

Executive Travel

The New Plaza

An Interview with Shane Krige,
General Manager, The Plaza



EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining *The Plaza*, Shane Krige was Managing Director at the Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas following a time as Manager of the Grosvenor House Hotel and Residences in Park Lane, London. Krige has held senior management positions with Ritz-Carlton and began his career with Marriott. He holds a bachelor of science degree in hotel management with a minor in business from Mercyhurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania.



Shane Krige

PROPERTY BRIEF *The Plaza* (www.fairmont.com/theplaza) is the only New York hotel to be designated a National Historic Landmark. After a three-year, \$400 million renovation, it re-opened in March 2008. Under its current owner, Elad Properties, the century-old hotel was pared down from 805 to 282 guest rooms and suites. The rest of the building was converted to private residences. The Grand Ballroom also had a face-lift as part of the extensive renovation. The new hotel lobby, which now houses *The Champagne Bar* and *The Rose Club*, was carved from former meeting rooms and melded with landmark sections of the building, such as *The Palm Court* and *Oak Room* and *Oak Bar*.

How critical is the relationship between manager and owner in running a successful hotel?

It's important to believe in the brand you're working for, and *The Plaza*, and Fairmont Hotels & Resorts as a management company, both have their strengths. I'm blessed and humbled to be part of this historic, fantastic building, adding my service philosophy and values; but at the end of the day, *The Plaza* is *The Plaza* and always will be.

Is taking care of the customer always paramount?

Absolutely. The biggest kudos is when somebody checks out of the *The Plaza* and says "It was absolutely fantastic, it exceeded my expectations. Thank you, I'm coming back." That's how you build brand loyalty.

How clear was it, when you met the leadership, that this was the place for you?

Whenever you work 70 or 80 hours a week, and you commit your heart, blood, sweat, and tears to something, you truly have to believe in it. Your personal philosophies and beliefs

have to align with the company's. For me it was an easy match because I believe in everything that *The Plaza* represents.

Describe the reopening and repositioning of *The Plaza*.

The Plaza has undergone a \$400 million, three-year restoration, but we have maintained a lot of the property's history. The new *Plaza* is the ultimate luxury lifestyle destination and features lavish hotel rooms, private residences, destination restaurants, an exclusive retail collection, and state-of-the-art meeting and event spaces.

Can you describe the private residences, condominiums, and hotel segments of the property?

The Plaza offers 282 guest rooms, including 102 suites, which were designed to meet the highest and most demanding standards. Seven styles of condominium suites are available. These condominiums offer residents every convenience, from catered meals to a personal butler. *The Plaza* offers 182 grand private residences, including 14 recessed penthouses.

What makes the property unique?

The history of the property and our location at the crossroads of Central Park and Fifth Avenue are key. *The Plaza's* 102 suites are available in seven distinct designs and include bi-level suites, private terraces, and balconies. In addition, we have the Guest Services Panel, created specifically for *The Plaza*, which provides access to personal butlers and concierge assistance and various hotel and travel services. We host many legendary events in our restored Grand Ballroom as well as in the historic *Palm Court*, *The Champagne Bar*, and the new *Rose Club*.

What restaurants does *The Plaza* offer?

Our Executive Chef, Didier Viro, has brought French world cuisine to *The Plaza*. The fully restored *Palm Court* offers breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner, and afternoon tea; *The Champagne Bar* offers a selection of champagnes; *The Rose Club*, which overlooks the lobby on the mezzanine, offers a stylish ambiance; and the *Oak Room* and *Oak Bar* will provide the quintessential New York experience.

Have you placed a major focus on executive meetings and events?

The Plaza is the premier location for events and meetings in New York. The hotel offers

21,000 square feet of meeting space. We have seven meeting rooms on the fourth floor. The smallest room can be reserved for as few as 10 people and the largest can be reserved for up to 150. All seven rooms can be opened to create one large space accommodating 450 people. The Grand Ballroom accommodates 500 to 700 people, while the Terrace Room accommodates 350 to 500 people.

How much do you focus on technology and how do you maintain the personal side of the business *The Plaza* is known for?

Our services and amenities are enhanced by technology. A user-friendly Guest Services Panel allows guests to control their environment and access signature *Plaza* services. The panel simplifies technology, so that anyone can adjust elements such as lighting or temperature in their personal space. With one touch of the screen, guests can immediately connect to *The Plaza's* concierge team to make restaurant reservations, access citywide cultural venues, or contact *The Plaza Retail Collection*. Rooms also have high-speed wireless Internet access, an IP-based high-definition video-on-demand system, wall-mounted flat-screen televisions, and a cutting-edge guest room electronic locking system. However, the human side of the property remains our strongest asset, so we offer personal, white glove butler service in every room.

What can guests expect from the butler service?

Our butlers have gone through extensive training to ensure they deliver the utmost service. Butlers provide services including personal wake-up experiences, packing and unpacking bags, shoeshine, and assisting with any needs from coffee to more creative requests. Our butlers are from around the world, which helps cater to our international and local clientele.

Have you been happy with the talent you've brought to *The Plaza*? What is the property's approach to training?

For many of our staff, working at *The Plaza* is the pinnacle of their career. For this reason we have attracted some of the world's top talent. Fairmont treats its employees with respect and dignity, which also is a factor that potential candidates take into account. All employees undergo extensive training so they can offer the very best five-star services and expertise in any role. ●

*The exterior of *The Plaza* (left); a hotel room with private butler service (right)*