

Hospitality

An Authentic Experience

An Interview with Anthony Lee,
General Manager, The May Fair Hotel



The May Fair Amarillo Suite

EDITORS' NOTE Anthony Lee assumed his current post in September 2010. Prior to this, he was at the five-star Connaught hotel for more than 31 years where he was General Manager since 2002.

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated in the heart of the Mayfair village, The May Fair Hotel (www.themayfairhotel.co.uk)—first opened by King George V in 1927 and once owned by the film-making Danziger Brothers—has been recognized for having “The Best Hotel Bar in London,” by the Evening Standard and was awarded Cool Brand status in 2010, 2011, and 2012. The 406-room, West End hotel has hosted countless celebrities, heads of state, world leaders, and cultural icons throughout its storied history. The hotel features 14 signature suites; a private VIP entrance; extraordinary banquet facilities, including the largest private theatre in London and the largest Baccarat chandelier in Europe; the world-class May Fair Spa; and a rooftop penthouse with 360-degree views of London.



Anthony Lee

Have you seen growth within the London travel market?

We talk about economic turmoil, but there are still people riding that wave and coming through it stronger than before.

We have to focus on those industries that are still performing and outpacing the general market conditions, and look at them from a geographic point of view as well.

The Middle East is still buoyant; Brazil is phenomenal; China, even though it's slowing down, is still strong.

That said, at a certain level, wealth will always be there and continue to override the economic ups and downs.

Today, people are looking for value for money, and that could be at any price point. A property like The May Fair offers an incredible value for money due to its location and price point.

How challenging is it to differentiate among London's leading properties? What sets May Fair apart in the market?

A lot of the London hotels are part of a global group with global brand recognition, but the world has become so homogenized that people are now looking for an authentic experience in a travel destination.

In London, there is a lot of choice, so the way I angle this particular hotel is that we're privately owned, individually branded, right in the center of one of the most relevant districts in London, and we offer an authentic London experience.

When you come to London and you have an offering such as The May Fair, my suggestion is give us a try, because you won't find our experience anywhere else.

What concept have you developed around your food and beverage offering? Is that an area where you can truly be successful?

It is, but it has to be through doing something different.

I'm producing what I call an urban resort—that's a series of experiences all under one roof; you don't need to go anywhere else because everything is there.

We have five bars to choose from, all quite different; there is also a new cigar room with one of the most extensive ranges of single malts anywhere in the world, 14 signature martinis, and champagne; we have a casino that can be reached directly from our lobby, which offers two bars and another restaurant; we have one of the biggest private cinemas in London; The May Fair Bar offers an English menu with comfort food that people love, like the fish and chips and chicken pie; and Quince offers a Turkish influenced menu, but includes salads and Italian dishes as well as comfort foods like a great burger or club sandwich. The food there is quite different than most other restaurants in London.

Is there a common feel throughout the accommodations or do they vary?

When it comes to the suites, we start with the studio suites, go into the junior suites, then up to the duplex suites—we have three that connect on different levels; then we get into the serious signature suites, of which we have 14.

Each of those signature suites is quite distinct in feel and design; some offer private elevator access.

The Penthouse is extraordinary and well-known for many parties and we're currently going to double its size—we're heading in the region of 3,500 square feet of paradise; three to four bedrooms; a couple of terraces; five

bathrooms; a back-up kitchen behind the scenes to entertain; and a private gym, sauna, etc.

In addition, a few months ago, we produced a new suite called The Ebony. We worked in conjunction with TOTO, the Japanese bathroom people, so it's a one- or two-bedroom suite with a magnificent terrace, and the bathroom is extraordinary—it showcases the next generation of TOTO products so they're using translucent materials.

How critical is the relationship with the owner to the success of the property?

What I love about this company is that we own 14 hotels in London and this is the unbranded flagship, so it's owned and managed by one person that sits in my property five days per week.

If he says “yes” to something, it's immediate; therefore, we are more nimble than most other people out there.

How can you continue to make sure your service performance remains at such a high level?

I have in place some amazing people who understand where we want to take the business and they build their teams accordingly; it's important to have that continuity and recognition.

For us, the personalization of the service delivery to the guest in what is considered a large environment is key. This is why I've broken down the environment into several pockets under my urban resort heading.

The feedback is usually that we have 180 to 200 rooms, which means that I have been successful in that strategy. The reality is we have 406 rooms and no one can believe that, because you would never see a hotel of this size giving the kind of personalized service delivery that we do.

The key is in the experience level of the staff.

How do you offer guests the technology they desire without losing the human touch for which you're known?

It's up to me to create the spirit for the hotel. My job is to blend the building, the staff, and the guests together to create a magical, intangible element that captures you and makes you want to return for more.

This is a people industry; the technologies will be there to support that but they will never take over.

We also have to be careful to keep technology simple but relevant. ●