



## Creating Memories

An Interview with Peter Simoncelli,  
General Manager, The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago



The living area (above) and master bedroom of the two-bedroom Navy Pier Suite at The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago (left)

**EDITORS' NOTE** Peter Simoncelli assumed his current post in January 2016. Over the course of his career, he served 14 years with Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, including his post as director of food and beverage, then executive assistant general manager at its Chicago property. For the last 15 years, he has been in Chicago where he served as General Manager of the Westin Michigan Avenue Chicago and Westin Chicago River North. Simoncelli graduated with a B.A. in business administration from Illinois College.



Peter Simoncelli

He sits on the board of directors for the Illinois Hotel and Lodging Association and served as its Ambassador of Hospitality in 2013. He serves as Chairman of the Magnificent Mile Association, the Development Board of St. Francis High School, and the Westin Hotels and Resorts GM Advisory Council.

**PROPERTY BRIEF** Among the skyscrapers of the Magnificent Mile awaits The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago ([ritzcarltonchicago.com](http://ritzcarltonchicago.com)), a hotel located in the coveted Gold Coast neighborhood. The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago's 434 guest rooms, including 90 suites, each offer stunning views, spacious layouts, and unimposing elegance. The property unveiled a new Ritz-Carlton Club Lounge, refashioned suites, and a fitness center with city views at the end of 2016. The final phase of sophisticated updates debuted this summer featuring reinvented, modernized spaces including the lobby, restaurants and ballrooms that blend the charm of the Water Tower Place with the rich history and architecture of the city.

**What excited you about leading The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago and made you feel it was the right fit?**

The opportunity to lead The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago, especially during this incredibly exciting time for the property, was one I would never pass on. I have 30 years of operations experience in the luxury hotel market that has made my transition to The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago team a seamless and perfect fit. I'm excited to contribute my knowledge of innovation in product enhancement, operational productivity, and revenue growth to this property and to work with our group of incredible ladies and gentlemen to improve our service culture.

**Would you discuss the transformation and redesign taking place at the property?**

We completed a multiphase re-fashioning this summer and now have a completely new lobby, restaurants, ballrooms, spa, Club Lounge, guest corridors, and suites. We took some of the long-standing traditions of this historic property and added in fresh designs and offerings and infused elements of the city's outdoors and surroundings including the skyline and lake into the architecture.

**How do you define a true luxury hotel experience today?**

A true luxury hotel experience is more than an overnight stay – it is an experience where memories are made. We have created an approachable and welcoming environment. A luxury hotel experience is all about how the hotel operates – we anticipate the needs of our guests from before the moment they arrive on property to the time of their departure. They feel an emotional connection to our hotel and to our ladies and gentlemen.

**Would you discuss the service standards at the property and your focus on providing personalized service and customizing the guest experience?**

Personalized and anticipatory service is extremely important. Our ladies and gentlemen are trained to establish a personal and professional relationship with our guests. We use technology to assist with getting to know our guests before they arrive and figure out ways to make them feel special and their stay memorable.

**How important is the strong suite offering at The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago as a differentiator for the property?**

Our strong suite offering is a key differentiator for our property. Our 90 suites were refashioned at the end of 2016 and have incomparable views of Navy Pier, Lake Michigan, and the Magnificent Mile. The majority of our suites have dramatic views of the most incredible lakefront in the world. We have the best views of any hotel in the city.

**What are the keys to being successful in the restaurant/food and beverage part of the business for The Ritz-Carlton, Chicago?**

In my experience, I have found that the consistency of delivery and commitment to quality has led to operational excellence. Luxury travelers have come to expect a remarkable culinary experience for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and we are dedicated to delivering that. We recently introduced a new lobby bar, restaurant, and market café that offers an updated take on the European brasserie

with upscale coffee, tea, and bistro items. Our signature Mediterranean-inspired Italian steakhouse, Torali, boasts an elegantly detailed contemporary space.

**You have placed a major focus on your ballroom product. What can guests expect from this offering?**

The event spaces have been completely redesigned starting with the creation of one, fluid level to set the stage for glittering soirées. The Ritz-Carlton Grand Ballroom boasts sweeping city views, allowing for a more functional, seamless event for up to 600 people – and is the largest luxury ballroom in the destination. The awe-inspiring ballroom is flooded with natural light, and the opulent chandelier has been lovingly restored with 400,000 crystals casting tiny prisms of magical light to its original glory and maintains an unbroken bond to the legacy of the hotel. The additional refashioned breakout space and an entirely new St. Clair junior ballroom have been added complete with dedicated breakout and pre-function spaces, aptly named the St. Clair Foyer. The ceilings of the pre-function spaces are layered with linear lighting, providing a theater-like setting for the great white way of celebrations.

**How do you balance your technology offerings at the property without losing the human touch that Ritz-Carlton is known for?**

We use technology to benefit our human interaction and create more sincere relationships by knowing more about our guests and their preferences. The state-of-the-art systems we have provide us the opportunity to truly enhance each guest experience and be well-prepared to make their stay one of a kind.

**What advice do you give to young people interested in building a career in the hotel business?**

My biggest piece of advice is that you have to enjoy working with people – it is a business built around relationships. The Ritz-Carlton is a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission – we can never lose sight of this. In the hospitality industry, if the care and comfort of guests is not part of your DNA, you will struggle. Be open to change because the industry is constantly evolving and advancing, but the focus on customer service and being hospitable remains the cornerstone of this industry. I tell the young people that I work with that are interested in building their careers in the hotel business to check-in 100 people in one day and then assess how they feel about growing their careers. ●