

# Hospitality

## Constant Reinvestment

An Interview with Paul H.F. Nash,  
General Manager, The St. Regis New York



The new Bentley Suite at The St. Regis New York features views of Central Park and is the only Bentley Suite in the world.

**EDITORS' NOTE** In March 2009, Paul Nash assumed his current post. Prior to this, he was the General Manager of The St. Regis Houston. He is a native of London and has more than 30 years of luxury hotel experience working at various properties within Starwood Hotels & Resorts. He has worked at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco; The St. Regis Shanghai; the Westin Resort Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia; and the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit in Bangkok, Thailand. Nash received his credentials in Hotel, Catering and Business Management in 1984 from the Ryde College of Catering Studies and Hotel Administration in Sydney, Australia and a Certificate of Business Administration from the University of Washington.



Paul H.F. Nash

**PROPERTY BRIEF** The St. Regis New York ([www.stregis.com/NewYork](http://www.stregis.com/NewYork)) offers 229 luxurious guest rooms and suites, featuring Louis XVI-style furniture, Waterford crystal chandeliers, carved crown moldings and wainscoting, marble baths, and silk wall coverings, with well-appointed meeting and events facilities, and a range of timeless dining venues. It is the flagship property of St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, one of the two premier brands – the other being The Luxury Collection – of metropolitan New York-based Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.

**How strong has the luxury market come back? Is this a time when hotels in that segment can achieve growth?**

Absolutely. There are always opportunities for growth, but to be more prudent, the luxury markets are looking to diversify, both with the demographics of their current guests and geographically.

**Do you see the market broadening overall or just when it comes to geography?**

It's a combination of both, because to be successful, you have to be strategic; so we're not looking a month out but a year-plus out. The international markets do change because they go through peaks and troughs, as New York has over the past few years.

To be strategic, you have to have a solid game plan and to have the entire team focused on achieving it. It's my role as the team leader

to make sure when that plan is in process, we don't relax but continue to look at what's next.

**Are you content with where the product is today? Do you have any major plans to update the property?**

The key is reinvesting all the time. In 2011, we rolled out long-term relationships with renewal components for the Dior and Tiffany suites. Last year, we added the Bentley Suite, and as a part of that, we have the most amazing vehicle now parked outside the hotel – a courtesy car, which is the first 2013 Bentley Mulsanne model in the U.S. and the only one of its color.

So there are always things we can and will continue doing because the biggest danger is complacency. Starwood has always been supportive in reinvesting where it needs to, particularly in this flagship property.

**How have you been so successful in the service area? Is it critical to have metrics in place to make sure you're meeting those service goals?**

The key is starting with the talent and we are somewhat strategic with that. If we're going after a particular market because we see an affluence there that will sit well here, there are ways to do that, particularly through our butler program. We recruit internationally, primarily out of Swiss hotel schools, but that doesn't always mean I'm recruiting a Swiss person. There are students there from all over the globe who are multilingual and who have hotel degrees, so we try to put the two together: it's like a domino effect. If we're going after that market, we support it with talent at the property that is familiar with that culture and language, and that makes people comfortable.

The training aspect is vital. There is a great focus on that because our butler service is a differentiator for us among our luxury competitors in the marketplace. There are a number of people involved in several different disciplines who all need to understand the end goal and work together during different time frames.

**Would you talk about the Bentley partnership and what the suite offers?**

Our Tiffany and Dior suites appeal to the female guest, so we wanted to offer a more masculine option. Bentley offers custom-made and bespoke cars, which fits so well within the

culture of our enterprise here – they strive to be the best.

In early conversations, it was clear that both companies had the same philosophy about luxury, so the coming together was rapid – this whole project was put together in 18 months to deliver the first and only Bentley Suite in the world, and it's the only suite you'll ever walk into that smells like a new car with beautiful Bentley leather, wood veneer finishing, work from their metal shops, and the attention to details that mirrors what we strive for here.

The global partnership has been supported by design, the suite, and by the Mulsanne parked outside.

**How do you define the true luxury travel experience today?**

The word luxury is overused, but the reality of the experience needs to be in line with what today's guests are looking for; and guests change – it's not about traditional, stuffy, and expensive anymore.

Luxury today has to be relevant for the current time. The theme we continue to strive for at The St. Regis is, "This is no longer your father's hotel."

Luxury is far broader these days and it has to be. There are several independents opening in the marketplace further south of us, but they are attracting a market that can afford the best things in life.

**Is there a consistent feel among St. Regis properties worldwide or is it about what works in a particular locale?**

There are elements to any St. Regis that we pride ourselves on: there will always be the St. Regis butlers; a sweeping staircase in some area of the building; amazing chandeliers, which can be classic or contemporary; and the Bloody Mary – there are elements of continuity that give you an awareness on a global scale. But there are also offerings that are more tailored to that local destination.

**What advice would you offer young people to help them grow within this industry?**

In the people business, the best experience is working with people. However, even coming out of one of the reputable hotel schools around the world, you're not going to walk into a senior management position. You have to put in your time because otherwise you won't establish credibility. ●