

Connected To The Fabric Of Chicago

An Interview with Maria Zec, Regional Executive Vice President, USA and Managing Director, The Peninsula Chicago

EDITORS' NOTE Since March 2002, Maria Zec has served as Managing Director of The Peninsula Chicago and she assumed her current post with The Peninsula Hotels in May 2007. Prior to this, she served as Managing Director and Hotel Manager at the New York Palace Hotel. Zec holds a BS in business management and a BA in French from Purdue University.



Maria Zec

PROPERTY BRIEF The Peninsula Chicago (peninsula.com/chicago)

has been recognized as a premier property with Forbes' Five-Star and AAA Five Diamond awards since its grand opening in 2001. The property features 337 luxurious guest rooms and suites and offers a 15,000-square-foot spa and fitness center, 24-hour room service, a ballroom, and eight additional meeting and event rooms as well as three distinctive restaurants and Z Bar.

Will you provide an overview of The Peninsula Chicago, and what have been the keys to the strength and leadership of the property?

The Peninsula Chicago is located along the city's iconic Magnificent Mile, and from the very beginning we have been deeply connected to the fabric of Chicago. We have always believed that true luxury comes from creating a sense of belonging – both for our guests and for the community we are proud to be part of.

Our strength lies in our ability to thoughtfully blend the global Peninsula brand with Chicago's rich history and character. Across our restaurants, spa, events, and guest experiences, we showcase international culture while ensuring local relevance is present at every touchpoint. Our afternoon teas, particularly during the holidays, have become a cherished tradition for many Chicago families



which speaks to the meaningful relationships we've built over time.

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, it is clear our greatest successes have been shaped by a shared commitment to genuine, heartfelt hospitality. I believe strongly in leading with a guest-first mindset – supporting guests whenever and wherever possible to create a seamless experience from the moment they approach the hotel. This philosophy is mirrored by our teams who work together in unison to deliver the same level of care.

None of this would be possible without our dedicated colleagues, many of whom have spent decades serving this city and our guests. At the core of our leadership is caring – about every detail, every interaction, and every person – so that both guests and team members feel truly recognized.

The Peninsula Chicago is celebrating its 25th Anniversary this year. How has the property evolved over this time?

Over the past 25 years, The Peninsula Chicago has established itself as a Chicago icon, seamlessly blending its Asian-influenced service with an ever-evolving approach to luxury. What began as traditional five-star hospitality has become a highly-personalized, technology-enabled, and experience-driven model – most notably through pioneering guestroom innovations, seamless digital integration, and flexible service concepts that redefine ease and control for today's traveler.

Our food and beverage offerings have evolved just as thoughtfully. Z Bar, built atop our Grand Ballroom and introduced in 2018, has become a defining part of our property. With its immersive views of the Magnificent



Packard at the front entrance of The Peninsula Chicago (above); The Peninsula Chicago (top right)



Z Bar outdoor fireplace

Mile and seasonally inspired cocktail program, it has established itself as a favorite among both Chicagoans and visitors. Nearly a decade later, Z Bar continues to reflect the city's dynamic cocktail culture while offering a truly elevated setting.

At the same time, the hotel has shifted from being a standalone destination to an active cultural participant, embedding local art, culinary creativity, and community partnerships into its identity. The result is a hotel that honors timeless elegance and service excellence while staying culturally relevant, emotionally resonant, and unmistakably connected to Chicago.

How has The Peninsula Chicago approached its restaurant/food and beverage offerings, and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

Our approach to food and beverage is rooted in variety, quality, and intention. We offer an all-day dining experience that spans a range of cuisines and atmospheres, allowing guests and locals alike to find something that feels personal and fitting for the moment.

Pierrot Gourmet serves European inspired fare for those looking for a more casual morning or afternoon experience, while Shanghai Terrace offers refined Chinese cuisine for guests seeking a more intimate evening. The Lobby remains one of the strongest pillars of our dining program, providing contemporary American cuisine throughout the day, complemented by live music and an unmistakable sense of occasion. Guests can then conclude their evening at Z Bar, enjoying innovative cocktails against the backdrop of the city

skyline. Each venue is distinct, yet together they create a cohesive dining journey – one that reflects both global influence and local sensibility.

Something extraordinary is taking shape behind the scenes. This fall, a familiar space will transform – inviting guests to experience the next evolution of dining at The Peninsula Chicago.

What does luxury mean to you in today's hospitality landscape?

Luxury today begins with recognition. It is about ensuring that every guest feels seen, valued, and genuinely cared for. True luxury is no longer defined by excess, but by personalization – anticipating needs, creating meaningful connections, and delivering experiences that feel thoughtful and effortless.

At The Peninsula Chicago, recognition is expressed through intentional, personal touchpoints that make each stay feel unique. Whether through our Peninsula Academy programs, our holistic approach to wellness, or the way our teams connect with guests, we strive to create experiences that are tailored, memorable, and deeply human. This commitment has guided us for 25 years and will continue to define our approach well into the future.

As The Peninsula Chicago celebrates its 25th anniversary, how important is it for your team to take time to reflect on this milestone and celebrate together?

This milestone is incredibly meaningful for our team. We have 38 colleagues who have been with us since opening day, and more than 40 percent of our staff has been here for ten years or more. That level of longevity speaks to the culture we have built together. It is especially touching to see multigenerational families – father-mother-son trios and more – working side by side within the hotel. It truly feels like an extended Peninsula family.

We believe that true hospitality extends beyond our walls, which is why The Peninsula builds hotels not only for our guests, but for the surrounding community as well. Celebrating this anniversary together allows us to honor our shared history, recognize the people who made it possible, and look ahead with pride and purpose. ●



Deluxe Suite living area