

Creating Memories

An Interview with Sylvia Wong, Proprietor, The Roundtree, Amagansett

EDITORS' NOTE Sylvia Wong serves on the Board of Directors of WTI, Inc. and works closely with the company to identify, evaluate and negotiate acquisitions and other investment and financing transactions. Prior to working with WTI, Wong was an executive at IBM Corporation for over 15 years where she held a number of senior positions. From 2012 to 2015, she was IBM's Chief Trust and Compliance Officer, based in the company's headquarters in Armonk, New York. In that role, she led the global ethics and compliance program for the company's 380,000 employees and business operations in more than 175 countries. From 2009 to 2012, she served as the General Counsel of IBM's Growth Markets Unit, a \$20 billion business with operations throughout the developing markets, including Asia, Latin America, Russia, Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa. At the start of her career, she practiced law in New York City at the law firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, where she



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specialized in mergers and acquisitions, financing, joint ventures and corporate transactions. Wong received her undergraduate degree in economics from Binghamton University and her law degree from New York University School of Law.

PROPERTY BRIEF In 2020, The Roundtree, Amagansett (theroundtreehotels.com) opened its doors in the beautiful enclave of New York's Hamptons region. With just 15-rooms, this independently owned, luxury boutique

property pays homage to Amagansett's historic farmstead legacy dating back to the 1700s, with nature-inspired details that embody the spirit of this idyllic destination. The Roundtree, Amagansett features five cottages (one of which is over 250 years old), and a combination of 10 rooms and suites housed throughout a 100-year-old barn and the main house. All of the property's accommodations are renovated to include thoughtful amenities and modern accents that make for a luxurious stay year-round.



What was your vision for opening The Roundtree?

I have always loved traveling and have been fortunate to have accumulated many wonderful memories from my travels. The thought of going into hospitality some day had been lingering in the back of my mind for some time, but I did not have a specific plan on the right moment to pursue that path. In 2019, I stumbled upon a historic Hamptons property for sale. It was then called Gansett Green Manor and had been family operated for years and was most recently operated by a lovely couple. I wasn't necessarily set on The Hamptons, but the more thought I gave it, the more it made sense with my home base being in New York City. I have a vivid memory of taking the Hampton Jitney to check out the property and remember how crisp and clean the air was and how beautiful the property looked. The property's lush lawns, surrounding farmlands, and incredible history drew me in and there was no question that this would be the place I settled on.

Though the grounds and bones were there, we had a lot of work to do in terms of modernizing the property's interior so it had a luxurious feel and elicited feelings of home while still keeping the integrity of the existing structures. In terms of the vision for decor and design, I pulled from my own personal taste and found inspiration in my many travels over the years. The way I see it, I am inviting people into my own home and I wanted to create a place where guests felt welcome and comfortable.

We opened our doors in June 2020, just slightly behind our original schedule and in the midst of the pandemic. We had no reservations on the books at the time, but somehow we were confident that people would find us and would understand and connect with the



The entrance to The Roundtree, Amagansett (top) and the main house living area (above)



Cottage living area

vision. Almost immediately, the response from guests was overwhelmingly positive. Many guests extended their stay or came back several times that summer. We had many referrals from the first guests. I still remember in our opening month, we had a family stay with us for two weeks. One night, the father invited a few friends and their kids to join him to eat at the property. Our team set up a beautiful table for them to enjoy on our lawn and I will never forget walking past him, his family and friends and seeing the smiles on everyone's faces. To this day, moments like that mean the world to me – nothing compares to seeing people enjoy something you put so much of your heart and soul into.

Will you provide an overview of the property and how The Roundtree is positioned in the market?

The Roundtree is located on Main Street in the seaside village of Amagansett which is on the East End of Long Island. The property is a quick ten-minute walk from the beach, is steps from a collection of local boutiques and restaurants, and is an easy drive from some of the area's best wineries and museums. The Hamptons tends to be known for glitz and glamour, but Amagansett seems to attract a more low-key crowd that is looking to enjoy the natural beauty of the destination and surrounding area. The Hamptons is also one of those destinations that, while it has its peak visitation time, is magical year-round and we've built our programming to mirror the change in seasons.

The Roundtree celebrates the humble farmstead origins of the destination through five stand-alone cottages and a combination of suites set in a 100-year-old historic barn. I recently completed the renovation of The Main House, a spacious two-bedroom house on the property, and The Beach House, a

compound of two cottages just a five-minute bike ride from the property that has private access to an ocean beach. We're so proud to be able to offer such a variety of options to our guests, whether a couple looking for a romantic getaway or a larger family visiting for an extended stay.

Will you discuss The Roundtree's focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

One of the perks of being a more intimate property is the level of attention we can offer to each guest who stays with us. We've

designed our guest experience to be overtly individualized – from concierge, daily house-keeping and laundry service to the fresh-baked cookies we serve each afternoon and evening s'mores around our central fire pit. During the summer, we have an electric buggy that shuttles our guests to and from the local beaches plus an Ice Cream Happy Hour that kids love. Our team can arrange a variety of off-site experiences for our guests based on what they're wanting to do – everything from family bonfires on the beach to private experiences at neighboring wineries and art galleries. We want each guest to leave with memories to last a lifetime.

How did you approach building the team at The Roundtree and what are the key characteristics you look for when hiring talent?

Having a good team is absolutely critical. I look for people who are service-oriented and are always looking for ways to go above and beyond for our guests. To me, the individual doesn't necessarily need to have hospitality experience so long as the person has a good attitude and is eager to learn. Fortunately, we have a great team in place and know that the property and our guests are in good hands when I'm not able to be there.

What interested you in opening a hotel and how do you focus your efforts at the property?

I had always seen property investment in luxury destinations, whether hotel or residential, as an intriguing opportunity and took the steps to turn dreams to reality when the time was right. After getting through the renovation and opening, I've continued to go to the property on a very regular basis and love getting closely involved. It doesn't feel like work when I am enjoying it. ●



Firepit on the manicured lawn of The Roundtree, Amagansett