



Creating a Sense of Place

An Interview with
**Michael King, Chief Operating Officer,
 Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa**



*Eau Palm Beach Spa Rainforest pool (left);
 Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa (above)*

EDITORS' NOTE *Michael King was recently named to his current post, before which he was the Managing Director. Prior to this, he was General Manager for The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company LLC, as well as for Waldorf Astoria Orlando and The Cloister at Sea Island. He was also Director of Operations and Director of Food & Beverage for Ritz Carlton Hotel Company.*



Michael King

PROPERTY BRIEF *Situated on a secluded private beach on seven acres of the Atlantic coast with breathtaking ocean views and lush tropical gardens, the AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five-Star Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa (eaupalmbeach.com) was recognized as Florida's top resort for two years running in the Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards. The resort's many amenities include the Forbes Five-Star, award-winning 42,000 square foot Eau Spa, three Har-Tru tennis courts, two pools, a fitness center, and an outstanding child and teen club called AquaNuts/Coast. With over 30,000 square feet of meeting and event space, Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa accommodates groups from 10 to 1,000 and offers a wide variety of indoor and outdoor venues for private events. Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa has four restaurants and is just minutes from the lively Palm Beach nightlife and shopping. Eau Palm Beach Resort & Spa is a distinctive member of the Preferred Hotels & Resorts Legend Collection.*

What are the strengths for the Eau Palm Beach property and what has made it work so well?

The physical strengths of the property are aesthetic and are based on the attributes of our location on a stretch of beautiful private beach in an area of Florida that is one of the most affluent communities in America, adjacent to Palm Beach. One can have the best of both worlds – we have great exclusivity within two really great communities with Palm Beach on one side and Boca Raton on the other.

That plus the fact that our owners have continued to strive to be more involved in the marketplace and to create a sense of place. When one walks into this hotel, they feel like they are getting the luxury Palm Beach lifestyle experience.

All of those things play to our strengths, which cause our guests ultimately to fall in love with the destination.

How critical is it to have owners with a long-term focus on the property and who have an appreciation for true luxury hospitality?

It's very important. We all lived through the downturns when people were not investing in their properties. My many years of growing up under a renowned luxury brand and working very diligently every day to create

the expectations around luxury are the price of entry, which means excellent service, room, food, and view are the basics. It's about going above and beyond the physical plant to where people absolutely fall in love with the property and every time they come, their stay is even better than the last.

Having been in this sector a long time, have you found that the word "luxury" has lost its meaning? Is it more about personalization or customization today?

Absolutely. There was a day where one could get by with the physical plant and some degree of luxury. It now has to be through every level of a guest experience. We've been talking recently about how important it is that the website for the reservation experience has a feel of luxury and one where someone walks away and feels good.

The definition of luxury hasn't so much changed as it has evolved and people's view of luxury is a bit different, but at day's end, surprising and delighting at every turn will create a luxury experience for people.

While we have a beautiful building and a great facility, we can take our employees anywhere and put on an event that would be equally as luxurious as anything we do here because we carry this sense of luxury with us.

How important is the suite product for your clientele?

In season, which is December 26 until mid-April, when our clientele are coming from the Northeast and Midwest, the demand for the suite product is the highest. It's when people specifically come to Palm Beach for the Palm Beach experience, and probably 70 percent of our inventory is premium accommodations. We do extremely well and the demand is not just for the one room but for multiple

connecting rooms, with outstanding views and access to the club level. We sell top-down in this space. Summer is a bit more of a turn from that because during those months, our clientele is more Southeastern.

What are the keys to being successful at what many would call a hotel restaurant and is it important to engage the community in that part of the business?

Yes, it's clearly important. We always used to say that the hotel has the national and international reputation, and food and beverage has the social reputation. We are very focused on the local community – that is a great gauge for us as to how we're doing.

One of the things that make us successful in food and beverage is that we try to evolve our offerings frequently.

As we transitioned into an independent property, we developed something completely unique to us, which is an over-the-top Mediterranean breakfast buffet. It's more health-focused and we have become extremely well known for it. People expect us to keep that. We also have our Angle Restaurant, which is our gourmet offering.

Farm to table is very relevant these days, so to say it is kind of redundant because if we're going to play in the world of high cuisine and deliver at that level, we have to source very unique things. Much of it is as local as we can be, and we present it in such a way that our chef might explain it to guests so their dining experience becomes a story they will take with them.

That has been the secret to the success of our food and beverage and we have done extremely well as a result.

Will you touch on the spa product as well?

We own the spa and have a third-party management company that handles the day to day operations, but we treat it exactly like it's a part of our establishment. The employees there go through our orientation and learn about our values and beliefs. They are considered Eau Palm Beach hoteliers. The spa, first and foremost, is a tribute to our ownership who invested the money necessary to create this experience with 42,000 square feet of absolute luxury. We offer unique product and service offerings, and it's just another example of something we do on site that is ever-evolving and changing. ●