

The Peninsula Experience

An Interview with Rolf Buehlmann, General Manager, The Peninsula New York

EDITORS' NOTE *With more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Rolf Buehlmann's previous position began in January 2018 when he moved to Hong Kong to assume the position as Vice President, Rooms Operations and Quality, for The Peninsula Hotels. During the past four years, he has led the enhancement of the guest experience for Front Office, Housekeeping and Spa as well as being instrumental in the group's innovation and technology efforts across the global rooms' operations.*



Rolf Buehlmann

Prior to his position in Hong Kong, Buehlmann was Resident Manager at The Peninsula Bangkok, a position he held for four years. His service with the company began in 2010 when he joined as the Executive Assistant Manager at the prestigious Hong Kong Club which is managed by Peninsula's Clubs and Consultancy Division. During his time there, he drove the club's major renovation project which included redefining its food and beverage concepts, facilities, offerings, service quality and processes. Buehlmann has always been a hotelier and prior to his career bringing him to Hong Kong, he held various posts in the Chinese mainland, the United States, and his home country of Switzerland. Buehlmann holds a BS degree in international hospitality management from the Lausanne Hospitality Management School, Switzerland.

PROPERTY BRIEF *The Peninsula New York (peninsula.com/new-york) occupies an elegantly restored, 23-story, Beaux-Arts landmark building on Fifth Avenue in the heart of Manhattan's prestigious shopping, cultural and business neighborhoods. Featuring 233 rooms and suites equipped with state-of-the-art technology, a glass-enclosed spa and health club, rooftop bar and lounge, Salon de Ning, and the popular Clement restaurant, the property is the recipient of the AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five Star ratings. The Peninsula New York is owned and managed by The Peninsula Hotels (peninsula.com), a division of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited.*

Will you provide an overview of The Peninsula New York and how the property is positioned in the market?

Ideally located on Fifth Avenue and 55th Street in Midtown Manhattan, The Peninsula

New York is in the heart of the city's most prestigious shopping, entertainment, and cultural district. The hotel is within walking distance of Central Park, Rockefeller Center, Fifth Avenue shopping, excellent restaurants, historic museums, and exciting Broadway theatres. Housed in a 23-story, 1905 landmark building, the hotel carries an old-world elegance with timeless interiors. There are 233 guestrooms and suites, one restaurant and three lounges including our rooftop bar, Salon de Ning, the award-winning Peninsula Spa, a fitness center and an indoor swimming pool.

How valuable is it to have such a strong suite product at the property?

Having a good suite product is paramount, especially in New York. Our business success is very much defined in our ability

to occupy these large suites regularly. I don't believe we have a suite product superior to other hotels in the same segment, but what I believe sets us apart is the service and discretion that comes with staying at The Peninsula. I believe that is what people appreciate and turns them into loyal guests.

How did The Peninsula New York adapt the way it works to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?

The pandemic has affected our industry fundamentally in that we are even more focused on our approach to health and hygiene. We have put in place stringent protocols to mitigate these health risks and the team is diligently following them. I think the pandemic has taught us that working remotely is possible, and we are taking advantage of that by having some of the back-of-the-house positions contribute to the Peninsula experience from their homes. In fact, we have a few team members working remotely



The entrance to The Peninsula New York on 55th Street off Fifth Avenue

in other parts of the U.S. that help us reach out to guests to detail their stay and anticipate their stay experience.

Will you discuss The Peninsula New York's focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

Personalization of a guest experience has always been our focus. Especially during these post-pandemic times, we have noted that guest needs and the anticipation thereof have become even more important. From a guest standpoint, we have adopted a highly flexible approach to their needs. For example, given the unpredictable nature of the pandemic as far as travel is concerned, guests are free to cancel by 6:00 PM, 24 hours prior to arrival. To provide even more flexibility, we have introduced Peninsula Time, our flexible check-in and check-out times policy for guests who book direct. This luxury benefit allows you to arrive as early as 6:00 AM and stay as late as 10:00 PM.

How critical is it for The Peninsula New York to build a diverse and inclusive workforce to mirror the diversity of the guests it serves?

Having a diverse and inclusive workforce is an integral part of our company culture. We are proud to have a diverse team and we value each of their experiences, expertise, and unique perspectives. In addition, the main attributes in today's workforce we are looking at fostering is their ability to connect with our guests on



The Fifth Avenue Suite living area

an emotional level. It is the emotional bond between guests that we believe is the "secret sauce" to today's success for any luxury hotel experience and helps us to create a positive impact on our guests. Fostering these bonds is

significantly easier if the workforce mirrors the diversity of our guests.

How do you define the role of the general manager and what are the keys to being effective in the role?

We are in a people industry, and I believe that this is where most of my time should be dedicated. I am fortunate to manage a great team that tries to go above and beyond on a daily basis, and I see my role as the person that provides the resources for them to be successful. In order to do so, I stay close to them. I walk the hotel several times per day to talk to team members to ensure they have what they need to create great experiences for our guests.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead The Peninsula New York and made you feel it was the right fit?

Actually, I never thought that I would be offered the opportunity to move to the U.S. after having spent the past 15 years in Asia. However, I was excited to be asked to lead the team in this very important market. Having spent some years early in my career in the U.S., I am delighted to be back and I am rediscovering what makes this such a great place to live and work. The ease of conducting business, the availability of virtually anything, but above all the resilience of the city and its people is unparalleled. The way that New York has come out of the pandemic was eye opening and to me, this is indicative of what makes a city great.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in building a career in the hotel industry?

Work hard, stay humble, and work in departments where you can lead people and interact with guests. It's all about people and human interactions – most technical skills can be learned. ●



Salon de Ning West Terrace