

An Urban Vibe

**An Interview with Elizabeth Andrews,
General Manager, The Opus, Westchester**



EDITORS' NOTE Elizabeth Andrews is a veteran of the hospitality industry with over 20 years of experience in hotels. Her career began at 60 Thompson (now SIXTY SoHo) as a Front Desk Agent, moving her way up and growing alongside ownership over the course of ten years before finishing her tenure as General Manager of the property. Andrews then went on to serve as General Manager for several boutique luxury properties including Thompson LES (now SIXTY LES Hotel); Smyth, a Thompson Hotel (now AKA Tribeca); Paramount Hotel; and Gramercy Park Hotel. The former modern dancer turned hotel operator works to infuse her artistic flare and experience into the ethos of every property she helms. Andrews was appointed General Manager of The Opus, Westchester prior to its opening in April 2021.



Elizabeth Andrews

PROPERTY BRIEF The Opus, Westchester (theopuswestchester.com), an Autograph Collection property, has a luxe residential flair, capturing the calm of a sanctuary retreat with a city soul and rich urban experience infused throughout the property. The new hotel features 146 guestrooms including 38 luxury suites and acts as a central hub for the community.

Will you provide an overview of The Opus, Westchester and how the property is positioned in the market?

The Opus, Westchester is part of Marriott's Autograph Collection hotels. We strive to evoke an upscale but approachable urban vibe. Located in Westchester, New York, we are just 35 minutes from the heart of New York City, making our hotel an ideal place for those who are looking for a relaxing retreat yet feeling the

unmistakable energy and soul from the city. The hotel features 146 guest rooms including 38 luxury suites, the rooftop Kanopi restaurant with floor-to-ceiling windows and sweeping skyline views, a vibrant, socially engaging lobby bar, a heated indoor rooftop pool, 10,000 square feet of meetings and events space and more.

At The Opus we offer a warm and inviting space with a social nature and modern appeal, featuring inviting open spaces, eclectic art and décor, authentic experiences, urban glamour, and personalized service.

What excited you about opening The Opus, Westchester and made you feel it was the right fit?

I had taken a step back from my career to care for my two small children when a former colleague mentioned The Ritz Carlton New York, Westchester was going to be renovated and rebranded as a lifestyle property. I had not planned to rejoin the workforce for another year or so, but the project had such tremendous potential, I could not resist. As a Westchester resident, I knew the market was in desperate need of a sophisticated, modern destination hotel. White Plains is truly an urban center at the nexus of the Hudson Valley and New York City, which makes for a fascinating mix of styles and experiences.

Having spent most of my career managing Manhattan hotels, the sheer size of the average guestroom and the expansive five-fixture bathrooms were compelling as well. Despite only featuring 146 rooms, The Opus, Westchester has countless amenities including an indoor heated rooftop pool, a seductive Lobby Lounge, expansive fitness center and 10,000 square feet of event space. The opportunity to manage a world-class luxury spa was also something that drew me to the role, and I am thrilled to announce that we look forward to opening The Opus Spa in August.

The Opus, Westchester has a strong dining/food and beverage product. What are the keys to being successful in food and beverage for a hotel?

The food and beverage experience is crucial to any lifestyle property. As a member of Marriott's Autograph Collection, we have the freedom to create one-of-a-kind offerings that are informed by current food and beverage trends, while still accessible to a wide range of guests. We feature local, Hudson Valley



The Opus, Westchester entrance (top) and lobby (above)

ingredients wherever possible, and have crafted a strong cocktail program, which changes seasonally and features modern takes on classic drinks.

Will you discuss The Opus, Westchester's meeting and event capabilities?

Whether the guests are planning a sophisticated wedding reception, an intimate dinner, a mitzvah or a large-scale conference, at The Opus we provide the ideal canvas for any event. We have 10 different event spaces adding up to 10,000 square feet, including a Grand Ballroom with capacity for 350 guests, and we offer modern facilities with floor-to-ceiling windows and an abundance of natural light so there is definitely room for any kind of beautiful event that an organizer wishes to plan.

We also cater to different tastes with a range of cuisines – from hors d'oeuvres, champagne, cocktails, and the perfect complement of stations to a five-course dinner or elaborate ballroom gala, our team can reach and exceed any expectations.

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

For me, being the General Manager means wearing many hats – leader, mentor, problem-solver and idea facilitator. I aim to provide my team with the tools, resources and support necessary to provide service excellence. Today, General Managers need to ultimately be responsible for every element of the hotel operation.

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

More so than ever before. When I attended the Cornell GM Management Program several years ago, there were 100+ GMs from all over the world, and only three of us were women.



One-bedroom suite

For many associates, the GM archetype is still an older, white man, especially for full-service hotels, but that is changing. Representation matters, so women need to see other women in leadership roles. Traditionally, women have been taught to hide their personal lives from employers and co-workers. Fighting against that conventional wisdom is key to enacting change. If I have to leave work early to attend a parent-teacher conference, or see a school play, I do not apologize for it. I want to demonstrate it is possible to be successful in hotel operations and have a fulfilling family life as well.

I am thankful to work for an organization like Crescent Hotels & Resorts, which is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion, and has a very active Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council.

What advice do you offer young people interested in building a career in hospitality?

Hospitality is still an industry where you can start from the “ground floor” and work your way up, and one does not need an advanced degree to succeed. Get experience by working unpopular shifts and volunteering for whatever projects are available. Whenever there was a task force opportunity or a new hotel transitioning into the portfolio, I would volunteer. Early in my career I took on many projects that I was not technically qualified for, but I made it my mission to succeed. Take every opportunity to learn – volunteer for a task force, assist different departments, when you find yourself in a conversation with a knowledgeable person – ask questions.

You have been in the hospitality industry for more than 20 years. What has made the industry so special for you and a place where you have wanted to spend so much of your career?

About 10 or so years ago I considered transitioning away from hospitality management, even going so far as to earn my MBA in the part-time program at NYU, but I just could not bring myself to do it. Instead, I developed a renewed passion for the work that we do and enjoyed using my education in my day-to-day hotel operations. I love engaging with a diverse group of associates and guests daily, and the constant problem-solving that comes with the business. No day is the same and there is truly never a dull moment. ●



Rooftop pool