



Timeless Design

An Interview with
Steve Sasso, General Manager, The Benjamin



The Benjamin exterior (left) and living area of The Benjamin Suite (above)

EDITORS' NOTE In January of 2014, Denihan Hospitality Group named Steve Sasso to his current post. Sasso joined Denihan three years ago as Hotel Manager of Affinia Manhattan, followed by General Manager assignments at Eastgate Tower, Affinia Gardens, and Affinia Dumont. Previously, Sasso served as Hotel Manager of the Acqualina Resort & Spa on Miami Beach. His extensive experience also includes Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, and Interstate Hotels and Resorts, where he held various positions in Boston and New York City, including Opening Director of Operations at The Copley Square Hotel. Sasso conducted his undergraduate studies in New Hampshire and Switzerland, and attended University of Massachusetts Amherst working toward his M.B.A. and M.S. degrees. He also completed the 2014 General Manager Program at Cornell University.



Steve Sasso

PROPERTY BRIEF Situated in an ideal Midtown Manhattan locale near Rockefeller Center, MoMA, and Fifth Avenue, The Benjamin (thebenjamin.com) is a luxurious boutique-style hotel designed by famed architect Emery Roth. The beaux-arts gem promises to help guests be at their best with newly redesigned accommodations by Lauren Rottet and thoughtful services and amenities such as restful solutions by sleep expert Rebecca Robbins and Winks' Kidzzz Club for families. Room types range from guestrooms with kitchenettes to one-bedroom terrace suites. The National Bar & Dining Rooms by Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian is housed on the first floor and showcases modern bistro cuisine in a chic grand café, in-room dining, and meeting space. The Benjamin, an AAA Four-Diamond Award winner, offers more than 2,200 square feet of space for meetings, small weddings, private dining, and special events. In addition, world-renowned stylist Federico Calce presents Federico Hair & Spa at The Benjamin.

The Benjamin is a leader in the market. What makes the property so special?

As you approach the doors of this 1927 landmark, it's apparent that you are entering a truly special place. The Benjamin is a beloved Midtown fixture with timeless design. We have strived to maintain the integrity of our building while remaining relevant to today's traveler. Guests often

tell me that they feel like they are coming back to their private residence rather than a hotel. The Benjamin offers all the amenities of a large luxury hotel but we are intimate enough to pay attention to detail, and we have genuine relationships with our guests.

Would you provide an overview of your suites and the importance of having such a broad offering in this regard?

Yes, nearly 50 percent of our 209 rooms are one-bedroom suites, which is uncommon for any hotel, especially in New York City. We have 13 one-bedroom balcony suites and four one-bedroom terrace suites, which offer great outdoor space and add to the experience. We also recently unveiled The Benjamin Suite on the 22nd floor, which is great for honeymoon couples, high-level VIPs, and special occasions, and is perfectly suited for an elegant afternoon or evening of entertaining. Our deluxe studios start at 300 square feet and provide great space, and all accommodations within the hotel feature modern artwork and a kitchenette with a microwave, refrigerator, and tableware for four.

Would you highlight the recent renovations at The Benjamin?

In 2013, a renovation was completed by Lauren Rottet of Rottet Studio. She really wanted guests to feel like they were living in New York City and not just visiting. The furnishings were individually selected to complement each other so that the room experience is inviting and unique.

Our most recent development was the launch of our premiere suite in early 2014. The 1,620-square-foot Benjamin Suite personifies the classic American Dream realized.

Situated on the 22nd floor, the space references the luxe and flourishing elegance of the Art Deco era intermixed with urban modern touches such as hardwood flooring, velvet and satin seating, and a multichannel sound system.

The Benjamin Suite also includes a rare custom burl wood dining table, pantry kitchen, a master bedroom, a master bathroom with a free-standing tub and a double rain shower, and an additional powder room for guests.

However, it is the signature outdoor areas – a balcony and private terrace – that truly set this luxury suite apart. Offering a sanctuary in the sky with the privilege of al fresco dining by Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian's The National, the terrace is a rare experience further punctuated by the

spectacular southern view of the Manhattan skyline. The terrace hosts espaliered apple trees from Oregon in varieties of honey crisp, McIntosh, and Fuji, as well as stone planters brimming with ingredients like a lime tree and mint for a refreshing mojito and tomatoes, basil, and oregano for a seasonal summer salad.

Would you discuss the partnerships you have developed for the property and how valuable they have been to its success?

Our amazing grand café, The National Bar & Dining Rooms by Iron Chef Geoffrey Zakarian, our award-winning Federico Hair and Spa with celebrity stylist Federico Calce, and our admired Rest and Renew Program in partnership with Sleep Expert Rebecca Robbins, are a few of our guests' favorites. We also work with SIN Workouts, and they provide high-end fitness services such as personal training, or arranging car service to and from a local spin class. Finally, we partnered with BarkBox for our pet program to provide the latest vet-approved treats and toys for our four-legged guests.

How can you provide such consistent service for guests and how do you measure your service standards?

Ultimately, it is about the team of service professionals that we have in place, whether they are new to the industry and freshly trained, or have worked at The Benjamin or in the hotel industry for decades. We try to stay close to our guests without being intrusive during their stay, and we pay attention to feedback received via our post-stay surveys and social media. Guest loyalty is the ultimate compliment for a GM, and we have seen many "regulars" at The Benjamin so that type of familiarity helps us personalize a guest's stay in many ways. We like to tell our guests that we want them to "Be at Your Best" when staying with us.

What are you most focused on for 2015 to make sure that you maintain a leadership position in the market?

We outline measurable goals each year that are focused on guest satisfaction, associate and employee satisfaction, and profitability as measured from a financial and competitive standpoint. Making sure my entire team knows what those goals are and buys into them is very important to me. The hotel has accomplished much over the years, and continuous improvement in all areas along with providing a unique and enjoyable experience for all that we interact with has helped us be successful. Actions aimed at that will help maintain and excel our position in the market. ●