic way, and it shows a high level of luxury and attention to detail within the overall experience. ●