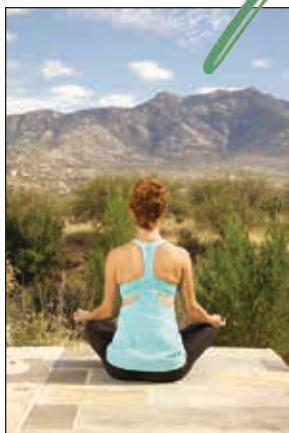


Hospitality



Life-Changing Memories



An Interview with Laura McIver,
Vice President and General Manager, Miraval Arizona Resort & Spa *Yoga overlooking the Santa Catalina Mountains (left); a stunning Miraval suite (above)*

EDITORS' NOTE Laura McIver assumed her current post in October 2014. Prior to her new role, she served as the General Manager of Belmond El Encanto Hotel in Santa Barbara. Previously, McIver served in directorial and managerial roles as General Manager of Canary Hotel, Resident Manager of Hotel Casa Del Mar, and Corporate Director of Food and Beverage at Shutters on the Beach. During her time with the Kimpton Hotel & Restaurant Group, McIver served as Area Director of Catering for Argonaut Hotel and Director of Catering for Hotel Monaco, and oversaw banquet operations at Serrano Hotel. McIver began her hospitality career as an executive receptionist at The Claremont Hotel Club & Spa and continued to grow with the hotel, eventually serving as its Assistant Director of Banquets.



Laura McIver

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated in the warm shade of the Santa Catalina Mountains in northern Tucson, Arizona, on 400 acres of idyllic land, Miraval (miravalresorts.com) is a top-rated all-inclusive destination resort and spa dedicated to helping guests live life in the moment. Since 1995, the property has been consistently ranked as one of the world's top destination spas by Travel + Leisure, SpaFinder, and Condé Nast Traveler. Offering an array of dynamic growth and development programs, one-of-a-kind, luxurious spa treatments, and authentic, flavorful, and healthful cuisine, as well as an expert staff of renowned well-being specialists, Miraval helps its guests to open their eyes, minds, and hearts. In 2012, the resort unveiled the Miraval Life in Balance Spa, a state-of-the-art oasis designed to transform guests both physically and emotionally.

When the opportunity presented itself to join Miraval Arizona Resort & Spa, what excited you about the property and made you feel it would be the right fit?

Miraval has been a leader in this segment of luxury for a long time, at the forefront of well-being and a balanced lifestyle, and offers programs that no one else offers.

From a luxury hotelier perspective, it was an amazing chance to do something very different but at the same level that I have been at for the past 25 years or so.

From my background, I felt it was a great opportunity to continue running a luxury property, but also be in an environment that gives back and creates life-changing memories for our clientele. It's unlike anything I've ever done before.

How broad is the market for Miraval?

We have guests from all over the world. We have about an 80 percent female clientele, most of whom are executives or owners of companies. Many are entrepreneurs themselves or are married to very high-powered individuals.

For the most part, the people we serve are in the \$250,000+ earnings bracket and have the opportunity to travel wherever they want in the world.

When you refer to a property as a luxury wellness resort, what does that entail?

Miraval provides an opportunity for people to come to a resort setting with all the amenities they would expect, such as beautiful bedding and a wonderful spa. However, we add to that an amazing array of specialists and activities they can take advantage of from nutritionists and physiologists to fitness programs, to our equine experience, to mind/body experiences with healers and intuitives, and yoga.

It allows guests to get away and relax, but also to step outside their comfort zones, and acquire new knowledge and perspectives.

Are you happy with where the product stands today and are there plans for renovations on the horizon?

I'm very happy with where the property is now, but we continue to look for opportunities to improve and we remain at the forefront of our programs, and our spa and fitness offerings. We are planning to undertake a major rooms renovation within the next year, as well as to update and upgrade some of our restaurant spaces and other public areas.

How much of a focus is the group and meeting business?

We do quite a bit of group business. We have event space, breakout space, and larger ballroom space, as well as a lot of outdoor area for people to use.

We're a great team-building and incentive meeting facility because we offer ropes courses and group activities in many of our lifestyle workshops. This makes us an amazing facility for corporate groups to get away to and bond with each other.

What is the focus of your food and beverage offering?

Our focus is on healthy organic eating, but we have also been able to bring in a chef who focuses on taste, quality, and presentation so that it doesn't feel like diet food.

Our chef has been with us for quite a few years – he actually started as a cook in the kitchen and became a sous chef, before taking over as executive chef.

It's wonderful for us because he understands the Miraval experience. He also teaches classes on eating and cooking for wellness with anti-inflammatory foods so people are able to take home the things they learn here.

How challenging is the talent and people aspect of the business, and what type of investment are you making in training and service standards?

We are currently majority-owned by KSL Resorts, which has focused on the four keys of training for years. We have rolled that out to our entire staff. It really simplifies the overarching qualities of hospitality, and we have been able to build that within our community here.

The team that was here prior to KSL coming in has always been incredibly warm and welcoming. They are very dedicated to this property. It's such a special place and they're incredibly protective of the environment and the experience here. They always look after our guests' interests. It has been wonderful to layer in a more structured hospitality training environment to enhance their existing strengths.

Do you find that the GM position has become more of a business role today?

The only way to drive the bottom line in the hotel industry is to drive the service and provide added value to guests giving them an environment in which they feel pampered and taken care of. If you lose sight of that, you don't bring added revenue to the bottom line. The more we take care of our guests, the more they take care of us. ●