

Connecting Guests To Nature

An Interview with Bernd Pichler, Regional Vice President and Area Managing Director, 1 Hotels



Bernd Pichler

EDITORS' NOTE Bernd Pichler has more than two decades of hospitality expertise gained from various hotel brands across the United States and internationally. Having joined Starwood Hotels in 2019 at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge and later at 1 Hotel Central Park, Pichler is Regional Vice President and Area Managing Director of 1 Hotels, overseeing the operation and development of the portfolio in New York City, its greater area and Toronto, Canada. He also serves on the board of New York City Tourism + Conventions. Prior to his tenure at 1 Hotels, Pichler held a series of prominent positions at top-tier properties, including the Ritz-Carlton Lake Tahoe and Fairmont Grand Del

Mar in San Diego. For over the course of the decade, he held leadership roles at additional Fairmont Hotels & Resorts in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, San Francisco, Sonoma and Pittsburgh. Pichler previously served on the team that opened The Langham London and held diverse sales and marketing positions at The Chelsea Toronto in Canada and The Leading Hotels of the World, where he represented the United Kingdom and the Nordic region. A native of Austria, Pichler is a certified sommelier and fluent in English, German, and Spanish. His academic accolades include a degree in international hospitality and tourism management and continued education at universities in Canada, Spain, and the U.S., most recently finishing the asset management program at Cornell University.

Will you discuss your career journey?

My career in hospitality has taken me across several countries, brands, and disciplines, which has given me a broad perspective on the industry. While I began my career as a chef, it was sales and marketing that brought me to Canada and several places in Europe before moving into hotel operations, where I discovered my passion for creating exceptional guest experiences.

Over the years, I had the opportunity to work with several renowned hospitality brands, including Fairmont Hotels & Resorts, where I held leadership positions in the Middle East and North America, as well as several positions with The Ritz-Carlton and Langham Hotels & Resorts. Those experiences helped shape my approach to service, operations, luxury hospitality, and commercial success.

I joined Starwood Hotels in 2019 at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge and later moved to 1 Hotel Central Park. A few years back, I was appointed Area Managing Director for New York, overseeing both properties and the development of our anticipated Hudson Valley project. Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to work with talented teams and ownership groups at iconic hotels, but what attracted me to 1 Hotels was the opportunity to combine luxury hospitality with a mission-driven approach centered on sustainability, well-being, and meaningful guest experiences. It's been incredibly rewarding to be part of the brand's growth and evolution over the past several years.

Will you provide an overview of 1 Hotels' properties in New York?

1 Hotels currently operates two properties in New York City: 1 Hotel Central Park and 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge. While each property has its own distinct personality, both are rooted in our mission of connecting guests to nature through sustainable design, thoughtful service, and a strong sense of

place. 1 Hotel Central Park offers an urban retreat in the heart of Manhattan, just steps from Central Park, while 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge is located alongside Brooklyn Bridge Park with sweeping views of the East River and Manhattan skyline. Together, they provide two unique perspectives on New York City while reflecting the core values of the 1 Hotels brand.

Will you highlight the strength of 1 Hotels' suite product?

New York is one of the world's most competitive luxury hospitality markets, and our suite offerings are designed to provide experiences that feel both exceptional and deeply connected to their surroundings. At 1 Hotel Central Park, the Park Penthouse is one of the property's most distinctive accommodations and the most recent addition to the hotel. Located on the 19th floor, it includes three suites and two guest rooms that can be reserved individually or combined into a private five-bedroom retreat. Guests enjoy expansive indoor and outdoor living spaces, floor-to-ceiling windows, and panoramic views of Central Park and the Manhattan skyline, creating a true sanctuary above the city.

At 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, the Riverhouse Suite offers a different but equally memorable experience. Positioned alongside Brooklyn Bridge Park, the suite features floor-to-ceiling windows that frame views of the East River, the Brooklyn Bridge, and the Manhattan skyline. The residential-style layout, generous living space, and connection to the surrounding landscape make it one of the most sought-after accommodations in Brooklyn.

Across both properties, our suites are designed to go beyond traditional luxury accommodations, offering a sense of place, privacy, and connection to nature that defines the 1 Hotels experience.

How has 1 Hotels approached its restaurant/food and beverage offerings, and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

At 1 Hotels, we've always viewed food and beverage as an extension of the guest experience rather than simply an amenity. Our goal is to create restaurants and bars that can stand on their own as neighborhood destinations while still reflecting the values of the brand. That starts with partnering with talented culinary teams, sourcing thoughtfully, and



1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge lobby



1 Hotel Central Park

creating spaces that feel authentic to the communities we're part of. In New York, that approach is reflected in our longstanding relationship with Chef Jonathan Waxman. At 1 Hotel Central Park, Jams showcases his seasonal, ingredient-driven approach to dining with a focus on locally sourced ingredients. More recently, we expanded that relationship with the opening of Barbuto Brooklyn at 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, bringing the celebrated Barbuto brand across the East River.

The key to success is creating concepts that resonate with both hotel guests and locals. When a restaurant or bar becomes part of the fabric of its neighborhood and delivers a consistently great experience, that's when it becomes truly successful.

How has 1 Hotels approached health and wellness?

Health and wellness have always been central to the 1 Hotels experience. Our philosophy is rooted in the idea that wellness should be integrated throughout a guest's stay rather than confined to a single amenity or space. From biophilic design and natural materials to nutritious dining options, movement, recovery, and restorative treatments, we aim to create environments that help guests feel their best while traveling.

In New York, that approach is reflected in several ways. At 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, guests can enjoy the Bamford Wellness Spa, which offers treatments rooted in holistic well-being and natural ingredients, as well as the Field House fitness center. At 1 Hotel Central Park, wellness is integrated throughout the guest experience, including in-room wellness amenities through our partnership with HigherDOSE, allowing guests to incorporate recovery and self-care into their stay from the comfort of their room, alongside fitness facilities and thoughtfully sourced culinary offerings.

The wellness landscape continues to evolve, and we are seeing growing interest in experiences that support both physical and mental well-being. Our role is to create spaces and programming that allow guests to recharge, reconnect with nature, and maintain their routines while away from home.

Will you discuss 1 Hotels' focus on offering personalized service and a customized guest experience?

Personalized service has always been a core part of the luxury hospitality experience, but today guests expect more than recognition. They want experiences that reflect their individual preferences, interests, and travel habits. At 1 Hotels, our approach is to combine genuine hospitality with technology and guest insights to create stays that feel thoughtful, seamless, and tailored to each individual. A key part of that strategy is 1 Hotels Mission Membership, our guest membership program designed to reward meaningful engagement with the brand while helping us better understand our guests' preferences over time. Through the program, members receive personalized benefits and experiences while also supporting environmental initiatives, creating a deeper connection between the guest and our mission.

Mission Membership offers exclusive experiences that reflect the character of each property. At 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, members can enjoy intimate family-style seasonal dinners hosted by Chef Jonathan

Waxman, bringing guests together over locally inspired cuisine in a setting that feels both personal and memorable. At 1 Hotel Central Park, members can take part in a one-on-one tequila tasting experience at Jams, where expert mixologists guide guests through a curated selection of premium tequilas while sharing the craftsmanship behind each spirit and the bar program's focus on sustainably produced agave.

Whether it's recognizing a returning guest's preferences, tailoring recommendations to their interests, or creating experiences that feel relevant to the reason they're traveling, our goal is to ensure every stay feels personal. The most successful luxury hospitality experiences are the ones where guests feel understood, and that's something we continue to invest in across the portfolio.

What do you feel are the keys to providing a true luxury hotel experience?

I believe true luxury comes down to delivering excellence consistently across every aspect of the guest experience. It's not just about beautiful design, spacious accommodations, or exceptional amenities. It's about ensuring that every interaction, from arrival to departure, feels effortless and thoughtfully executed.

Attention to detail is critical. Guests notice when every element of their stay has been carefully considered, whether that's the quality of the sleep experience, the dining program, the condition of the property, or the level of care provided by the team. The best luxury hotels create an environment where guests can fully relax because they know every detail is being handled.

At the same time, luxury continues to evolve. Today's travelers are increasingly focused on meaningful experiences, well-being, and authenticity. For us, true luxury is creating memorable experiences that feel genuine to both the guest and the destination while maintaining the highest standards of service and hospitality.

What has made the hospitality industry so special for you?

For me, hospitality has always been about people. We have the privilege of creating moments that guests remember for years – whether it's celebrating a wedding, welcoming a family on vacation, or simply making someone feel genuinely cared for after a long day of travel. What has kept me passionate throughout my career is that no two days are ever the same. Every day presents new challenges, new opportunities, and new people to learn from.

I've also been incredibly fortunate to work alongside talented teams whose passion, resilience, and commitment continue to inspire me. Buildings, brands, and beautiful hotels are important, but it's the people who create the magic. Watching individuals grow into confident leaders and seeing teams achieve things they didn't think were possible has been one of the most rewarding parts of my journey.

As my career has evolved, I've also developed a deep appreciation for the business side of hospitality. There is something incredibly rewarding about aligning exceptional guest experiences with strong commercial performance. When you build a culture where people feel empowered, guests feel genuinely cared for, and owners see sustainable returns on their investment, everyone wins. Working alongside ownership groups to grow asset value, strengthen market positioning, and create long-term success has shown me that great hospitality and great business are not competing priorities – they are inseparable.

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

Stay curious, stay humble, and never stop learning.

Hospitality is one of the few industries where attitude often matters more than experience. Technical skills can be taught, but genuine care for people, a strong work ethic, and a willingness to say "yes" to new opportunities will take you much further than you might imagine.

Don't be in a rush to reach the next title. Focus on mastering the role you're in, seek feedback, ask questions, and learn from everyone around you – regardless of their position. Some of the most valuable lessons I've learned have come from housekeepers, engineers, servers, and front desk agents.

Most importantly, remember that hospitality is a people business. If you take care of your team, your team will take care of your guests, and everything else – including commercial success – will follow. That's a lesson I've seen proven time and time again throughout my career. ●