

An Icon Reborn

An Interview with Luigi Romaniello, Managing Director, Waldorf Astoria New York

EDITORS' NOTE Luigi Romaniello's illustrious 30-plus year career includes leadership roles at prestigious hotels worldwide where he has demonstrated exceptional skills in openings, renovations, repositioning, and concept development with a focus on delivering a world-class guest experience. In his new position, Romaniello plays a pivotal role in redefining the next era of Waldorf Astoria New York, further delivering on Conrad Hilton's vision of this hotel as the "greatest of them all."



Luigi Romaniello

In addition to driving plans for the property's reopening, he is responsible for all aspects of operations for both the hotel, Waldorf Astoria New York, and Waldorf Astoria Residences New York, the hotel's newly introduced residences. Romaniello is focused on delivering on the brand's commitment to providing unforgettable experiences and extraordinary service to guests from around the world and across New York City.

PROPERTY BRIEF For nearly a century, Waldorf Astoria New York (waldorfastorianewyork.com) has been a fixture of New York City society, earning its place as a beacon of radiance in the cultural capital of the world. Following a meticulously and thoughtfully crafted restoration effort led by renowned architects from Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and interior design by Pierre-Yves Rochon, the property will retain the scale and beauty of the original Art Deco architecture reimagined with fresh contemporary furnishings that pay homage to the original Waldorf Astoria New York. The 375-room hotel will feature some of Manhattan's largest rooms and suites that will embody the spirit of New York. Above the hotel will sit 375 private residences, ranging from studios to four bedrooms, with interiors designed by Jean-Louis Deniot. Residents will have access to 50,000 square feet of exclusive amenities and an art collection curated by Swiss collector and auctioneer Simon de Pury. Hotel guests, residents, and visitors will have access to a holistic wellness program, including a spa spanning over 30,000 square feet and a state-of-the-art fitness center, distinct culinary offerings with Lex Yard, a standout signature restaurant helmed by acclaimed Chef Michael Anthony, and 43,000 square feet of modernized event space including a striking new opera-inspired Grand Ballroom set to be the crown jewel of New York City's entertainment scene.

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

Leading the reopening of Waldorf Astoria New York is truly the opportunity of a lifetime. My experience managing ultra-luxury properties in international markets has prepared me for this exciting moment, and I'm honored to be part of such an iconic chapter in the hotel's history. I've always loved New York City, and there's an undeniable energy about

this iconic hotel – you feel it the moment you walk through the doors. This is the perfect setting for my outgoing and unapologetically Italian personality.

How valuable will it be for Waldorf Astoria New York to have such a strong suite product?

The suites at Waldorf Astoria New York redefine sophistication and refinement in the city, with 375 expansive rooms and suites that embody the spirit of Manhattan. Renowned



designer Pierre-Yves Rochon crafted elegant, flowing layouts that provide a feeling of both comfort and privacy. Our extensive inventory of connecting suites – seamlessly transforming into two- and three-bedroom accommodations – makes the hotel an ideal choice for families and celebrations. In addition, our signature suites each offer a distinct expression of Waldorf Astoria's storied luxury, catering to the most discerning travelers.

How will Waldorf Astoria New York approach its culinary offerings and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

It was essential for Waldorf Astoria New York to establish a strong culinary presence – not



Entrance to the Waldorf Astoria New York (top right); rendering of the lobby (above)



Rendering of the Grand Ballroom

just as a hotel, but as a key player in the city's vibrant restaurant scene. Staying authentic to New York was a priority, which is why we were thrilled to partner with Chef Michael Anthony of Gramercy Tavern and Jeff Bell of Please Don't Tell. These celebrated New York City talents are leading Lex Yard and the legendary Peacock Alley, bringing their expertise and creativity to our dining experiences. The key to a successful food and beverage program in a hotel is operating with the spirit and independence of a stand-alone restaurant which allows for greater creativity and flexibility.

Will you discuss Waldorf Astoria New York's focus on health and wellness?

We recognize that balancing a healthy lifestyle with a busy travel schedule can be

challenging, which is why health and wellness are at the core of our guest experience. Waldorf Astoria New York has partnered with a world-class luxury operator to create a true wellness destination in the heart of the city. From indulgent spa services and state-of-the-art facilities to personalized fitness programs, every aspect is designed to promote well-being. With an integrated approach that includes a wellness-focused retail space, guests, residents, and visitors will feel both rejuvenated and pampered throughout their time at Waldorf Astoria New York's spa.

How do you define the role of the managing director and how do you approach the role?

I don't see my role as Managing Director as just a position – it's a reflection of who I am

and my innate love for luxury hospitality. This moment in my career is the culmination of years of experience and dedication. I embody the essence of Waldorf Astoria New York, by being the ultimate host, very present with both our guests and team members. I also enjoy the creative process and I take pride in inspiring our team with a spirit of ambition and innovation, ensuring the hotel remains relevant and forward-thinking. Ultimately, my main focus is on driving a successful business – one that is built on delivering an exceptional experience for both our guests and our team.

What makes for a true luxury hotel experience today?

A true luxury hotel experience is the result of several elements working in harmony. To start, the hotel must be beautifully designed and thoughtfully programmed to reflect the local destination and culture, offering guests authentic and meaningful experiences. Then comes the service culture – the driving force behind a team that works with purpose, consistently delivering an elevated level of service and engagement. Finally, and I believe most importantly, every guest should feel recognized and valued, which is why customizing each stay is essential. Waldorf Astoria New York will embody the vibrant energy of Manhattan through creative programming and bespoke experiences, ensuring every guest feels truly understood.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the hospitality industry?

If you choose hospitality as your career, then give it your all and enjoy the incredible journey it offers. The industry requires a high level of professionalism and a genuine passion for service, but with dedication and perseverance, you can achieve remarkable success. Hospitality is more than a job – it's an exceptional lifestyle filled with enriching experiences, meaningful connections, and opportunities to create lasting memories. ●



Park Avenue Junior Suite sitting area and bedroom