



Growing Montage

An Interview with Alan J. Fuerstman,
 Founder and Chief Executive Officer,
 Montage Hotels & Resorts



Montage Deer Valley in Utah (left);
 Montage Kapalua Bay in Hawaii (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Alan J. Fuerstman is Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Montage Hotels & Resorts. Prior to launching Montage Hotels & Resorts, Fuerstman was the opening Vice President of Hotel Operations at Bellagio in Las Vegas. Previously, he served as President and Managing Director of The Phoenician. He began his distinguished career with Marriott International. Fuerstman graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Gettysburg College.



Alan J. Fuerstman

COMPANY BRIEF Montage Hotels & Resorts (montagehotels.com) is a hotel and resort management company designed to serve the luxury traveler and homeowner. The company encompasses an artistic collection of distinctive hotels, resorts, and residences in stunning settings that offer comfortable elegance, a unique sense of place and spirit, impeccable hospitality, and memorable culinary, spa, and lifestyle experiences. The portfolio of hotels, resorts, and residences includes Montage Laguna Beach, Montage Beverly Hills, Montage Deer Valley, Montage Kapalua Bay, Montage Palmetto Bluff, and, opening in 2018, Montage Los Cabos. In 2014, the company launched Pendry Hotels, a collection of new luxury hotels in taste-making destinations. Pendry Hotels will bring together the best in vibrant design and anticipatory service. In addition, the company also operates some of the country's premiere golf courses, including Spanish Peaks Mountain Club in Big Sky, Montana, and The May River Golf Club in Bluffton, South Carolina.

Since starting Montage in 2002, has the ride been what you expected?

It's been an incredible journey. In 2002, when I started Montage Hotels & Resorts, it was built around the premise that traditional or old-world luxury was too pretentious and scripted, and that the next generation of luxury travelers was looking for a more gracious, humble approach. The vision for the brand has always been to create an artistic collection of distinctive luxury hotels, resorts, and residences in stunning settings that offer an elevated guest experience. We do this by offering accommodations that exude comfortable elegance and a unique sense of place, while maintaining incredible attention to detail, craftsmanship, and quality. This concept has resonated with both the new and older generations of luxury travelers, resulting in a loyal following of affluent consumers.

Could that attention to detail limit how large you can grow?

By definition, ultra-luxury is limited in how large it can grow. We are only focusing on markets that can support rates that are commensurate with the service levels we offer. We are particularly sensitive when developing new properties and look to grow in locations and destinations that our customer is truly looking for.

Is there a certain consistency in the feel of a Montage?

The architecture and design of Montage properties are highly customized to the locale, paying homage to the local community. What transfers beautifully from hotel to hotel is the style of service – the graciousness, the approach to how we interact, and the training and learning we invest in our team, so that everyone is able to deliver that signature service to our guests. From striking architectural details to carefully selected residential-style decor and locally curated art collections, each property's unique design gracefully reflects the heritage of its destination. Each Montage property also features a selection of innovative culinary dining venues, along with cutting-edge wellness offerings through our award-winning Spa Montage.

Our collection of properties also offers a residential component, which allows homeowners to embrace the Montage lifestyle with exclusive residential concierge services and access to all hotel or resort services and amenities.

Is true luxury today more about that customized guest experience?

There is a level of authenticity that permeates true luxury. Authenticity means being true to the local culture and environment, so integrating elements of local character into the hotel is key for creating a unique experience. Things like craftsmanship are exceptionally important. True luxury is a high level of service that exceeds guest expectations; it's about attentiveness and attention to detail; but ultimately it's about creating an environment where guests are made to feel extraordinarily special.

Is hiring more about experience or culture fit for Montage?

Personality and culture fit, along with attitude and aptitude, are important components when choosing talent.

Finding the right energy and individuals with the affinity and passion for our business has been an essential element to our success and contributes to Montage's remarkably low associate turnover.

Many of our staff have had no experience in the hospitality business prior to us hiring them. We believe that we can develop the technical skills needed for our staff to become extraordinary hospitality professionals. We have a tremendous commitment to our training and ongoing education that starts before any associate has contact with our guests. It continues through all levels of our organization and that commitment to training and learning is never-ending.

Are Pendry Hotels a natural extension of the Montage brand or is it looked at separately?

Pendry is a natural extension of Montage. Where Montage is traditional luxury, Pendry is new luxury – which is a bit edgier in design, with food and beverage spaces that are incredibly vibrant. The earlier boutique hotels were known for being progressive from a design perspective, and with Pendry the goal is to match a sensational design with an extraordinary service culture that is a Montage trademark.

Are you focused on growing both brands in specific markets?

The growth of Montage is best-suited for major gateway cities around the world and remarkable resort destinations. There are some locations that are of great strategic importance to Montage. For example, we would love to see a Montage hotel in New York City and London.

The key for us is to not compromise just to enter those markets. Unless we can achieve a dominant position with the right property – both location-wise and aesthetically – we'd rather wait to find those opportunities.

Pendry is key to our company's growth, as we are able to enter markets with the brand that may not be appropriate for a Montage hotel or resort. There are more markets that can support Pendry in a way that makes sense for both the brand and location.

As the brand has grown, has your role evolved?

I live and breathe Montage, but my role is to make sure the vision for the company is being executed on a daily basis. I have an incredibly strong team made up of the most talented executives, including Montage's President and COO Jason Herthel and my eldest son, Michael, who is the Co-Founder and Creative Director of Pendry.

I'm highly focused on my role as the visionary leader, working with a team to set strategic growth goals and develop relationships that will help us grow into the future. ●