

The Power Of Personalization

An Interview with Abe Liao, Managing Director, The Watergate Hotel

EDITORS' NOTE Abe Liao is the Managing Director at the famed Watergate Hotel. Previously, Liao served as Vice President of Operations at Aimbridge Hospitality, where he oversaw up to 20 hotels across the continental United States, with a specialization in independent and soft-branded hotels. Prior to Aimbridge, Liao was Regional General Manager at Lore Group in Washington, DC, overseeing both Riggs Washington DC and Lyle Washington DC. During his tenure, he led Riggs DC to numerous accolades, including its inclusion in Travel + Leisure's World's Best Hotel Awards and Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Awards. Liao's career is underscored by a deep commitment to community and hospitality excellence. As a sitting member of the Board of Directors for the Hotel Association of Washington DC, he continues to contribute to the local hospitality landscape. In addition to his professional accomplishments, Liao remains actively involved in the local community.



Abe Liao

Next Whisky Bar, and spectacular Top of the Gate rooftop bar and lounge with 360-degree views. Another property hallmark is the exclusive Argentta Spa and fitness facility, complete with a lavish indoor pool. The hotel is conveniently located near many of Washington, DC's most popular destinations including The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, a mere one mile walk to The White House and National Mall, and in the near vicinity to Georgetown shopping, George Washington University, Embassy Row and the picturesque Dupont Circle.

What interested you in leading The Watergate Hotel and made you feel it was the right fit?

I was attracted to the legacy and history of the hotel. Its legendary stature not only in Washington, but globally, really made me feel like it would be an amazing opportunity. While the hotel is well known for "the scandal," it is also an intriguing place to gather, meet, celebrate, relax, and indulge,

whether you are a single traveler, or attending a 400-person gala.

Will you highlight the history of The Watergate Hotel?

The history of the hotel permeates in all that we do. The history of The Watergate Hotel lives in our bold design, naming of spaces, branding, and imagery. We also have a Scandal Suite, where we pay homage to the actual event.



PROPERTY BRIEF Under the ownership of international real estate developer Euro Capital Properties, The Watergate Hotel (thewatergatehotel.com) features select interiors by illustrious designer Ron Arad along with intriguing sculptural furnishings from Italian furniture company Moroso. The Watergate Hotel boasts 336 stylish guestrooms, including six exquisite Diplomat Suites, 24 premier suites and two stately Presidential Suites, as well as 27,000 square feet of flexible meeting and event space, including a brand-new ballroom and 10,000 square feet of outdoor terraces overlooking the Potomac River. Hotel guests and local residents alike can enjoy access to dining at Kingbird restaurant, in addition to its energetic bar, The



Scandal Suite and sitting area details

What have been the keys to The Watergate Hotel's industry leadership?

The Watergate Hotel has solidified its place through a consistent legacy of exceptional customer experience and exciting amenities. As a truly independent hotel, we are able to provide our guests with unique experiences and able to evolve our amenities as trends change, but also remain true to ourselves.



The Next Whisky Bar (above and left)

Will you highlight The Watergate Hotel's suite offering?

We have an amazing suite product with one of a kind sweeping views of the Potomac River, Georgetown, and the Kennedy Center. There is no other location like it. With various suite room types, we have something for all guests and their preferences. We are also well designed to configure groups of rooms, up to six rooms behind one door as an example.

How has The Watergate Hotel approached its food and beverage offerings, and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

We stay up to date on industry, food and drink trends, ensuring we are current and as an independent hotel, we can quickly adjust and adapt our offerings to meet and exceed guest expectations. Kingbird and The Next Whisky Bar feature exceptional design, and Top of the Gate has unparalleled views of any hotel in Washington, DC. Paired with innovative food and drink offerings, seasonal activations and offerings, they are venues of choice for locals and visitors alike.

How critical is providing personalized service and customizing the guest experience in delivering a luxury guest experience?

This is at the center of all we do, every day. Personalization is luxury.

Did you always know that you wanted to work in hospitality and what has made the industry so special for you?

This wasn't my profession of choice, but at an early age, my mother was my inspiration. She spent 35 years in the hotel business, retiring when she was an Area Director of Banquets for two hotels here in the DC area. She encouraged me to pursue a career in the industry, but insisted I start from the bottom and work my way up. This has been exactly my journey, which I have always viewed as a gift. Learning all the roles on my way to Managing Director has allowed me to relate and connect with colleagues at all levels of the business. As any good leader, or specifically a hotel leader, would say, our teams are everything. We cannot accomplish anything without team members at all levels of our business contributing at a high level. People have been at the core of our business since its inception and will always be at the core of hospitality.

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

Be humble, don't be afraid of the work, put in the hours, be genuine, be honest, take notes, find your mentors, care deeply about your team, hold yourself and those around you accountable, have incredible integrity, show some grit, and celebrate the successes and don't repeat the mistakes. ●



Presidential Suite living area