

The Personal Touch

An Interview with Alberto del Hoyo,
General Manager, The Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows

EDITORS' NOTE Alberto del Hoyo managed major hotels around the world, including the Regent Beverly Wilshire, before assuming his current post in 1997. He is a graduate of the University of Madrid.

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated among 12 landscaped acres, The Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows was built in 1912, and features 204 guest rooms, suites, and private bungalows, and the celebrity favorite, The Polo Lounge. Long known as "The Pink Palace," the hotel (www.thebeverlyhillshotel.com) is a member of the Dorchester Collection.



Alberto del Hoyo

In terms of the impact the global economic crisis has had on travel and tourism and the luxury segment, for Beverly Hills broadly, and for the Beverly Hills Hotel specifically, how much of an impact have you seen on the business?

We have been impacted like any other part of the world in the luxury segment. However, during several months, we performed as the year before, like in July and August, when I was running 85 and 90 percent occupancy. Of course, the rate was a little lower, but the traffic and occupancy was still there.

You have assembled a team who has been here for many years and knows the hotel well. During these challenging times, how important is it for you to communicate regularly with them, to help them understand what is happening with the property?

We have daily meetings, so we monitor the situation on a daily basis. We did not lay off or deny benefits to anybody – we're probably one of the few hotels in this country that did not. We decided to ride out the crisis together, and it has worked for us.

How important is the owner/hotelier relationship to the success of a hotel?

It's crucial. When you have an owner, a management company, and the local management in the hotel working together, it makes the property successful. When you have bickering among those three partners, in regard to the success of the hotel, there are always problems. In our case, we are totally in tune.

The property is part of the Dorchester Collection, which is a collection of iconic

properties and a growing brand. How important has that association been and what impact has it had?

We now share clientele, and we are part of something that is equally as good as we are, and that helps because we can afford a big advertising campaign and sales offices around the world, for instance.

The word luxury has become one that people don't always look positively towards, but with luxury should come quality, value, and service. Is it challenging today to get the message across about what luxury is?

Right now, luxury is high-end, high-service, a great location, and great clientele, because whenever you go to a hotel, you expect to see great people staying in that hotel, and in these times, the value has also become very important for the luxury market, and that's what we're trying to provide.

The Polo Lounge has always had great impact, not just for hotel guests, but for the community as well. Has that business remained strong during these challenging times?

Yes, The Polo Lounge was not affected. Ninety percent of that business comes from the outside; it's not the guests in the hotel – it's the community. The loyalty has been there. We're still doing well. So we have not seen any drop in business there.

How critical is the spa component for guests in the high-end luxury segment today?

That is a key focus. We run a spa in partnership with La Prairie out of Switzerland, and it is frequently utilized by clients, which tells you that it is a component that is indispensable for any luxury hotel today.

When it comes to technology, you are very focused on offering all of the amenities but are also focused on not losing The Beverly Hills Hotel culture, which is all about hospitality. How do you balance those two?

Very carefully. There are very technically savvy clients today, but we use the technology more to provide a personal service – we don't just hand our guests the technology and tell them they're on their own. We really care about the personal touch. But the technology definitely makes us much more efficient in delivering that service.



We see a high turnover today of hoteliers from property to property. What is it about the culture, the brand, and the property that has made it a place you've been so attached to for so long?

It's unique, it's one of the best hotels in the world, it is a lot of fun, and we belong to a great company with total commitment to luxury and to what I like to deliver, which is complete and total luxury service. I'm also in charge of the Hotel Bel-Air, which we are closing for complete rehab and refurbishing and bringing it into the 21st century.

How do The Beverly Hills Hotel and the Hotel Bel-Air complement each other? Is Hotel Bel-Air focused on a different type of guest and is it more of a sister property?

It's a sister property. We are in the same market but we have a completely different type of clientele. The Beverly Hills Hotel is more for guests who like to see and be seen, and the Hotel Bel-Air is more of a secluded hideaway. It is the same market, the same segment, but a completely different hotel.

When do you expect The Bel-Air to be completely renovated and ready to welcome guests again?

It will be about a year and a half, and it is a multimillion dollar investment. The Bel-Air was the best hotel in the world some 20 years ago and will definitely be the best hotel in the world again.

You talk about the business with a certain excitement and passion. Do you ever get tired of it?

Every day is a different challenge. Once you get this business in your blood, you cannot get it out. It's a job like no other. One minute, you're talking about the best way to clean a carpet, and the next minute, you're talking about music. You address a complete array of topics throughout your day and that makes it very varied and interesting. ●

The Beverly Hills Hotel surrounded by 12 acres of lush, tropical gardens (left); The Hotel's Spa by La Prairie (top right); The famed Polo Lounge (bottom right)