

A Mix Of Heritage And Innovation

An Interview with Israël Benyaïr, General Manager, Baccarat Hotel New York

EDITORS' NOTE *Israël Benyaïr is General Manager of the Forbes Five-Star AAA Five-Diamond Baccarat Hotel New York. Prior to joining Baccarat Hotel, Benyaïr was the Vice President of Operations for the Delamar Hotel Collection, a private luxury brand consisting of six hotels. Before this, Benyaïr was the General Manager of The Mayflower Inn and Spa, an Auberge Collection hotel in Washington, Connecticut. Benyaïr's career has included leadership positions with several Mandarin Oriental Hotels, including the Mandarin Oriental New York, Mandarin Oriental Geneva, Mandarin Oriental Boston, and the Mandarin Oriental Washington D.C. He also held leadership positions with Hotel Beau-Rivage Geneva and InterContinental Hotel Geneva. A native of Rhone, France, Benyaïr earned a bachelor's degree from the Institut Vatel Hotel School in Lyon, France; a sales and marketing baccalaureate from Lycee Des Glieres in Annemasse, France; and a national diploma from College Michel Servet, also in Annemasse, France. He is fluent in English, French, and Hebrew.*



Israël Benyaïr

Will you discuss your career journey?

Throughout my career, I have consistently worked to drive revenues and results, maximize profits, enhance quality, mentor management teams, and foster a climate of enthusiasm and motivation. Prior to joining Baccarat Hotel, I was the Vice President of Operations for the Delamar Hotel Collection, a private luxury brand consisting of six hotels. Before this, I was the General Manager of The Mayflower Inn and Spa, an Auberge Collection hotel in Washington, Connecticut. During

this time, I oversaw an extensive renovation and successful repositioning of the property. I have also held leadership positions with several Mandarin Oriental Hotels, Hotel Beau-Rivage Geneva, a Leading Hotels of the World, and the InterContinental Hotel Geneva.

What excited you about the opportunity to lead Baccarat Hotel New York and made you feel it was the right fit?

Growing up in France, I was very familiar with the profile of the Baccarat brand, as it is known for being an iconic example of French craft excellence. Since completing hospitality school in France, I have spent my career in luxury hospitality. I was delighted with the opportunity to represent the Baccarat brand as a luxury hospitality destination and be part of a full New York experience. The first-of-its-kind element is difficult to find in the world these days, and that is also very exciting to me. I believe it is the combination of prestige, the mix of heritage and innovation, and our dedicated team committed to service excellence, that set us apart. I feel as though all roads led me here.

Will you provide an overview of Baccarat Hotel New York, and how the property is positioned in the market?

The hotel was imagined and realized by the acclaimed Parisian design team, Gilles & Boissier. The property features extraordinary museum-quality art pieces, spanning from the

PROPERTY BRIEF *Baccarat Hotel New York (baccarathotels.com) is the first hotel and global flagship for the more than a quarter centuries-old Baccarat crystal brand. Directly across the street from the Museum of Modern Art and steps away from Fifth Avenue's legendary shopping, the 114 exquisitely appointed guest rooms and suites designed by Paris-based, luxury design team Gilles & Boissier delight the senses with lavish finishes and artisanal attention to detail. Generous amenities include stunning salon-style spaces showcasing an all-day dining menu created by two Michelin-starred Culinary Director Gabriel Kreuther in partnership with Executive Chef/Director of Food and Beverage Ashfer Biju. Guests will also enjoy a beautiful barrel-vaulted bar featuring a kaleidoscope of Baccarat crystal stemware; a soothing Spa de La Mer, the first of its kind in the United States; and a 55-foot sunken marble swimming pool complete with day beds reminiscent of La Côte d'Azur. Baccarat Hotel New York has earned the prestigious Forbes Five Star and AAA (American Automobile Association) Five Diamond Awards.*



Baccarat Hotel New York Grand Salon



The Bar at Baccarat Hotel New York



Baccarat Hotel New York guest room

18th Century to present day, as well as paintings, photography and compelling works in other mediums that are all uniquely suited to Baccarat. The hotel is dripping in Baccarat crystal, from the chandeliers to the glassware to each room's mini bar, we are ensconced in old-world craftsmanship at its finest. The French heritage and artisanal components that you find in each department of this property give the Baccarat Hotel a uniquely luxurious and intimate feel.

How valuable is it to have such a strong suite product, and do you see this as a differentiator for Baccarat Hotel New York?

Yes, our suites are very unique. They reflect Baccarat's 250+ year design, aesthetic, and heritage, and showcase unique pieces such as the Zenith Chandelier and custom art and décor, all within a palette of champagne, ivory, chocolate and platinum tones. Our refined linens and amenities are beyond the typical. Here, suites are not just bedrooms – they are more like showrooms, with floor to ceiling windows, a separate living and dining area, curated art, and of course, Baccarat Crystal selections you will rarely see elsewhere. Unique perks and inclusions are offered with our suites beyond the room itself as well.

How has Baccarat Hotel New York approached its restaurant/food and beverage offering, and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

Baccarat Hotel New York partnered with the acclaimed and Michelin starred French Chef Gabriel Kreuther to mentor the culinary team and have its hand in our food and beverage programming. Chef Kreuther also owns a hand-craft chocolate shop, and this is the selection we offer to our guests. All our cocktails and beverages are served in Baccarat Crystal glassware, with premium wine and spirit selections, as well as a champagne menu that is one of the largest in the country.

The Grand Salon and Bar are sumptuously decorated with Baccarat crystals, and feature curated works from world-class artists such as Henri Girault de Nolhac or Clio Setzo. Glowing inside and out, a corrugated crystal-like curtain reveals cascading chandeliers framing lush lounge-style seating clad in rich velvets and Jouffre silk. There is nothing else like it in New York.

One of our signature offerings is our afternoon tea service, which has consistently been recognized as the city's best afternoon tea. Guests enjoy a transporting experience through a celebration of historical personalities that have associations with the time-honored brand. Boutique blends are paired with chef-selected canapés, house-made scones, and petit fours. After all, in New York, the key to success is a lasting impression and experience that is unlike any other. Our tea offering is a great example of this.

Will you discuss Baccarat Hotel New York's focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

Customized service is what sets one brand apart from another and in this regard, Baccarat Hotel New York clearly distinguishes itself from our competitors. The goal is to connect with our guests before arrival and understand the purpose of their visit. In this way, our guest experience team and hosts are essentially curating your stay based on your preferences and agenda while visiting New York to ensure it is hyper-personalized. From luggage packing and unpacking services and personal check-in, to shoe shining and priority access to our dining and cocktail venues, the real customization starts with the guest immersion with Baccarat's legacy of excellence and tradition. A highlight of any stay is a personal tour that can be organized at one of the three Baccarat boutique locations in the city. But should guests prefer to stay closer to 'home,' there is a boutique on the lobby level of the hotel.

How do you define the role of the general manager, and what are the keys to being effective in the role?

I believe an environment of empowerment and transparency creates a very healthy culture. I like our teams to fully understand their responsibilities while also having enough autonomy to fulfill them. Trust is also critical to creating a strong structure and a prerequisite for a culture of innovation, as it fosters the confidence to experiment and challenge the status quo. I like to hire colleagues for the qualities they demonstrate and then trust their ability to deliver service in innovative ways.

My role is to bring a vision to life and get people to embrace it and share in it. Creating and mentoring a team of great people with different skills and helping them to work together is key. I like to have a good sense of humor and embrace our ability to grow from learning curves. Another essential aspect of a successful general manager is to maintain curiosity, fun, and passion within the team. You need 360-degree management skills to facilitate a great working relationship with owners, guests, agents, and your team. It's imperative to remain true to yourself and maintain the same set of values throughout. But ultimately my goal is to serve our guests and our teams.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in building a career in the industry?

It is a passion, so do not be afraid to be yourself. We often forget that the goal in the luxury realm is to be the perfect host both for our guests and our teams. There are also two key aspects to keep in mind when you start a career in the industry: First, we're in the people business and the guest experience is created through our colleagues. It's therefore key to treat our colleagues in the same way we expect them to treat our guests. Second, if you are not a people person, this is not the job for you. ●