

# Hospitality

## Building a Winning Team

An Interview with Anne-Juliette Maurice,  
General Manager, Hôtel Plaza Athénée New York



The Manhattan Terrace Suite living and dining areas

**EDITORS' NOTE** Anne-Juliette Maurice was named to her current post in April 2014. Her prior roles include the position of Director of Sales and Marketing at Langham Place, Fifth Avenue. She also held the position of Regional Director of Marketing, Miami and Regional Director of Marketing, Northeast, for Morgans Hotel Group, as well as opening and launching Mondrian South Beach and Mondrian Soho. Prior to this, she was Director of Sales & Marketing at Swissotel The Drake, New York and Director of Sales at Le Parker Meridien New York. She has also worked for the Essex House under Nikko and Westin and was a member of the opening team of Euro Disney in Marne la Vallée, France.



Anne-Juliette Maurice

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Hôtel Plaza Athénée New York ([Plaza-Athenee.com](http://Plaza-Athenee.com)) is steps from some of the city's most revered attractions, including Central Park, Museum Mile, and Madison Avenue shopping. This 142-room luxury boutique hotel has been the home-away-from-home for sophisticated travelers from around the world for over two decades. Owned by the TCC Group of Thailand, it is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

**What excited you about this opportunity and made you feel it would be a good fit?**

The opportunity was to be able to transition back into operations because I had been in operations at the Essex House and also at Euro Disney, which I opened in 1992. I really enjoyed my time in operations, which was short-lived, so I was excited to come back to that side of the business.

Additionally, I knew this was a rare opportunity and I was very excited about becoming part of the Plaza Athénée family – a hotel that I had been a patron of for many years and that I knew well.

I was excited about taking on this opportunity knowing that ownership was planning a renovation in the near future.

So the opportunity for me to build a winning team, move forward through 2015 and beyond, and take the hotel to the next level was very exciting for me.

**How broad do you view the competitive set?**

Our primary set, which makes the most sense, is the Upper East Side, which includes The Mark, The Carlyle, The Surrey, and The Pierre – and we include the Loews Regency, because it is only a few blocks away and was recently renovated.

**How do you continue to enforce the great service the hotel is known for?**

Regardless of the type of renovation that we're going through, guests come here for multiple reasons, but they come here mainly for the discretion and the privacy, and most especially for the staff. We have staff members that have been here for more than 30 years and when our guests walk through our doors, they feel like they're coming home. That's something very uncommon to find these days, especially in New York where you have so many new hotels rising and everything is new and shiny. You experience very large lobbies and long hallways, and that's something we don't have here, which is the reason guests come back.

Moving from the door to the elevator takes you no more than five seconds, which is a rarity in New York. We're able to provide this unusual place and this intimacy that is so very special.

**How important is the suite offering to your mix?**

We have an opportunity to revisit the suite mix because out of the 142 rooms we have, we offer 25 suites. We're very fortunate here to do very well with the suite segment, and this is mainly because we have a lot of repeat guests who stay with us and that's what they look for.

What's unique here and what I haven't found elsewhere in the city is that we have suites that include indoor terraces and outdoor terraces, which is really unique. We also offer a couple of duplexes.

**Is food and beverage an area where you can truly be profitable? What makes it work?**

It is very challenging to run a profitable food and beverage operation within a hotel. I have not found the recipe as of yet. That said, it is absolutely essential to offer a restaurant and bar in a luxury environment despite losses which one may incur. Our food

and beverage team is extremely flexible, frequently adjusting menus for our guests who come to us from around the globe and who are on different body clocks.

**Would you talk about your spa and is it a must-have in this segment?**

I don't necessarily believe that a spa is a must-have, but it's definitely a benefit.

The reason we have been successful with our spa is that it's very intimate. We also have a phenomenal partnership with Valmont, which has been invaluable to our success and we have been able to work together to make it profitable.

Also, in the spa, each of our four treatment rooms is designed in such a manner that a guest has the utmost privacy. They're actually spa suites where you have your own dressing area and private bathroom, which you don't find in most hotel spas.

**How do you build loyalty at this property?**

We have a loyal following and while we're very grateful to welcome back many of our guests, we're also looking for new guests. Although we appreciate loyalty, we can't necessarily always count on it. In a market like New York, competition is fierce and our guests are particularly curious, so you can no longer count on absolute loyalty. You always have to look out for new customers.

**Do you worry about potential oversupply in the market?**

When we're at around 102,000 rooms in the city, it's hard not to think that the supply will become an issue.

It's very challenging, but on the Upper East Side, we're fortunate because there is very little real estate so there is really nowhere else to build in this area.

Guests are curious and there are many great hotels that are opening in the near future, but they're all in different locations.

**How hard is it to forecast and plan today?**

Forecasting has become a lot more difficult over time and it's true that in a city like New York, the booking window has shortened dramatically. It's unbelievable when you look at what types of business books short term. We have experienced last-minute bookings for anywhere from 50 to 60 rooms at the last minute coming from overseas. It's a challenge but you just have to work around it, and that's what we do. ●