



## “The Home Away from Home”

An Interview with Ashish Verma,  
General Manager, The Lowell



Garden Suite living area (left); the entrance of The Lowell (above)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Ashish Verma previously held positions with Orient-Express Hotels, Millennium Hotels and Resorts, Hyatt International Corporation, and Oberoi Hotels & Resorts International in Asia, Europe, and North America. Verma was born in the Punjab, India and received a B.A. with honors in political science and economics from Punjab University, Chandigarh, India; a graduate degree in Hospitality Administration from the Oberoi School of Hotel Management, New Delhi, India; and a Master of Business Administration from IMHI Cornell-ESSEC in Paris, France. Verma has been committed to several social, educational, and environmental causes and serves on boards of various nonprofit organizations.



Ashish Verma

**PROPERTY BRIEF** A 1927 landmark building, The Lowell is situated off Madison Avenue on New York's exclusive Upper East Side. The hotel ([www.lowellhotel.com](http://www.lowellhotel.com)) dotes upon its guests with unique personalized service and attention to detail, maintaining 49 individually appointed suites and 23 deluxe rooms. Guests will appreciate complimentary beverages upon arrival, Voss water at turndown, and a selection of Bulgari amenities, and most suites have wood-burning fireplaces, some have terraces, and almost all have fully equipped kitchens.

### How important is it when you see the market coming back to bring rates up?

We lead the market in rates, and when we see the competition bucking up their rates, it pushes us up even further. We believe that rate eventually is the best way of improving profitability.

So we're encouraged by improvement in our occupancy and rate, and by our resultant profitability thus far.

### The owners continue to invest in the property. Are there areas that will be changed?

We are happy with where the overall product is and, simultaneously, we're in the process of making some major improvements – one is to our restaurant at the lobby level; we had The Post House, which was a very nice restaurant.

However, it is time to completely redo it and reinvigorate the concept there. We have some very exciting plans. It will be a revitalized fine-dining establishment with a great bar and lounge space being created with a more lifestyle aspect to it. This will further enhance The Lowell's positioning

and give us a much needed great destination restaurant and lounge in our neighborhood.

### In a city where most hoteliers talk about how challenging food and beverage is, why has it worked so well for The Lowell?

It's our focus on our core competency. As much as a fine-dining experience enhances the luxury experience, the practicability of managing one yourself versus engaging a sound partner whose core competency might be managing such spaces has to be carefully

considered.

We are engaged in finalizing decisions with our partners, operators, and culinary experts. Several very interested parties have approached us. The new operator and the cuisine will do absolute justice to the image of The Lowell, and we are investing heavily in some spectacular decor and design, which will be complementary to our acclaimed suites and other guest accommodations, along with our much enhanced public areas.

Within a year, you'll see much excitement here at The Lowell with the launch of our fantastic new fine-dining, lounge and restaurant concept.

### How challenging is it to get the right message out for a property such as The Lowell that has more of a residential, independent feel?

We respect all of our competitors, and there are some well-established chains and brands that have a good following.

Having said that, we have our unique niche, and we focus on our strengths, which come from being a landmark hotel with some of the best service you may expect in the world. We are also part of The Leading Hotels of the World. Our decision-making abilities are efficient, guest-centered, and long-term driven. Our reputation is hard-earned and worked to be maintained tirelessly every day. Of course, we have a superb location and product.

Ultimately, everything boils down to the attention we pay, to the personalization, and the details we provide each and every guest. In our industry the phrase “home away from home,” is such a cliché; however, it really does apply to The Lowell.

What defines The Lowell is that residential feel – not just in decor and design, but in the way we recognize guests year after year and bespoke their stay each time they visit.

### How critical is it to have the metrics in place to track service standards?

Luxury hospitality is not just my professional background but, in fact, an extension of my core beliefs and an extension of my lifestyle. Yes, the finest hotels in the world, like ours, require the hardware, which is very important. However, ultimately, it's the software: the service, your team and the way you manage them in the day-to-day operations, and all the minutiae. Providing that detailed experience is what distinguishes us and, if we continue to focus on that, then I believe strongly that we will continue to lead the market.

### You've managed both large and small properties. At which is it more difficult to maintain your service standards?

It's more challenging in larger hotels but can be done. I was fortunate that I had an excellent team at a much larger hotel that I managed previously; and we created and implemented solid service systems. The Lowell does provide a better natural environment in which to both execute and maintain our levels of service consistently well. We get to know the guests intimately and our housekeepers, doormen, bellmen, front desk, servers, and chefs, all get to anticipate the guest needs. We prepare for them and fulfill their expectations much better.

### How important is your suite product and is there consistency in the feel throughout?

So as to maintain a flow and integrity of our feel, consistency is very important. Yet, there is adequate uniqueness, with our themed suites like the Garden Suite, the Manhattan Suite, the Hollywood Suite, and The Lowell Suites.

There are other categories, like Lowell One-Bedroom Deluxe Suites, which are more similar; however, the uniqueness there is in some features in terms of fireplaces, or that some have terraces.

There are amenities and design aspects that distinguish between accommodations; however, no matter the suite, you will always feel that you're at The Lowell.

### How critical is it to share that same vision for the property as the owners?

Having the same vision between the owner and the management is vital, especially, if the partnership is long-term focused.

There has to be genuine respect for core competencies across the board, from the owner to every position in a hotel. We are extremely fortunate to have that culture and chemistry here at The Lowell, which is a most crucial ingredient of our success. ●