

Experience Real Access

An Interview with Barbara Biffi, Chief Brand Officer, Kempinski Hotels

EDITORS' NOTE Barbara Biffi is the Chief Brand Officer for Kempinski Hotels (kempinski.com), a newly created executive role designed to lead the next stage of the group's transformation. She is responsible for the strategic overhaul of Kempinski's entire brand and marketing ecosystem, guiding the company's evolution by building on its enduring heritage and redefining its future in luxury hospitality. Biffi brings more than two decades of proven leadership experience in luxury hospitality, brand strategy, technology innovation, and digital transformation. Most recently, she served at Silversea, the ultra-luxury cruise line, initially as Vice President, Brand and subsequently as Senior Vice President, Global Sales. Before Silversea, she held senior roles at MSC Cruises and began her career in advertising at Ogilvy. Biffi holds a degree in statistics and economics from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and an executive certification in digital strategy for business from Columbia Business School. She is fluent in English, French, and Italian.



Barbara Biffi

employee welfare programs in the 1900s. Today, our culture and brand values emanate from our brand's legacy, rooted in a simple belief: exceptional hospitality starts with how we treat each other. Three values define both the experience we create for our guests and the experience we want our colleagues to have.

Respect – We celebrate different cultures, perspectives and personalities. We listen, value individual contributions and treat one another with sensitivity, fairness and grace.

Care – We look after our guests, our colleagues and the communities around us. We anticipate needs, support one another and create an environment where people can learn, grow and thrive.

Hedonism – We believe hospitality should bring joy. We take pride in creating beautiful, memorable experiences and encourage our people to enjoy the craft, creativity and pleasure of doing exceptional work together.

Will you highlight Kempinski's portfolio, and where you see opportunities for growth?

Over the last two years, we have deliberately taken an asset-heavier approach, recalibrating towards direct investment and ownership of landmark properties with a very clear intent: to control the guest journey from beginning to end and create truly differentiated guest experiences. Augustine Hotel, Prague, is the first acquisition to mark this significant strategic shift.

Our first objective is really to increase our European density, which is why Prague comes immediately into it. Second, we are looking at the U.S. and more luxury-leisure properties in key destination markets.

What are the key characteristics that define a Kempinski hotel?

Rather than pursuing uniformity, we believe that Kempinski's brand and portfolio strength lies in its collection of highly individual properties, many of which are historic architectural landmarks and are deeply resonant with the destinations' culture and community.

Will you discuss your career journey?

I started my career in 1999 in advertising at Ogilvy in Milan. I was working with high-profile international clients, including hotel chains. I fondly remember that my first client was an Italian hotel group, followed by American Express, where we supported the brand in its launch of the Centurion Card across Europe and Asia.

My career in the cruise industry started in 2004 with Silversea, the brand leader in ultra-luxury and experiential cruising, and that was my anchor in the travel and tourism industry.

What excited you about the opportunity to join Kempinski Group, and made you feel it was the right fit?

I believe that the luxury cruise industry has a great deal in common with hospitality, especially from a guest experience, marketing and digital perspective. It has been a wonderful transition and a valuable transfer of my experience and expertise to a luxury, pure-play brand like Kempinski.

How do you describe Kempinski's culture and values?

Kempinski has a long heritage of innovation in developing workforce culture, pioneering



Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski Munich - Ludwig Suite library



Augustine Hotel Prague Sundial Garden

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

For decades, luxury has meant the same room service in different postcodes. Beautiful lobbies, high thread counts and a concierge desk that hands you a map. But in a world where everything is on display, true luxury isn't another amenity. It's real, personalized access that no amount of money alone can buy.

Kempinski has recently launched a new hospitality concept called the E.R.A.s – or Experience Real Access – starting with Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten Kempinski Munich. Our hotel in Munich is no longer a refuge from the city; it is the gateway into it. We hand guests the keys to the city itself and ask every guest one simple question: what E.R.A. are you in?

Behind every one of these experiences stands a Resident Curator, who doesn't hand guests a map or book a concierge-recommended tour. Instead, they hand guests their own personal relationships with the local insiders who spend their lives shaping a city's culture and communities, and who alone can open the doors that bring a destination truly to life.

This is real access, personalized to every guest's travel needs and desires.

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Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?

My goal from a brand and marketing perspective is to take Kempinski Group from a collection of well-run hotels to a single, global experience brand. This starts with reclaiming our legacy in hospitality innovation and making it relevant for today's culture and our guests.

This goal is my north star, and I consistently focus my efforts on cross-functional alignment to achieve this goal – bringing to life what our brand stands for and the unique perspective it offers to the world.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership?

For me, the three main themes for effective leadership are trust, empowerment and vulnerability.

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

I truly believe that travel has the power to transform people and places. It has the potential to bring joy to people, enable cultural dialogue, and expose people to new skills and languages. It is an industry that allows people to grow and learn beyond the day-to-day job while helping other people create new memories and transform their lives. ●