

# Hospitality

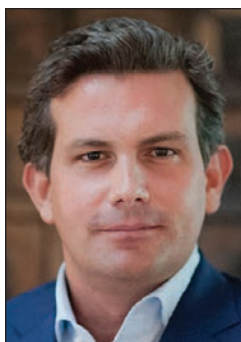
## Creating a Buzz



The Mark Bar, designed by Jacques Grange (above); Entrance to The Mark (below)

An Interview with Olivier Lordonnois,  
General Manager, The Mark Hotel

**EDITORS' NOTE** French-born Olivier Lordonnois has over 19 years of experience in hotel operations. He has been General Manager of The Mark since January 2011. Lordonnois started his career at Hôtel de Crillon followed by the Ritz Paris, then moved to The Laneshorough in London for two years. He then returned to Paris and ascended to the role of General Manager at some of the city's best known hotels: Hôtel Costes; Sofitel Le Faubourg, Accor Group's flagship; and Hotel de la Tremoille, which he managed for six years. Lordonnois holds a master's degree in business and tax law and a PDP Certificate from Cornell University.



Olivier Lordonnois

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Based in Manhattan's exclusive Upper East Side, The Mark Hotel ([www.themarkhotel.com](http://www.themarkhotel.com)) first opened its doors in 1927. Having undergone a total transformation overseen by legendary designer Jacques Grange, the elegant new design includes works created by celebrated artists who were commissioned to create one-of-a-kind pieces for the property. The Mark is steps from Central Park and world-renowned museums and galleries, and offers guests an inviting retreat with access to the best Madison Avenue has to offer.

### How has The Mark evolved and how is it positioned today?

It's in a much better position now and took less time than I anticipated to turn around.

After three long years of renovations and re-opening as a brand new product, the hotel was running an average occupancy in the 30 percent range – just not what it should be. We took a drastic approach and moved quickly. Upon starting in January 2011, my first priority was to ensure that we had the best team in place. Then we launched the 24-Hour Check-In, which helped to create a buzz about the hotel. We told our clients and guests that as long as they give us their arrival times 48 hours in advance, we can guarantee their rooms will be ready when they arrive – at this moment, no other hotel in this city is capable of doing that.

Then it was about making sure that guests were happy and becoming loyal customers; we have grown our repeat guest percentage from 20 percent to over 40 percent. It is really a matter of making sure our guests become great ambassadors of the hotel.

The goal is also to continually create new ideas to keep guests “addicted” to the hotel, which isn't too difficult since the minute our guests try it, they love it; 77th Street becomes their refuge away from midtown.

We also just launched an airport concierge service targeting international clientele. Going through customs in JFK can sometimes take up to two hours. We have the ability to put a greeter right outside the aircraft waiting for the guest. That person helps the guest through immigrations and customs via expedited lines, through baggage claim, and to his car.

### How exactly do you offer a guaranteed early check-in?

The first flights landing in New York City are the red-eyes as well as the flights from South America that often land at 6 AM, which means a guest could arrive as early as 7:30 AM.

In a New York City hotel, you always have a few departures at about 5 AM. With 24-hour housekeeping, we can prepare those rooms for very early arrivals.

If the guest's preferred room or suite is not ready when he arrives, we have a few options to accommodate the guest in the meantime so he can relax and refresh himself before starting his day.

### Is the growth primarily coming from international clientele?

It is. The American market is the core of our business, but we need to grow internationally to diversify our clientele.

Our popularity with international travelers is due in part to the product, which is very European and many nationalities feel very familiar with it.

### How has the restaurant benefited the property?

Having Jean-Georges on board definitely helped the property, as his name has a particular resonance in New York.

### When you need to drive occupancy, how do you maintain rate integrity?

I find it easier because the product we have is exceptional. Once guests experience our product, they understand the value of it.

Recently, I took our Sales and Marketing Director and Revenue Director for a tour of the top suites at each hotel in our competitive set. Competition is tough in New York and while we saw some great suites, we feel we have one of the best products in the city and we're confident in selling it.

Our ownership is very supportive of our strategies. January and February are challenging months, and like the other hotels, we offer promotional rates to stimulate business. However, we try not to drop below a certain level. Even if some competitors go lower, we know we can work on a solid base of loyal customers who understand the value of our product.

### How challenging is it to compete as an independent?

I sometimes miss the support of a big brand, but as an independent hotel, we can react more quickly. Everybody here has a creative approach, which is not necessarily the case with big chains that are driven by ideas from headquarters. Creative minds here are close to the clients, which helps us develop new ideas and have a genuine approach.

### Is the GM role more business and less hospitality today?

It's a combination of both. I, of course, have to report to our ownership,

but the amount of reporting is much less than in larger companies. This helps me focus on my job, which is primarily looking after guests.

We're not a big hotel so people expect a personalized touch. I meet and greet 40 percent of the arrivals every day and I write all welcome notes myself every morning – that personalized touch makes a difference.

The best way for a GM to avoid being disconnected from his or her job is to spend less time in the office and in endless meetings. I never spend more than 20 minutes at my desk at a time or hours behind closed doors. This helps me do my real job. ●

