

Hospitality



Revitalized and Relevant

An Interview with Hermann W. Elger,
General Manager, The St. Regis New York



The St. Regis New York 55th Street entrance (left); the Royal Suite living area (above)

EDITORS' NOTE In May of 2014, Hermann Elger was appointed to his current post. Elger joined The St. Regis New York from the Montage, Beverly Hills, where he held the position of General Manager. Prior to his role at the Montage, Elger served as the General Manager at The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun. In addition, he has held positions as Hotel Manager at The Ritz-Carlton, Cancun, and The Ritz-Carlton, Key Biscayne, and was the Opening Team Leader for The Ritz-Carlton, Aspen Highlands, Philadelphia, Dubai, and Kuala Lumpur. He also held positions around the world as Assistant Executive Manager, Takeover Team Leader, and Director of Rooms Division. Elger attended the University of Denver, where he received his B.S.B.A. in Business Administration and Hotel Management. He began his career working as a doorman for The Brown Palace Hotel in Denver, Colorado.



Hermann W. Elger

PROPERTY BRIEF The St. Regis New York (stregis.com/NewYork) offers 238 luxurious guest rooms and suites. Contemporary luxury meets classic sophistication at this iconic hotel, just steps from an exceptional Fifth Avenue shopping experience. Guest rooms and suites are newly renovated and marry original design elements, such as crystal Waterford chandeliers and elegant crown moldings, with beautiful, large-format photographic artwork, vibrant-hued fabrics, and stunning beveled mirrors. Rooms feature marble-tiled entryways, rich color schemes, custom furnishings, and state-of-the-art technologies. It is the flagship property of both St. Regis Hotels and Resorts, and Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide, Inc.

When the opportunity presented itself to lead at this property, did you know quickly it would be the right fit?

I had a feeling it would be a good fit and what interested me was the fact that the hotel was going into a very exciting time, on the heels of the renovation where a lot of money was invested in revitalizing the hotel and when the hotel was looking at ways to continue to grow its relevancy within the market, and to reestablish itself with the luxury traveler and the next generation traveler.

This process is not only a passion of mine but it's something I think I do well in terms of finding creative ways to continuously keep products and hotels relevant in their markets.

Was it important to keep some of the history and heritage during the renovation and how do you make sure you blend that with staying current?

It's probably the most important part, because the St. Regis has been around since 1904; you have 110 years of not only the same building but also the same brand.

There is a significant amount of the hotel that cannot change and should never change, but within that framework, finding ways to continue to make it relevant is important.

Is the St. Regis brand well understood around the world?

St. Regis hotels and resorts around the world take their roots from The St. Regis New York, so travelers find elements of the flagship throughout each of the properties. They're all very focused on location, design, bespoke service, and some traditional elements, as well as keeping the property relevant – all elements you would either find in the St. Regis New York or that John Jacob Astor would have put in his hotel in 1904 when he opened it.

Is it possible to effectively differentiate in a market like New York and how hard is it to show that?

You can differentiate, which creates an environment of very healthy competition and camaraderie among the hotels. When each hotel is different and unique in its own way, it then becomes about the destination, and driving business travelers and guests to New York City.

We know that we're unique in certain ways because of our historical element and the fact that we have just been renovated. We consider our location to be one of our greatest attributes. I also consider our service to be another of our greatest attributes. We have a very established service team that has been with us for a very long time, and knows the customers and the guests very well. When ranking our competitive advantages, I put service at the top.

How critical is the suite offering and would you talk about some of the specialty suites?

Suites are the biggest driver of average rate in the mix and we have a huge offering.

At the top of the selection, we have seven suites that are really special. The Presidential, the Royal, and the Imperial, which in effect could be considered three Presidential suites, are priced from \$20,000 to \$36,000.

We also have four designer suites and with those we partnered with individual designers: Bentley, Tiffany, and Dior, and the fourth is our Milano suite. We have clients who will only stay in certain designer suites because they so closely match their tastes and needs. Within our 70 suites, these seven alone are very unique to any hotel in the city.

Additionally, we have the wonderful collection of Madison, St. Regis, Astor, and Deluxe suites, which have all sorts of configurations.

We're blessed with great square footage as far as the rooms and suites go, with great ceiling height because of how hotels were built in that day. We are fortunate also to have many different room configurations, so each traveler has his very specific needs met as far as layouts and room views.

How hard is it to drive profit from the food and beverage aspect of the business?

Profit in food and beverage doesn't compare to the profit in the rooms division, but in a luxury property, it's absolutely critical to have that offering.

In-room dining, for example, is very important to our in-house guests. If you don't deliver that well, the only guests we're letting down are those that are paying our room rates and funding a lot of our operation. So that has to continue to be done very well.

You must have your traditional offerings throughout the day for the guests. High tea is something we're very proud of and something that guests still enjoy, and is a part of the way they structure their day whether they're here on business or pleasure.

The King Cole Bar is an area that also does very well. It continues to be a bar that is full every single night and has a passionate following.

We also have the banquet and catering offering, and the second floor has amazing spaces that we just renovated, in addition to the ballroom on the roof. We can handle anything from the most festive social catering event to business meetings, and road shows, and those end up being a significant part of our food and beverage operation. ●