

Hospitality



Progressive Hospitality

An Interview with Gary E. Schweikert,
Regional Vice President and Managing Director,
Trump SoHo New York



Duplex Terrace Penthouse living and dining areas (left);
Trump SoHo building (above); rooftop spa and pool (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Gary Schweikert was appointed to his current post of Managing Director in September 2014 and, in July 2015, took on the additional role of Regional Vice President for Trump Hotels. Previously, he founded Strata Hospitality Group and was President of Jumeirah Hospitality and Leisure USA while concurrently serving as General Manager of the Jumeirah Essex House. His career also includes nine years as the Regional Vice President of Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, and Managing Director of New York's historic Plaza Hotel, as well as senior management positions within Hilton Hotels, including at the legendary Waldorf Astoria.



Gary E. Schweikert

PROPERTY BRIEF The first full-service luxury hotel in the neighborhood, Trump SoHo® New York's (trumpsobohotel.com) 391 spacious guest rooms and suites feature floor-to-ceiling windows offering unparalleled views of the city's spectacular skyline and the Hudson River. Owners and hotel guests will enjoy world-class dining at Koi SoHo, cocktail lounge Mr. Jones, the seasonal poolside Bar d'Eau, and the utmost in personal service with signature Trump Attaché service. The Spa at Trump®, with its two levels of pampering services, provides New York its first authentic luxury Hammam. The property is a member of the Trump Hotels portfolio.

Will you touch on your view of the New York City market and on Trump SoHo specifically?

The New York City market is experiencing some change and some pressure right now.

Certain geographical regions in the world are having economic difficulties, and that affects the hotel business.

New York City as a market is underperforming in terms of RevPAR growth this year, and certain industry developments, such as Airbnb and hotel brand consolidation, will impact market conditions.

Trump SoHo is seeing new competition in the immediate geographical market, which we welcome as a positive sign for luxury hotels in Downtown Manhattan.

Will you talk about the strength of Trump SoHo and do you anticipate changes on the horizon?

The property retains all the cachet that it had when it first opened. It was the market

leader in this neighborhood in terms of being a larger, yet full luxury hotel. It maintains all the great characteristics that allowed this hotel to earn its Five-Diamond awards, and we continue to build on those strengths. The team is amazing, the product has been maintained immaculately, and the exciting news is that ownership is planning a full renovation of the property. Their attention, as is the brand's attention, is on keeping the building relevant and at the forefront of progressive hospitality in a luxury style.

How do you define the luxury hotel experience today and has that changed?

It's constantly evolving. The luxury traveler now wants experiential visits from their hotels. How does that change things on our side? It means a lot more forethought, anticipation, and customer interaction by our service teams to make sure they anticipate that which will create a great experience for the guest.



Behind the scenes, our team is always looking for new opportunities with strategic partners to give our guests a great experience.

It's not so much about how plush the carpet is; it's what a guest is experiencing in the hotel, and if we're helping them find and explore new things in the city they've never experienced before.

In choosing talent, is it more about personality or about education?

It's really about the individual. There is no doubt that their education and their training brings a certain technical expertise to the job, but those of us in the industry who are older are now working more often with millennials,

and their mindset is completely different so we have to adapt. We are lucky if we have them for just three years before they explore opportunities elsewhere. The days of building an entire career with one company are long gone, but three years is a very short amount of time to develop somebody.

We seek folks that are enthusiastic about learning new tasks and fit into our culture. They need to have the same basic core values that the company does, which include passion, drive, and enthusiasm, and being authentic and trustworthy.

With regard to the suite offering for which Trump is known, in a market like New York City, how critical is that product?

It allows us to respond to several different markets. There are the family-oriented travelers, who were a tremendous uptick for us last year. We respond to that market, and to repeat guests, who require a larger suite availability for their groups. This also appeals to individuals who are splurging on a new experience by doing something that includes buying a suite.

Our penthouses are remarkable. These eight spectacular suites boast views that are incomparable.

Food and beverage is a key part of your offering. Will you talk about how, especially with the growth of restaurant offerings in Downtown and SoHo, you remain relevant and compete in that space?

We have a good partner in Koi, who runs our outlets, and provides a unique product in each area from the signature restaurant to the F&B on the seasonal rooftop poolside lounge. We also pay special attention to keeping our in-room dining and banquet options interesting.

Are there new parts of the world you're focused on for growth and how global is the Trump SoHo guest?

It's quite broad. We have deployed sales teams in places where we didn't have them before, such as Australia and London. In these markets we have associates who are representing our hotel on a daily basis.

For us, it has always been about exploring new markets and bringing in people who have not heard about SoHo and have never visited here. The brand enjoys a healthy growth rate, especially after this year, as the name has become known around the world. ●