

Hospitality

The Best of All Worlds



An aerial view of Fisher Island

An Interview with Bernard Lackner,
Chief Executive Officer, Fisher Island Club

EDITORS' NOTE In June 2012, Bernard Lackner was appointed to his current post as CEO of Fisher Island Club. Prior to joining Fisher Island Club, Lackner served as Vice President and General Manager of Hôtel Plaza Athénée in New York for more than 20 years.



Bernard Lackner

PROPERTY BRIEF Located just minutes off the coast of Miami and accessible only by auto-ferry or yacht and via preapproved security clearance, the exclusive Club and Resort at Fisher Island (www.fisherislandclub.com) is nestled within an upscale private residential community on Florida's only private powdery sugar sand beach. The Club-owned historic Vanderbilt cottages, courtyard villas, and guest house suites feature a private full-service Beach Club and restaurant; an award-winning P.B. Dye nine-hole championship golf course; a world-class tennis center with 18 lighted courts—14 Har-Tru clay courts, two grass courts, and two hard courts; two private deep water marinas; seven restaurants; the historical Vanderbilt Mansion, which provides a ballroom with seating capacity for 200; a private library; three additional restaurants and a private upstairs bar with billiard tables; a superb 24,000 square-foot-spa and fitness center; an upscale gourmet market; an aviary with flamingos and exotic birds; a bank; polo grounds; a private day school (Pre-K through fifth grade); a dog park; a post office; and a fire and rescue station. The Club is a member of The Leading Hotels of the World.

After a long and distinguished career, what drew you to Fisher Island and what makes this island property so special?

Fisher Island has earned a tremendous reputation among its well-traveled and affluent members and guests from around the globe; it is completely unparalleled, which is an attribute our members and guests aspire to find.

Our Equity Members from 40 countries own the Club and Resort, which gives them a special interest in its success and preservation.

The history of Fisher Island further adds to its uniqueness. The island was named after Carl Fisher, an auto-parts innovator and the principal developer of Miami Beach. He purchased the property in 1919 and had hoped to develop the island to house commercial docks for the area, but was not successful. In 1925, William K. Vanderbilt fell in love with the small island and bargained with

Fisher to trade his yacht for the island. Vanderbilt retained well-known architect Maurice Fatio to design a winter home for him and his second wife, Rosamund. Fatio was an extremely successful architect in Palm Beach society. Following in the footsteps of Addison Mizner, Fatio designed many Spanish-style mansions in Palm Beach in the late 1920s and 1930s.

We are in the process of finalizing a \$60-million investment in Club properties, which includes the Vanderbilt Mansion, the spa, the golf clubhouse, and the tennis facilities, which has

been ranked one of the top tennis clubs on the East Coast. The Vanderbilt Mansion is a tremendous facility with three restaurants, a ballroom, a private upstairs bar, and a swimming pool.

The brand new 24,000-square-foot Spa Internazionale offers all the services one can imagine, including personal training; group and private lessons such as pilates, yoga, dance, spin, CrossFit, and kickboxing; holistic life coaching; massage; body exfoliation treatments; facial treatments; and skin services. The Spa team takes a personalized approach to the health, wellness, and beauty of each member and guest they serve.

While security and safety are extremely important to our members, the island is enhanced by the fact that members and guests can only access Fisher Island by private ferry, which runs every 15 minutes, and only via a seven-minute ferry ride from Miami Beach and 15 minutes from Miami International Airport. But while remote and secure, we are also literally only a stone's throw from South Beach, so members and guests have the best of all worlds. They have their own protected, individual island experience, and if they want to venture out, they're only a seven-minute ferry ride from bustling South Beach.

How broad is the target market for Fisher Island?

Given its proximity to both Miami and Miami Beach and enhanced by our security, our property appeals to the affluent international members and guests from all over the world. Many of our Club members and guests include international celebrities as well as Fortune 500 business executives and families.

Would you provide an overview of your accommodations?

Our one-, two-, and three-bedroom historic cottages, courtyard villas, and guest house suites offer something to match the needs of the

most discerning guests and are ideal for individuals, couples or families backed by the best service in South Florida.

You also have a strong events offering. What size gathering can you accommodate?

We handle small events of 15 to 20 people at private residences and we provide catered events for up to 500 people at the Vanderbilt Mansion, the ballroom, outdoor terraces, and other unique venues throughout the property. Fisher Island Club is very popular for weddings and for small business meetings and incentive groups.

How much of a focus is the dining experience at Fisher Island?

We recently had a representative from *Forbes* evaluate our food and beverage department and accommodations and they were ranked very high.

We have broad offerings including Porto Cervo, our Italian fine dining restaurant; an upscale trattoria where members and guests can have pizza and other light Italian fare; a steakhouse; a beach club; and three facilities in the Vanderbilt Mansion.

Our in-room service is available to every accommodation and is also excellent.

When you came to the property, did its service standards meet your expectations?

This is a different type of operation: it is more complex and requires a different managerial approach.

Training is of the essence and a lot of fine tuning needed to be done in all areas.

Today, we are striving to provide five- or six-star service, which our members and guests expect at Fisher Island.

Is it tougher to be fully engaged in the details when you have such an array of facilities and services to oversee?

It is important to clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of the operations, as well as to surround oneself with the right management team and delegate effectively.

The effort is broader, but at day's end, it boils down to hospitality, attention to detail and, in this case, to making members and guests feel as comfortable as possible on a consistent basis.

How important is having engaged owners that make the investments in the property that are necessary?

We have a very supportive board with the same vision for Fisher Island: We want to make this the best place in the world. ●