

Hospitality

A Luxury Resort Experience in Rome



An Interview with **Alessandro M. Cabella**,
Managing Director, Rome Cavalieri, Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts

An antique French clock from Rome Cavalieri's art gallery (left);
the Rome Cavalieri concierge desk (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming his current post in Rome, Alessandro Cabella managed the stunning Hilton Molino Stucky Venice. In his 20-year career, he has overseen hotels in France, Monaco, Italy, and Portugal including the launch of Conrad Algarve in 2012.

PROPERTY BRIEF Enclosed in fifteen acres of lush Mediterranean parklands, the Rome Cavalieri (romecavalieri.com) is a calm retreat, yet is located just minutes from the heart of the city's great monuments. The first hotel in Europe to be part of the exclusive Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts and winner of the 2016 World Travel Awards as Europe and Italy's Leading Luxury City Resort, it boasts an art collection to rival many museums and a Grand Spa that won the 2013 award for Italy's Best Luxury Hotel Spa at the Luxury Hotel Awards.

Waldorf Astoria Hotels & Resorts is a portfolio of 26 iconic properties in the world's most sought after destinations. Unified by their inspirational environments and True Waldorf Service, Waldorf Astoria hotels deliver unparalleled, bespoke service from the moment a guest books through check out. Waldorf Astoria is a part of Hilton, a leading global hospitality company.

What excited you about this property and the opportunity to join it?

The Rome Cavalieri is one of the most iconic properties in the world, and certainly one of the most exclusive hotels we have in the company in Europe.

Being part of this historic hotel attracted me. Opened in 1963, this was the second Hilton hotel opened outside of the United States after Istanbul.

I thought I would enjoy being part of the story of the hotel business, especially the Hilton company.

On top of this, I saw a professional opportunity as well within the Rome Cavalieri to expand my knowledge, especially in the luxury market. I knew I would be facing a very dynamic challenge because there was the need to push the hotel forward into the 21st century in many areas, and to somehow rewrite part of the story of the hotel.



Alessandro M. Cabella

How important is it to make sure the hotel is current and maintains its history?

It's fundamental. Our duty is to maintain the legacy we have received. Rome Cavalieri would not be the same without that.

Even so, the world is changing every day, especially in the luxury environment. It is very influenced by technology but also by retailers and trends, so all those elements have to be taken into consideration for every project we are developing in order to

keep the relevance of our property within the market, while also distinguishing it.

How challenging is differentiation within this space?

Everybody immediately thinks of Via Veneto when luxury and Rome are mentioned together. There are in fact many competitors in that area.

My first challenge was to reinforce our leadership position as the only true luxury resort in Rome thanks in large part to our strategic location and spacious indoor and outdoor facilities, which allow us to offer a variety of options for guests, not only business and leisure, but also families and couples, a complete luxury resort experience in the city, not to mention a stunning view of Rome.

The competition is there and it is refurbishing itself in order to come out in 2018-2019 with new products, but this is the exciting side of the story and it pushes us to do even better, not only in terms of product, but most importantly in terms of the service, which really makes the difference.

How important was it to engage the employees first in your vision?

The biggest challenge for me was to align our communication with regard to this vision and everyone appreciates that I'm here to build a project that will enhance our hotel's heritage. I enjoy sharing my passion for this business with them.

Are you happy with where the product is today?

I'm happy with the evolution of the product. I can't say we have arrived at a conclusion. We will need another few years before having the full hotel evolution I would like to see.

How important is the range of suites?

They are strategically important in the luxury market because they make a great difference to our average room rate. This is also the kind of product that everybody is drawn to. Hotels are looking to satisfy international luxury travelers through these suites.

We have started the refurbishment of our nine one-bedroom corner suites and they will be completed soon. We will also fully refurbish the Petronius Suite, which is one of the four signature suites of the hotel. It offers four connecting rooms that can be added on. We will also add a kitchenette to better satisfy the Middle Eastern market.

We are going to fully refurbish the Imperial Club on the seventh floor, where our imperial rooms and our Napoleon Suite are.

What is the right concept to be successful with food and beverage operations?

People are generally moving away from F&B because of the costs. However, the right concept, the right chef, and the right ambiance are strategically important in how the hotel itself is publicized and promoted in the market.

With regard to La Pergola, the Rome Cavalieri would not be the same without it. It's one of the jewels in the hotel's crown and having such an iconic chef as Heinz Beck is driving visibility and interest. La Pergola, on its own, is driving a huge amount of interest in the hotel itself. This restaurant is full every single evening. Roughly 80 percent of our clients are coming from outside of the hotel.

Does technology assist with the human relationship today or does it take away from it?

We need to respect that people are consuming our offering in a completely different way. Express check-in via an app must be part of the experience we're giving them.

However, luxury is much more on the human-touch side and is not necessarily something that can just be plugged into an iPhone. It works for a certain kind of clientele, like businesspeople, but when it comes to leisure clientele who want to experience the Rome Cavalieri, people still want to sit down with guest relations and tailor-make their stay.

Is the role of a GM as much a business/finance role as it is hospitality?

There will always be owners who invest money, and we have to meet their expectations.

We can't, however, forget our relationship with the market and our guests. ●