



Raising the Bar

An Interview with Joel Freyberg,
Managing Director, Gansevoort Park Avenue NYC



Gansevoort Park Avenue NYC rooftop pool (left); lobby (above)

EDITORS' NOTE Joel Freyberg joined the company group in 2004 as Hotel Manager for Gansevoort Meatpacking NYC, the brand's original flagship. Before his current position with Gansevoort Park Avenue, Freyberg was the General Manager of The Chatwal New York where he transformed the company into a AAA Five-Diamond property and a Forbes Five-Star establishment. He was also the previous director and general manager of The Waldorf Towers in New York. Freyberg received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration from New York University.



Joel Freyberg

PROPERTY BRIEF Gansevoort Park Avenue NYC (gansevoorthotelgroup.com) offers a downtown edge with an uptown sensibility. Boasting 249 luxury rooms and remarkable suites, most with lofty ceilings, Juliet balconies, and five-fixtured bathrooms, the property, perched on the corner of 29th Street and Park Avenue, couldn't be more centrally located. A three-story atrium lobby showcases striking herringbone granite floors, an oversized fireplace, and dramatic aubergine chandeliers. In addition to their signature rooftop pool, Gansevoort Park Avenue also offers The Drift, a beach and surf inspired bilevel rooftop bar + lounge, The One Group's Ristorante Asellina – a 10,000 square foot trattoria offering Italian-inspired fare, an Exhale spa complete with transformational healing therapies and yoga classes, Cutler salon, a state-of-the-art gym, and more. Gansevoort Park Avenue NYC is ideally located in Manhattan's NoMad district.

When this opportunity was presented to you, what made you feel it would be the right fit?

It was like coming back home to me, because I had worked with the opening team at the original Meatpacking property in 2004. What I truly love about this property is that everything we wished for at the Meatpacking hotel has been implemented at this property.

We have wonderful rooms and suites. Many of our rooms have two full bathrooms, outdoor terraces, or step-out balconies. We also have a great restaurant, spectacular event space with natural light, and a fantastic spa and hair salon, all within the building. We truly are an urban resort in the heart of New York City. This part of

town also has great restaurants, bars, and million-dollar apartment buildings. This makes it a true neighborhood and very dynamic.

The hotel is ready to be taken to the next level, which was my directive from ownership, and I am ready to do so.

Where do you see this hotel positioned and how broad is the market for the product you offer?

I'm all about luxury but not being stuffy. I strongly believe that we need to have luxury and that element of fun as well. This hotel does offer excitement, but it also has the basic core value, which is understated luxury. We have all of the five-star amenities that one would expect, and a staff that understands and is willing to take serving our guests to the next level. I feel confident that we can compete with the best of the best in this city.

Do you look at the competitive set from a location point of view or is it broader than that?

When I was opening my previous property in Times Square, I was told that it would be impossible to open a luxury hotel in that part of town and in that neighborhood. I proved them wrong and that property has since changed the playing field dramatically. As for the competitive set, I view all hotels in all neighborhoods as friendly competitors.

Would you talk about the room product and suite offering?

We have 37 well-appointed suites, and the majority are about 900 to 1,000 square feet; the majority also have two full bathrooms or at least a bath and a half; great living space, natural light, and step-out balconies or terraces. I believe this sets us apart from many other hotels.

My goal is to educate the luxury travel professionals and their clients that we are here and ready to take care of them.

Did the staff who were here when you came in understand the vision? How important was it to get them onboard?

What has made me successful throughout my career is that I listen and I ask questions. I've learned from the best and, most importantly, I explained the vision. It's not just my hotel – it's our hotel.

What made my previous hotel very successful was that I reached out to the luxury travel community to gain insight and develop a

deeper understanding of what the luxury consumer needs are. They know what the client expects and demands from a hotel – whether it is for business or pleasure. I learned from them and we implemented those changes. I also like to implement little touches that I have learned from my previous properties, which I always like to incorporate at my hotel.

Is it important to have a spa offering at a property like this?

Yes, but it's not just a spa – it's a healthy choice and options. Many people think a spa is just for facials and massage, which we have, but we also offer core fusion classes, and a juice press for the best organic green and fruit juices. Next year we will be opening up a Flywheel for spinning classes – so we are forever changing to fit the needs of our clients.

Is the meeting space here more intimate than you might find at other properties?

Yes, but we also have natural light, which is a rarity, and we have floor-to-ceiling windows and dynamic city views. We can accommodate all size of groups and venues from 20 to 350 people.

How important is it to offer the technology for those who want it but to not lose the human touch?

It's great to have the latest technology but people still like to relate to people and nothing is better than providing personal service. Just to hear "Thank you for staying with us and come back soon" speaks volumes.

Where is the market today and is it a challenging time for the hotel business, especially with so much supply that has come into this market?

There is definitely a lot of supply but we still need to grow and expand – we cannot remain stagnant. We need to evolve and constantly be one step ahead, and we always need to be very engaged in the community. A managing director has to be the face of the hotel and very well connected with the travel community – it's all about relationships.

Is the travel agent still important?

Extremely important. People thought the Internet was going to eliminate the need for the travel professional/agent, and it might have for a very brief time, but when someone needs a flight changed or a hotel extension on a sold out night, no website can provide the magic and service to the travel community. ●