

## An Authentic Sense of Place

An Interview with Kristi Cotten-Morris, General Manager, Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Kristi Cotten-Morris has over 26 years of experience in the hospitality industry, 24 of which have been with Hyatt hotels. Since beginning her Hyatt career as a front desk agent at Hyatt Regency Hilton Head Island in 1997, Cotten-Morris has led Hyatt properties through rebrands, renovations and openings, taking pride in leading with care in an inclusive environment that encourages team members to be their best. Highlights of her experience thus far include leading a \$73 million renovation at Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport, which transformed every aspect of the property. Cotten-Morris also served on Hyatt's opening task force for several years, playing a key role in opening Hyatt Regency Boston, Hyatt Regency Century Plaza and Hyatt Regency Jacksonville. Most recently, she worked in Philadelphia as the general manager of The Bellevue Hotel, serving as a business leader, strategic advisor and project manager while balancing relationships between ownership, colleagues, customers and guests.*



Kristi Cotten-Morris

of a modern Buckhead as a premier fashion, business and entertainment destination. The hotel is full of vibrant colors, style and patterns, celebrating Buckhead's clay, pottery, and sculpture lore to offer guests a uniquely local experience. Located along the edge of Lenox Square and close to Path400, Shops Around Lenox and Phipps Plaza, you will enjoy having a bounty of plentiful dining and entertainment options to explore. Guests will check into luxury rooms and suites, wine and dine atop a rooftop lounge, find social and event spaces, and enjoy the hottest culinary experience around town.

As a modern, lifestyle-forward hotel development, our position is to be a preferred choice for the b'leisure guest. Whether traveling for business, pleasure or a little bit of both, the Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta will serve as a hub in the heart of Atlanta's fashion capitol, Buckhead. We're providing unique experiences by tying in local culture for our guests while in-house, and serving as a launch pad to exploration of Atlanta hot spots only true locals know. Our goal is to offer our guest the experience of feeling like a local.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** *Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta (hyattcentricbuckheadatlanta.com) is designed to reflect the historical pottery heritage of Georgia while taking inspiration from the evolution of Buckhead as a fashion destination. The 218-key hotel serves as a launchpad for guests to explore Buckhead, and immerses guests and locals in a playful interpretation of the local culture, from the residential-inspired lounge area in the lobby with a curated art selection to the over 3,700 square feet of meeting and pre-function space reflecting the pottery design concept. There are two signature food and beverage experiences operated by James Beard Award-winning chef Hugh Acheson: Mount Royal, a Montreal-style steakhouse that spotlights the work of the finest local farmers and artisans in the Southeast, and Spaceman, the 15th-floor indoor-outdoor rooftop lounge that features expertly crafted cocktails and a simple menu of shareable bites.*

**Will you provide an overview of Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta and how the property is positioned in the market?**

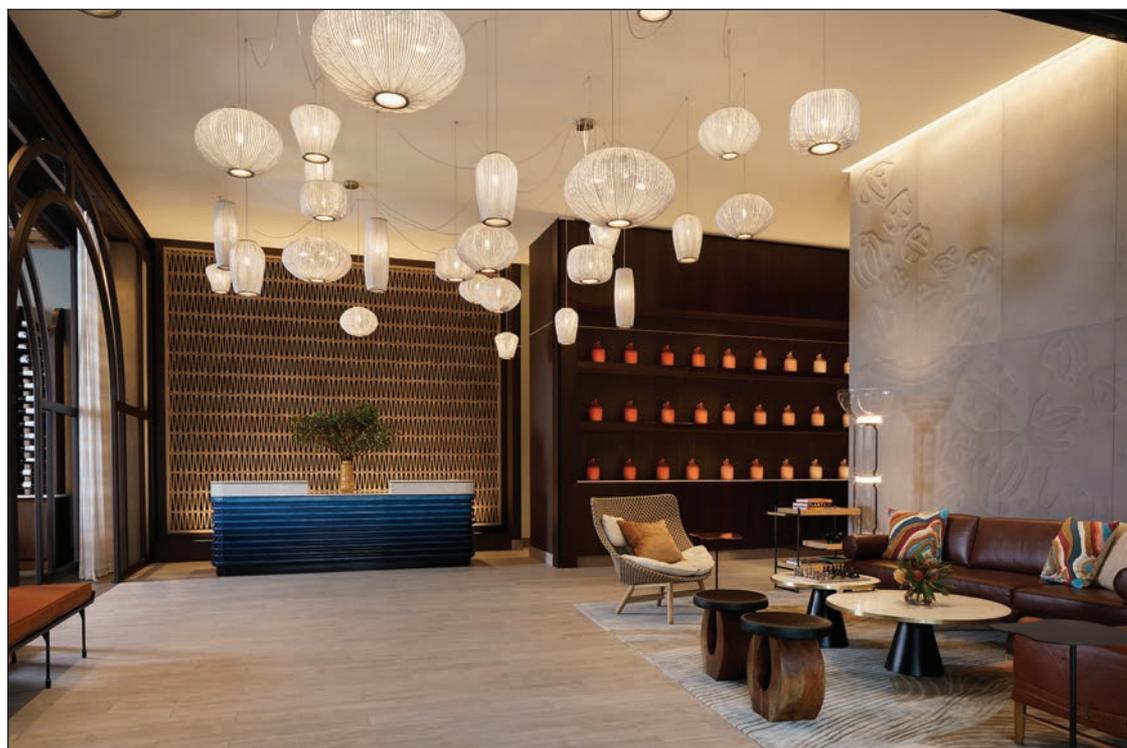
Representing the storied history of Buckhead, Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta is an upscale, stylish boutique hotel that embodies the district's unique legacy. The hotel's design is inspired by Georgia's ancient pottery heritage coupled with the evolution

**Will you highlight Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta's accommodations and suite offering?**

We offer 218 rooms, including seven suites. The guestroom experience offers an inspirational mix of Georgia's ancient pottery and bountiful clay heritage layered in with Buckhead's 21st-century evolution as a premier fashion destination. With clean lines, pops of vibrant color and modern art-like furnishings, our guestrooms feature 10-foot ceilings and oversized windows for amazing skyline and nature landscape views of Atlanta.

**What are the keys to being successful in food and beverage for a hotel, especially when located in a market such as Buckhead that has a strong local restaurant offering?**

As a lifestyle hotel brand, we are afforded the ability to create meaningful and unique experiences that embody not only the brand's overarching culture, but local culture as well. We are extremely excited to work with a celebrity chef who aligns well with our brand and local culture. Chef Hugh Acheson is known for his cultural diversity in food, incorporating French cooking techniques. He understands the importance of local harvests to offer a truly authentic experience.



Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta lobby



*Spaceman Bar on the 15th floor of Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta features amazing views of Buckhead and the surrounding area*

**Will you discuss Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta's meeting and event capabilities?**

Our boutique hotel offers 3,702 square feet of event space located on the second floor for impressive team meetings, social gatherings, weddings and more. Spaceman, our rooftop bar and lounge, is a truly one-of-a-kind experience showcasing 360-degree views of all Atlanta. This venue, complete with two outdoor terraces, is available for buy-outs, corporate and social events. Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta is a perfect venue option for groups also looking to do a complete take-over of our hotel and space. Each of our event spaces offers wet bars, lounge seating, new technology and all the flexibility you need to host a memorable event in one of the most celebrated neighborhoods in Atlanta.

**What was the vision behind Hyatt Centric Buckhead Atlanta's focus on art at the property?**

Our wonderful design team, Sawyer & Company, in conjunction with The Johnson Studio at COOPER CARRY in the food and beverage space, studied the local history, heritage and landscape of Buckhead's location and looked to the unique stories and historic details that have given the area its identity through the years. The hotel's design ideation was guided by the neighborhood's identity as a fashion capital as well as the state of Georgia's historic clay craftsmanship. The natural clay resources can be seen throughout the space, from the glazing and color of the front desk to the lobby light installation inspired by the shapes of pottery and a wall installation by American artist John Johnson. We have unique art installations throughout the property, each of which call back to the history and legacy of our location.

Our design team's goal is for guests to feel an authentic sense of place, so they captured the visual aesthetic of the neighborhood which

houses both low-rise and high-rise structures, as well as both urban landscapes and greenspace. The hope is that guests will be surprised by the playful use of color and design to capture the essence of the neighborhood.

**How has the role of the general manager evolved and what are the keys to being successful in the role?**

The role of the GM is ever evolving. As Hyatt continues to strive in achieving our purpose of care, the GM role has evolved to be more of a leader and mentor to colleagues. The role goes beyond traditional guest services and owner

relations. The role is to lead and act with care and empathy, ensuring we support all that touch our hotel and our brand.

**Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?**

Absolutely. Over the past several years, Hyatt has shared our Change Starts Here commitment, bringing a focus to diversity, equity and inclusion on all fronts. This also includes a commitment to doubling the representation of women at the GM level globally, as well as doubling the representation of women at the VP+ level outside of the U.S.

**You have been with Hyatt Hotels for 24 years. What has made Hyatt so special for you and a place where you have wanted to spend so much of your career?**

I could come up with many reasons to share, but the most meaningful to me is that the culture of the company has never wavered throughout the years. Let me take you back – I had just driven from New York City to South Carolina by myself in a little two-door car to join Hyatt. I had a tiny apartment, no furniture and didn't know a soul. On my second shift, I experienced a dental emergency. The following day, I was in the dental office and had to call someone to pick me up after the procedure. I called the main line of the hotel and asked to speak with the manager on duty. Through muffled words, I tried to explain who I was and asked for help. He not only picked me up, but paid for my prescription and got me home safely. I woke up hours later on the floor in my living room to find my prescription and a note. "Welcome to the Hyatt family." It was in that moment that I just felt like I belonged – like I was home.

Over the years, I've continued to feel cared for and felt as though I was getting back just as much as I was giving to the company. ●



*Floor-to-ceiling windows provide natural light and expansive views for a Studio King Suite*