



The Human Experience

An Interview with David J. Colella,
Vice President and Managing Director,
The Colonnade Hotel



Guest bedroom (left); Brasserie JO restaurant (above)

EDITORS' NOTE David Colella is immediate past chair of the board of directors of the Greater Boston Convention and Visitors Bureau, Board Chair Emeritus of both the Massachusetts Lodging Association and the Massachusetts Restaurant Association, and a member of the Advisory Board of the Hospitality and Tourism Management Program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. In addition to his current post, which he has held since December 1992, Colella is Vice President of Hotel Operations for The Druker Company Ltd., The Colonnade's parent company. He was named Massachusetts Restaurant Association's Restaurateur of the Year in 2008, and he was recently inducted into the Massachusetts Lodging Association's Hall of Fame. Colella is a graduate of the Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.



David J. Colella

PROPERTY BRIEF The Colonnade Hotel (www.colonnadehotel.com) is an independently owned and managed luxury property featuring 285 sophisticated rooms and suites with 21st-Century comforts and amenities that are both high-tech and soft-touch. Situated in Boston's Back Bay, the property is home to the city's only rooftop pool and one of Boston's most popular restaurants, Brasserie JO. Opened in 1971 by Bertram Druker, the hotel is overseen today by his son Ronald Druker, President of The Druker Company.

Has the market come back to where you had hoped?

The market has been recovering at a very steady pace. We're now running at 2008 occupancy levels. It appears that we are back on track.

City-wide occupancy and rates are currently strong at all hotel levels.

As the markets come back, how critical has it been to have an updated product that many refer to as "the new Colonnade"?

The investments that we have made in the hotel over many years, especially over the past four or five years, have been critical to the success we're enjoying today.

We literally reinvented the hotel in all areas, allowing us the ability to compete with the

increase in new supply, which came about prior to the downturn.

Our ability to compete so successfully during the downturn was enhanced by this detailed renovation. The Colonnade is a well-established hotel with a rich history that was literally reinvented from top to bottom. While hotels were reducing rates to gain share, as many new hotels often do, our heritage coupled with our new product was a tremendous advantage. The investment in the hotel could not have been better timed.

Are there more benefits or challenges to being independent?

Challenges bring new ideas. We're constantly thinking of new ways to market The Colonnade Hotel to that segment of business or leisure travelers who would prefer a hotel experience that is more unique to the city in which they're traveling. The Colonnade Hotel has always satisfied that niche.

We strongly believe being an independent hotel is an absolute positive. Boston is a city unlike Washington, D.C., San Francisco or New York – cities with a number of independent hotels. There aren't as many in Boston, allowing us a great opportunity to use our independence to our advantage. We're a strong competitor even among the few other independents, but are an equally strong competitor to the chains.

As part of the Preferred Hotel Group, we receive strong support from an organization that appeals to that business and leisure traveler who prefers to stay in a more unique property.

A new addition has been the iPrefer program, which now allows us the opportunity to offer to the business or leisure travelers a point system for future travel within the Preferred Hotel Group. With introduction of iPrefer, we are now on equal footing from a frequent stay perspective. But the most important component is still offering and delivering exceptional service.

Is there a consistent feel throughout the accommodation?

We offer a number of different suites. They might appeal to someone who is traveling with their family for a few days and requires more space, or someone traveling for business who may need the facilities to entertain or host meetings or receptions.

Careful consideration was given to the re-design of our suites during the planning process, which was considered independently from the guest rooms. The needs of a suite guest are quite different, and the offerings include more dramatic colors, lighting, furnishings, AV, and technology.

How do you continue to innovate within the food and beverage component with Brasserie JO while maintaining a loyal customer base?

The restaurant was created as a sister brasserie to the original Brasserie JO in Chicago. The similarities between Brasserie JO and the classic brasseries of Paris are incredible.

Brasserie JO is a classic Parisian brasserie, from its size, menu, design, operating hours, and price points. The size of the menu and prices encourage guests to return frequently.

It's about consistently offering the classics while remaining current by providing contemporary items.

Brasserie JO continues to perform well after more than 15 years.

At day's end, will differentiation for the hotel primarily come from the service?

It has always been and still is about the human experience.

Service is a piece of that. The product that you can touch and feel is a piece of that. But the atmosphere is created by the individuals who serve the guests. We must always remember that our role is to serve. Not everyone is comfortable in that role, and that's why some are more successful than others in this business.

When you put together a team of professionals who really enjoy what they do, a team comprised of individuals who possess that "service DNA," it comes through from the moment a guest arrives and is demonstrated consistently throughout the guest's stay.

What makes a potential hire the right fit?

Personality. Are they engaging? Do they have a warm and personal approach? Do they exude confidence? Do they embrace service as a profession, and not as a stop along the way to another career? Do they delight in pleasing customers by delivering exceptional service?

Over 40-plus years, The Colonnade Hotel is fortunate to have built a talented team of individuals that have that "service DNA." ●