



Design Language

An Interview with Lorenz Maurer,
General Manager, San Francisco Proper Hotel



San Francisco Proper Hotel bedroom (left) and exterior (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Lorenz Maurer most recently served as Area Managing Director for Commune Hospitality, where he oversaw three Commune-managed San Francisco neighborhood hotels, including the iconic Phoenix hotel in the Tenderloin. He simultaneously held the General Manager position at The Epiphany Hotel in Palo Alto, a Joie de Vivre hotel operated by Commune.



Lorenz Maurer

PROPERTY BRIEF Housed in a historic flatiron building in the heart of Mid-Market, San Francisco Proper (properhotel.com) is a fresh take on the quintessential urban hotel experience; a reimagining of the past, present and future of the city through the integrated lens of timeless design, intuitive service and attention to detail. The 131 beautifully designed rooms offer a range of private retreats layered between a lively collection of dining and public spaces. Taking its cue from a range of early Modernist, Cubist and Secessionist eras, the design of the hotel seamlessly joins the romantic warmth of the old world with the graphic vibrancy of the new. Deep colors, rich textures and natural materials complement the patina of the original building.

How will San Francisco Proper Hotel be positioned in the market?

The hotel recently opened and, while it's for everybody, we're targeting it specifically for the creative crowd, with a very inspired and clear design language for the entire hotel.

What differentiates it from its competitors is our obsession with service and how we make that service unique. In addition to the amazing design language, we're positioning ourselves in the market to compete with some of the more traditional lifestyle hotels in San Francisco.

The design is all encompassing and relates to any age group.

Will you discuss the focus you have put on service and how you will make your service unique?

I started my career at the front desk of a big hotel. We had an acronym that described the arrival process, which were six scripted steps. Those scripts were tested scripts by internal quality control, even during the phone calls. We had to hit the same points on every check-in, no matter what.

We're trying to focus more on the relationship, because more of the transactional functions will

eventually be taken over by technology and already have been at some hotels.

We want our hosts to be super knowledgeable not just about San Francisco, but also about our neighborhood. We want them to love this city so they can tailor their recommendations to our guests.

From a service perspective, there is no such thing as one size fits all. If guest are staying with us every week, there are many things they already know, so we might want to learn more about them, like what their favorite sports teams are.

This is intuitive service.

The same goes for our restaurants. Being a server is an art and someone has to pick up on clues from their diners.

It's easier at a 131-room hotel than at a larger property. Our front desk is always answering phone calls.

When you're hiring, do you look for people who have come out of hotel schools or is it more about finding the right personality?

It's absolutely personality, but I would not exclude someone from a hotel school.

This doesn't only mean someone has to talk a lot. Through the interview process, we pick up on clues. Some of the big hotel companies have great systems that we have adapted. One of the first qualifiers is the firmness of the handshake and eye contact, which shows confidence and is really important for customer-facing positions.

How unique is the building and how have you positioned the suite offering?

We have a unique building so the suite offering was obvious because they exist where we have windows on three different sides of a triangle-shaped building. The hotel we took over was 110 years old.

With so many great stand-alone food and beverage outlets in San Francisco, what are the right ingredients to being successful in this area?

This component is important to attract our local guests, especially in a boutique hotel. All of our food and beverage offerings are tailored to the San Francisco clientele.

From day one, the goal was to market this completely separately and, if people come and have dinner and notice that a hotel is attached, then we have succeeded in separating the two.

We can deliver more consistent product with full control, which we have. Since we run our restaurants, everyone knows that breakfast is really important here because it rounds out someone's experience.

Given the hotel's size, is your meeting space more catered to high-level, intimate gatherings?

We have about 1,300 square feet of dedicated meeting space and we offer flex space after that. Half of our lobby can be used for receptions at times, as well as our rooftop.

They also have wonderful food because they use our restaurant chef.

How consistent is this property to others in Proper Hotel's portfolio?

The one consistency is we name each of our properties with the city first, because each hotel should be a reflection of the city it's in and the building it occupies.

Do you enjoy both running and opening properties or does one business create more excitement for you?

The exciting part about opening a hotel is having a blank sheet on which to design something from scratch – we're not just building a hotel, but a brand at the same time, so this is very exciting.

Putting the team together is also exciting as each of them brings the best of their past experiences with them.

Did you always know that you wanted to spend your career in hospitality?

I'm from Switzerland and we have a big hospitality sector there. I started more as a travel agent because travel was always a passion of mine. I always wanted to work in hotels, but it never paid well enough so I was in the airline industry until I decided to leave it after 9/11.

Hotels work well for me because our goal is to pamper people with passion, love and care once they've arrived from their travels. In boutique properties, we all care deeply about our product and our guests. It's great to look after people.

What advice would you give to young people interested in building careers in the industry?

Experience certainly pays off. We've been discussing an apprenticeship program in hospitality as opposed to the secondary degree path, which is a less affordable option for some.

If one comes out of hotel school, I would advise them not to be afraid of detours in their careers. Whatever they do, they will learn so much about the business and that will help them wherever they go. ●