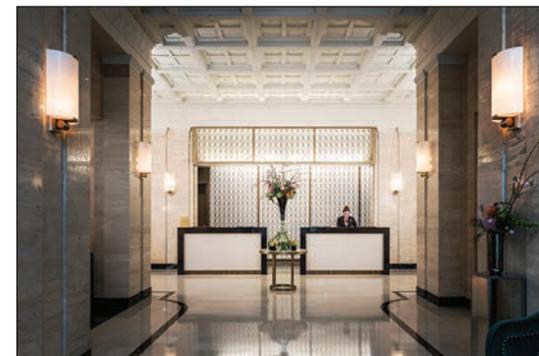




Mathieu Rivière in the meeting space lobby

A French Touch in D.C.

An Interview with Mathieu Rivière,
General Manager, Sofitel Washington DC Lafayette Square



The hotel lobby (above) a Superior Room (below)

EDITORS' NOTE Mathieu Rivière has been in his current post since December 2014. Before this, he was the Hotel Manager from November of 2013. In addition, he has held roles as Hotel Manager, Director of Operations, and Director of Food & Beverage for Sofitel Minneapolis, Food & Beverage Manager for Hilton Singapore, Assistant Food & Beverage Manager for Hilton London Heathrow, and Assistant Food & Beverage Manager for Sofitel Angkor Phokeethbra Golf & Spa Resort in Cambodia. He received his Master's Degree in International Hospitality Management from the University of La Rochelle in France.

PROPERTY BRIEF Sofitel Washington DC Lafayette Square (sofitel.com) offers exclusive luxury accommodations in the nation's capital. The elegant hotel is marked by distinctive style, superb cuisine, and incomparable service. Situated at the corner of Lafayette Square bordering the White House, guests can savor a contemporary twist on traditional French cuisine at iCi Urban Bistro or relax in the chic lounge, Le Bar. There is a selection of 237 rooms on 12 floors including 16 suites and one presidential suite all featuring Sofitel's luxurious feather-top and duvet sleep system, SoBed.

How do you differentiate Sofitel Washington DC Lafayette Square in such a crowded market and what makes the property special?

The hotel has been recently renovated, which sets us apart from other properties in the area. The hotel provides an intimate and welcoming environment that makes clients feel at home when they visit – an important quality for business travelers as well as tourists.

The hotel's location is also ideal, situated on the corner of 15th Street and H Street, just a few feet from the White House. We are near many corporate offices, but also close to many historic and cultural sites in Washington D.C.

Another wonderful aspect of the hotel is the guest-centric culture of the team, as they are the ambassadors of our brand. Sofitel is known to provide that personalized touch.

Is the Sofitel brand well understood in terms of the high level of service and the type of product it offers?

The Sofitel brand is well-known around the world with more than 100 properties across 41 countries. People are aware of what type of

product and *cousu main* service (personalized service) they can expect while staying at one of our Sofitel hotels.

You also have a strong suite offering. How important is that accommodation mix for your clientele and is there a common feel throughout the rooms?

The renovation celebrates the ties between Washington, D.C. and Paris through design, color, fashion, and history and we have revamped our room offerings in a way that blends these two cultures together.



The layered motifs of black and white in our rooms accented with red reflect the cosmopolitan chic of Paris and Washington, D.C., international centers of culture and style. The suites were designed based on the Blue Room of the Palace of Versailles that was the inspiration for Jacqueline Kennedy's redesign of the Blue Room in the White House, adding the element of style to the shared history of the United States and France.

It is key to appeal to all kinds of guests so having suites is definitely important.

You have a very well-received food & beverage product. Many hoteliers will say that there are challenges in competing with standalone restaurants. What are the key ingredients to making a successful hotel restaurant and how important is that product for your property?

Our restaurant, iCi Urban Bistro, has been well-received in the D.C. market. The F&B offering is important for us as gastronomy is an integral pillar within the Sofitel brand DNA. Our customers not only want to enjoy the food and service but need to leave their meal having a memorable "experience."

We are seeing more and more standalone restaurants opening in the city so there is more competition than before.

As hoteliers, you need to be flexible to adapt to culinary trends that address consumer demands. When Sofitel is known for the personal relationship, how far do you take technology to make it accessible to guests without losing the personal touch?

Personal touch is critical in the luxury hotel experience. The service culture of Sofitel is what we call *cousu main*. Our Ambassadors consistently create experiences in a unique and authentic way by providing "service from the heart." Technology is needed in today's world and can assist us in creating those *cousu main* moments, but one should never forget the importance of the personal touch.

Is that the real definition of a luxury hotel experience? Is it customizing that experience for each guest?

For us as hoteliers, luxury is being able to address consumer demands before they request it – something the client wasn't expecting but which will become the reason they come back. The *cousu main* I referred to is the perfect way to go above and beyond our guests' expectations.

One can reflect on the old days of general managers meeting with guests in the lobby, but with much financial pressure on the business now, is it as much a financial job as a hospitality job? How do you avoid losing the hospitality component?

The financial aspect is important and that is indeed a huge part of my role this year. However, I am a strong believer that good financial performance comes from doing what we are supposed to, such as greeting guests, meeting our clients, and taking care of our Ambassadors – it is about taking care of the product and ensuring the quality of service.

What advice do you give young people who aspire to reach the general manager level?

It is important to understand that it is a service-driven industry and someone must have a passion for hospitality and for people. Traveling helps with developing an open mind and understanding different cultures. Being General Manager should not be the ultimate goal. Be good at what you do and, most importantly, enjoy what you do. ●