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DANNY PECORELLI, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF EXCLUSIVE HOTELS AND VENUES EXPLAINS HOW A RELENTLESS APPROACH TO STANDARDS AND AN OPEN ATTITUDE TO INNOVATION AND PERSONALITY GO HAND IN HAND

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Take time away from tech



The festive season is done and dusted, and the transition from a busy, rampant Christmas trading period to the lull of January footfall is upon us. It's a tricky time to adjust and steady the ship ready to brace the next wave of business.

One thing that struck me recently was the reliance we place on technology. We are all guilty of walking along the pavement in busy towns, eyes down, glued to our phones as people hurry past, annoyed at our pace.

My daily commute and carriage upon carriage is filled with 'everyday robots' tirelessly working their thumbs through their daily social media feeds on their hand-held devices. Even when we snatch some time to relax in front of the television, an advert break sees us reach once again for our mobile phones, as the fear of missing an email / Instagram post / Tweet proves too much.

While it's great to stay connected, I'm going to be starting the year switching off for a bit. Not completely, but I will consciously make the decision to peel my eyes away from my phone from time to time, leave the emails unread until the morning and trust that I won't combust if I don't scroll through Twitter for a few hours. I'm going to embrace the chance to let the world around me inspire ideas.

For us, here at Boutique Hotelier we have a few things in the pipeline for 2018. Having had an impressive 50% growth YOY over the last two years online, we'll be looking to push our website offering further and elbowing our way amongst the big boys to ensure we are the go-to portal for hotel news and exclusive insight. As always we are dedicated to getting out and about in the industry, travelling the length and breadth of the country to meet readers, new faces and business owners with interesting stories to tell.

As always, don't hesitate to get in touch!

Editor
Zoe Monk
zoe.monk@itppromedia.com

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BOUTIQUE HOTELIER

PROMEDIA PUBLISHING LTD

16-25 Bastwick Street, London, EC1V 3PS, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 3176 4228
Fax: +44 (0)20 3176 4231

EDITORIAL

EDITOR Zoe Monk
Tel: +44 (0)20 3176 4237
zoe.monk@itppromedia.com

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Emma Calder
Tel: +44(0) 203 3176 4238
emma.calder@itppromedia.com

COMMERCIAL

GROUP COMMERCIAL MANAGER

Anne-Marie Judge
Tel: +44 (0)20 3176 5632
anne-marie.judge@itppromedia.com

COMMERCIAL MANAGER

Josh Waddell
Tel: +44 (0) 2031 764231
Josh.waddell@itppromedia.com

DIGITAL

Database Management

Vinod Alath, vinod.alath@itp.com

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION

Group Production & Distribution Director

Kyle Smith, kyle.smith@itp.com

Production & Systems Manager

Danny Corder, danny.corder@itppromedia.com

Outsourcing Manager

Aamar Shawwa, aamar.shawwa@itp.com

CIRCULATION

Subscription Customer Service

+44 (0)20 3176 4228
subscriptions@itppromedia.com

Web: www.boutiquehotelier.com
www.ITPPromedia.com

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Update

THE NEWS THAT GOT
HOTELIERS TALKING



EXCLUSIVE

Andrew Brownsword Hotels reveals plans to hit 20-property target within five years

The CEO of Andrew Brownsword Hotels has revealed plans to grow the group to a portfolio of 20 properties within the next five years.

Stephanie Hocking spoke exclusively to *Boutique Hotelier* about the brand's ambition to add another seven hotels to its stock, by the time the year 2021 rolls around.

Andrew Brownsword currently consists of iconic hotels including Gidleigh Park, Amberley Castle and the Bath Priory and Hocking, who joined in March 2016 from her role as operations director with Malmaison, explained that despite this year being particularly competitive for the group, acquisitions were at the 'top of the agenda' for 2018.

"When I just joined I had a simple brief from Mr Brownsword," she tells *BH*, "he wants to have an overgrowing quality throughout his hotels and to have happy customers and happy staff.

"We had 12 hotels (when I joined), and our ambition is to have 20 within the next five years, so growth was always on the agenda.

In September 2016, just six months after Hocking was appointed CEO, the group snapped up two new properties – The Imperial Torquay and Old Swan and Minster Mill in Oxfordshire, both of which will be undergoing development in 2018.

Andrew Brownsword owns the portfolio with his wife Christina, which consists of eight Andrew Brownsword hotels, plus the five-strong city boutique brand Abode, that has introduced new F&B concept, Brasserie Abode, into its locations such as Glasgow and Manchester over the last 12 months.

Hocking added that throughout both portfolios in 2017, rooms performance has been healthy, with occupancy stable and room rate having good growth also,

undeterred by the fast pace of the sector.

"The market has been very competitive this year," Hocking explains, "and we have to be able to move faster and faster and react more quickly to drive growth through the business.

"We have a planned approach to how we manage the pace of our business and we plan to be able to be reactive and we really measure what we do on pace.

"We will be looking, a year out, six months out, three months out, three weeks out, and we have planned slots in all our marketing and promotions that allow us to react if we feel we are falling off our pace. We've had to get quicker, sharper and more reactive."

Hocking also added that the reinvestment pot for maintaining standards throughout the portfolio is in the 'millions' each year, citing quality as 'incredibly important' for the group.

DEVELOPMENT NEWS

Permission granted for £10m redevelopment of The George Hotel in Colchester

After almost a year in the pipeline, planning permission has now been granted for the refurbishment and expansion of The George Hotel in Colchester.

In January 2017, Harwich-based developer Flying Trade Group, behind the Surya Hotels brand, submitted an application to completely renovate the 700-year-old building and convert the nearby St Nicholas House into a 44-bed hotel.

Work has now been given the green light by Colchester Borough Council and will begin in 2018.

Once complete, the two sites will run in collaboration, almost doubling the rooms available to 91.

St Nicholas House was previously used as a Co-op department store before becoming home to JJB Sports until 2009, when the space became vacant and has been ever since.

The project follows on from Flying Trade's construction of six apartments at One Castle Park, which also included the development of a coffee shop/archaeological exhibit - Claudius Gateway Museum.

Flying Trade plans to renovate and transform St Nicholas House and then use the 44 bedrooms created while it sets about restoring rooms at The George.

Flying Trade CEO, Suki Dulai said: "We have to ensure that we don't lose the historical atmosphere of the building."

Phase one of multi-million pound five-year renovation at Durham hotel gets underway

The first phase of a multi-million pound renovation project due to take place over five years has begun at a hotel in Country Durham.

The Grade-II listed Blackwell Grange Hotel is to undergo an extensive remodelling programme this year, which will see the interiors, public areas and function suites given a complete makeover.

The venue comprises 108 bedrooms, 11 function suites, three bars, a restaurant and leisure facilities.

Phase one will begin in Q1 2018 and will focus on the public areas, including the main reception and lounge, three function suites and three bars.

Dawn Raine, who has been general manager at the Durham property since 2005, said: "The investment will greatly enhance the Grade II-listed building for the long term.

"At Blackwell Grange we believe that the hospitality business is first and foremost about people; that each stay should be treated as a unique experience for the guests. We can't wait to give our beautiful hotel the restoration it deserves, and give Darlington a building of which it can be proud."

EXCLUSIVE

Soho House Group sets January launch date for newest London boutique

Soho House Group will open its latest masterpiece, with the launch of Kettner's Townhouse on January 9.

The group will unveil the 33-bedroom boutique in a few days' time, after an extensive refurbishment programme and will join Dean Street Townhouse as the second standalone hotel and restaurant open to the public from Soho House.

Heading up the new venture will be general manager, Conor Sheehan, who previously worked at 40 Greek Street, while head chef Jackson Berg will be at the helm in the kitchen.

The restaurant will be a French-inspired eatery and a Champagne bar, with original mosaic tiled floor and a striking early-deco 1920's design.

Each bedroom has been individually designed and inspired by the 1920s in a French boudoir style. They have original Georgian timber floorboards and fireplaces, with heritage windows and vintage pieces.

The Grade-II listed building, which was first established in 1867 by Auguste Nettner, was acquired from restaurant chain Pizza Express who owned the property prior the Soho House takeover.

Kettner's Townhouse will be part of the Soho House Group's brand of townhouses, which are said to become a standalone segment of the portfolio.

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RATED



FINDERS' KEEPERS

A Tottenham Hotspur footballer has uncovered a treasure trove in the basement of his hotel, which is said to be worth £1m.



PUBLIC ACCESS

Soho House's The Ned has opened its doors to all its ground floor restaurants to the public.



NEW YEAR FEAR

2018 looks challenging with flat occupancy levels and increasing overheads, despite positive global and EU growth.



SLUMP FOR TRUMP

Room rates at Trump Turnberry have fallen by 57 per cent since Trump became president.

EXPANSION NEWS

Watergate Bay Hotel reveals plans for new restaurant expansion to meet spike in demand

Watergate Bay Hotel in Watergate Bay, Newquay has revealed plans to build a new restaurant, to meet the increasing and changing demands of its visitors.

The hotel, which is owned and operated by the Ashworth family, is bidding to create the new 'Crab Shack' eatery and demolish and replace the existing lifeguard station to provide facilities for the RNLI and local life saving club.

The current lifeguard station is said to be in vital need of an upgrade, while the Watergate Surf Life Saving Club

currently has no indoor accommodation on the beach.

The restaurant would also have an 'enabling role', the owners said, as it would fund the additional facilities for the lifeguards and surf life saving club.

The team at Watergate Bay Hotel submitted a similar proposal to Cornwall Council earlier this year, but withdrew the plans after the Environment Agency expressed concerns.

A decision on the scheme is due to be made by Cornwall Council planners in due course.

Haverhill restaurant to add six boutique bedrooms in 2018 in £1m expansion on back of business boom

A family-run restaurant in Haverhill has revealed plans to open its first six boutique bedrooms in 2018, as part of an ambition plan to bring something new to the area and restore an iconic building.

The owners of Haverhill's Nine Jars Bistro have completed a £1m investment into the 17th century building to create six new bedrooms, due to open in 2018.

CXG Group acquired the derelict building in 2015 and had an 'ambitious vision' to bring something new and

fresh to Haverhill.

The first phase of the project saw a new Bistro open in late 2016, with the family-run restaurant proving successful within the first few months of launch.

Now another part of the building is to be reimagined as the Nine Jars Boutique Hotel, with its first six refurbished rooms ready to open during this year.

A third stage of development to open another six bedrooms will begin in 'due course', the owners said.

EXCLUSIVE

Sunborn London to relaunch into boutique sector armed with ambitions for two AA Rosettes

The four-star yacht hotel situated off the dock in the River Thames in East London is to be relaunched into the boutique sector, as it looks to grow its reputation under new management.

Sunborn London, which welcomed new general manager Arun Kumar in November, is to undergo a series of soft refurbishments prior to a 2018 relaunch.

The property, which is managed by ISS but privately owned, will give its

bedrooms, dining room and events space a soft refresh with new carpets and furnishings in a bid to reach the boutique sector and target more high-end leisure and corporate business.

The 131-bedroom property is currently home a Lands End restaurant, where Kumar wants to make it more about fine dining. "By the end of 2018 I had told my team I want to make the hotel 2 AA Rosette status," he says.

INDUSTRY NEWS**Six luxury treehouses to be added to the offering at Ramside Hall in next multi-million pound project**

Six luxury treehouses are to be added to the bedroom stock and offering at North East hotel Ramside Hall.

The new multi-million pound development will also see the hotel embark on its 'biggest bunker renovation project' to date at the championship Prince Bishop golf course, with an investment of £200k.

The new treehouses will mark another upgrade at the property, which has been on a rolling improvement programme since 2011, including the unveiling of a new £8m spa and bedroom wing.

Ramside Hall will open the treehouses this year, having been granted planning permission to build the addition behind one of its golf courses on site.

Ex-Tiller Girl sells Brockenhurst boutique off £1.5m guide price after four decades at the helm

The former famous Tiller Girl Avril Owton has sold her three-star Brockenhurst boutique hotel following over four decades in charge.

Owton, who took over Cloud Hotel on the outskirts of the New Forest National Park in the 1970s, has handed over the reins to experienced hotel operators Chris Legg and Stewart Wills, who had been looking to relocate.

The 17-bedroom hotel, comprising of three lounges, a bar, 50-cover restaurant conservatory, function room and one-bedroom owner's accommodation, was sold off a guide price of £1.5m after first going on the market in May 2016.

Owton: "Having owned the Cloud Hotel for over 42 years, I am delighted to be handing over the reins to seasoned hoteliers, Chris Legg and Stewart Willis who I am sure will continue to take the business from strength to strength."

Linthwaite House sets relaunch date back to 2018 as details of £10m makeover emerge

Leeu Collection has pushed back the reopening date of its Lake

District boutique Linthwaite House as further details of the hotel's £10m makeover emerge.

The hotel was originally intended to start operating again in December 2017, with work being completed on the new bedrooms in the first quarter of 2018. The decision has now been made to wait until all the work is finished before opening to guests from March 1, instead.

As part of the work at Linthwaite House, six Woodland Suites will be launched, featuring floor-to-ceiling windows and measuring an average 66 sq mtrs, as well as a renovation of the bedrooms in the main building.

New restaurant Stella will be focused on locally-sourced and organic produce, influenced by international chef Ritu Dalmia and her love for Italian cooking.

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MOVERS & SHAKERS

Chef Michael Wignall to depart Gidleigh Park

Gidleigh Park, part of Andrew Brownsword Hotels, has announced the departure of executive head chef Michael Wignall.

The luxury hotel in Devon first welcomed Wignall in January 2016, after Michael Caines left the role at the end of 2015.

Now Wignall will depart the property and look forward to ‘commencing a new venture of his own’.

He has had a hugely successful two years at the helm of Gidleigh Park, establishing many accolades and gaining the hotel two Michelin stars after just nine months of starting.

Wignall said that it had been a ‘pleasure’ to live and work in Devon and was ‘very proud’ of what he and his team had achieved.

“I’m now looking forward to my next venture which I will be announcing in the very near future,” he added.

Stephanie Hocking, CEO Andrew Brownsword Hotels comments: “Michael has brought a breath of fresh air to Gidleigh Park, and his cooking, innovation and style won Michelin and industry recognition incredibly quickly. We would like to thank Michael for all his efforts that have driven the dining experience forward.”

Gisborough Hall appoints new hotel manager as Kim Yardley steps down

North Yorkshire hotel Gisborough Hall is to see a change in management before the year is out, with Kim Yardley stepping down from his role to explore other interests.

The hotel, which became fully independent in March 2017 for the first time since it opened in 2002, will see the departure of Yardley as hotel manager who has worked at the property for the last 16 years.

Yardley has decided to cut back on

work and develop his hobbies, but will remain with the business as a consultant for the foreseeable future.

His departure means that long-standing employee Ruairidh Taylor has been promoted to the role of hotel manager.

Taylor first joined the business in 2002 as a waiter in Chaloner’s Restaurant and went on to become restaurant manager. Following a period lecturing at Middlesbrough College, he returned in 2015 as hotel operations manager.

Problem-plagued Heckfield Place appoints new general manager as opening date finally gets set for close of 2018

Heckfield Place, the country house hotel that has been plagued with delays since its initial launch date of 2012, has announced the appointment of a new general manager.

The 46-bedroom hotel has welcomed Olivia Richli to the role, which has previously been filled twice by hoteliers who have left the project just a short while after starting.

She has joined after opening Soneva Jani in the Maldives, having spent the last 18 years at Aman properties around the world.

She will officially start at Heckfield Place this month

Richli says: “I have been privileged to work in many beautiful corners of the world, and am so excited to be finally returning home to join the exceptional Heckfield Place. A team of uniquely talented people have created a place of intrinsic beauty where extraordinary things can happen, and I am very happy to become a part of this inspiring collaboration.”

The original plan was to open Heckfield Place – having been described as ‘world-beating’ – in time for the London Olympics in 2012, transforming the former 18th training centre and wedding venue into a new hotel.

BRIEFS FOR BUYERS

Top international mattress brand **Magniflex** is bracing to enter the UK hospitality market, following bumper success across the pond with hotels in the US. The brand, which already provides for some 35 million consumers around the globe, is bringing its Italian style and innovative design to UK shores, with an extensive range including over 100 accessories.



Registration has now opened for the 2018 edition of **Hotelympia**, which takes place on 5-8 March 2018. The event will include four contemporary shows, united under one roof, as part of a fresh new identity. The four new shows are The Professional Kitchen Show, The Foodservice Show incorporating Café Commerce, Hospitality Tech Show and Interiors and Tableware Show.



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MARKET NEWS

Two die in fire at Scotland's Cameron House Hotel

Two people died and others injured in a fire at luxury Scottish hotel, Cameron House in Loch Lomond.

Firefighters confirmed they were called to the property on the banks of the Loch at 6.40am one December morning, as the blaze took hold in the main house of the five-star property.

More than 200 guests were evacuated and two people died, one at the scene, while another died after being taken to the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley. Three others, including a child, were taken to hospital for treatment and later released.

Police Scotland said the hotel, near Balloch, had been extensively damaged and the fire could be seen for miles across the Loch.

A statement from Andy Roger, resort director at Cameron House Hotel, said: "At approximately 6:40am on Monday 18th December 2017 there was a large fire at Cameron House Hotel. Emergency services were alerted and guests were evacuated to the nearby Boat House Restaurant while Scottish Fire & Rescue, Scottish Ambulance Service and Police Scotland arrived on scene.

"The safety and well-being of our guests, employees and neighbours is our first priority, and our deepest condolences are with the families of those affected.

"We are working closely with the authorities to determine the cause of the fire, and to provide support to our guests and the families of those affected."

Owners of Seiont Manor hotel plan for £5m expansion as business picks up for 2018

The owners of Seiont Manor hotel in Wales are one step closer to getting the green light for a £5m expansion on site, as they look ahead to a healthy 2018 in business.

Paul and Rowena Williams from Rural Retreats & Leisure took over the property near Llanrug last year from Hand Picked Hotels and now plan to extend the facilities in a bid to encourage more local people to visit.

The plans, which have currently been agreed 'in principle', include a restaurant extension, the expansion of leisure facilities and a new purpose-built function suite and bedrooms, plus luxury lodges in the grounds.

Now, the next step is applying for a detailed planning application.

Rikki Reynolds, operations director for the brand, said that it was a 'major step forward' for the hotel, which is looking ahead to a profitable 2018. He said the project would provide a 'much-needed' source of income to make the hotel sustainable for the future and safeguard all its employees.

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10 HOT HOTEL HEADLINES

Yorkshire Dales hotel appoints first general manager as business builds 1

Three-year-old Beck Hall Hotel in Malham is owned and operated by husband and wife team Andrew and Louise Macbeth.

CARE HOME TRANSFORMATION SEES NEW 14-BEDROOM BOUTIQUE BORN IN SCARBOROUGH 2

ST MARTIN'S LODGE HAS NOW BECOME THE CHAPEL HOUSE HOTEL & RESTAURANT, AFTER ANDREW AND MICA WYATT BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO THE BUILDING.

Family boutique business gets another member with the launch of new Dublin hotel due in 2018 3

Brian and Sally McGill will launch Iveagh Garden Hotel following the transformation of the former Pinebrook House offices into a new 152-bed boutique.

4

FIRST LOOK: SEAHAM HALL UNVEILS NEW LUXURY LOFT SUITE

The new space features dramatic high ceilings, giant angel wings, white-washed exposed beams and art-deco style furniture.

FAMILY-OWNED BOUTIQUE HOTEL TO OPEN IN SOUTHEND IN JANUARY AFTER £4M RENOVATION 5

Seven Hotel will be a luxury 37-bedroom boutique once it opens, complete with 70-cover Aurum Restaurant and gin-centric bar.

SWINDON-BASED BREWERY SNAPS UP COTSWOLD HOTEL FOR ALMOST £2M 6

THE PRIORY INN IS A 'THRIVING' BUSINESS, WITH ANNUAL TURNOVER INCREASING FROM £400K IN EXCESS OF £1.3M OVER THE LAST 13 YEARS.

FIRST LUXURY FULLY-ACCESSIBLE £6.5M HOTEL SET FOR WORCESTER 7

TIM HOPKINS, CEO OF PROPERTY FIRM GEMINI GROUP, PURCHASED THE ELMS HOTEL IN JUNE WITH PLANS TO TURN IT INTO A LUXURY GETAWAY FOR PEOPLE WITH LIMITED MOBILITY.

Ramsgate's Royal Harbour Hotel pledges to cut plastic pollution 8

The hotel's Empire Room restaurant has announced a Tiffin Club scheme, after owner James Thomas was inspired by a BBC documentary.

THE ARCH WELCOMES NEW GM FROM COURTHOUSE HOTEL SHOREDITCH 9

THE 82-BED PROPERTY, WHICH IS OPERATED BY AB HOTELS, HAS APPOINTED RAY GOERTZ AS GM, WHO TAKES OVER FROM EVA MOUNT WHO HAS LEFT THE HOTEL TO JOIN THE ATHENAEUM.

Artist Residence in Oxfordshire achieves five stars and two Rosettes 10

Mr Hanbury's in South Leigh launched in July following a complete transformation of the former 16th century pub into a five-bed boutique.

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MAKING EXCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES COUNT

HEADING UP ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE HOTEL COLLECTIONS IN THE COUNTRY, DANNY PECORELLI, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF EXCLUSIVE HOTELS AND VENUES EXPLAINS HOW A RELENTLESS APPROACH TO STANDARDS AND AN OPEN ATTITUDE TO INNOVATION AND PERSONALITY GO HAND IN HAND TO FORM THE BLUEPRINT FOR THE SUCCESSFUL BRAND.

When out and about interviewing hoteliers, owners and managing directors of some of the best boutiques in the country, there is one name which keeps cropping up when I ask who they admire in the industry. And when I sat down at Lainston House in Winchester to chat to Danny Pecorelli, it's clear to see why Exclusive Hotels and Venues has struck such a chord with so many.

The group has blossomed since its conception in the 1980s into one of the leading lights of the hospitality sector, and now operates four hotels and two venues dotted around the South. Each of the hotels are luxury, five-star properties, with innovative food and drink experiences and first-class facilities that are proving both longevity and resilience in the sector.

And the best bit? The whole business is owned by the Pecorelli family, with Danny having been committed to the hotels and its people for almost the last two decades.

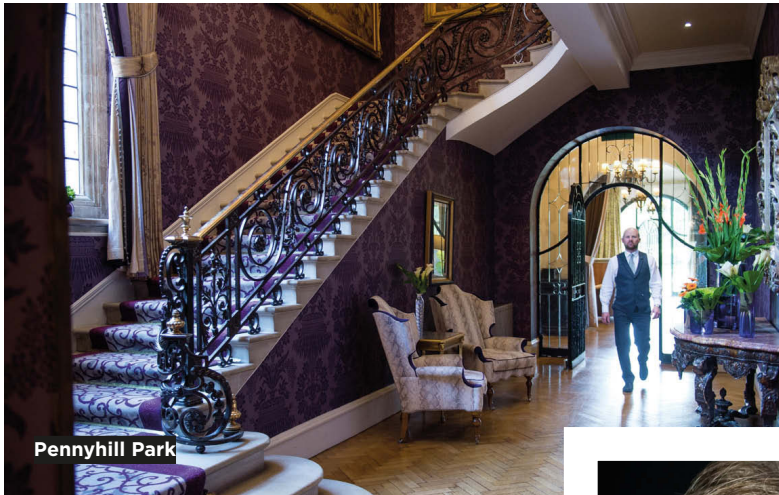
“We are relentlessly focused on creating happiness in amaz-

ing places, making customers and staff happy,” explains Pecorelli. “Our staff retention is way above industry standards and we are constantly finding ways to engage, push and train staff and finding ways to look after them and in turn looking after the customer.”

The group was founded by ex-forte executive Guiseppe Pecorelli who took on the group's debut property Pennyhill Park in Surrey in 1982.

When his father moved to the role of chairman in 1997, Danny was appointed managing director, in charge of looking after what had become a hugely successful collection of country house hotels, including South Lodge, Lainston House and the Manor House in Castle Combe which had also been added to the fold.

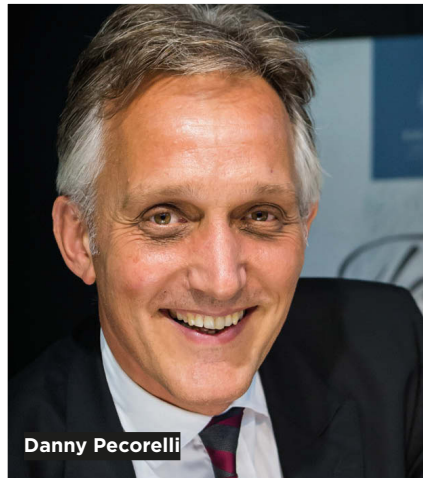
In May 2011, the group bought Royal Berkshire, located in Ascot and then later Fanhams Hall in Ware, Hertfordshire to become the Venues under the



Pennyhill Park



Lainston House



Danny Pecorelli

group's umbrella.

While some might say Danny was destined to take over the family business, after undertaking a training programme at the likes of London's Savoy hotel, he spent a year working in the USA for Sheraton, in a stint he deems as 'great experience' in learning the intricacies of how a big business ticks.

It wasn't until 1991 he joined the family business and was appointed general manager of South Lodge hotel in his first 'proper' job. "There are pros and cons of a family business," he says, "and we compete against some very well-structured businesses, so my time in the US meant I gained a lot of experience.

"My dad is hugely proud that I came to work in the family business, but at the same time you have to be very careful to divorce the father / son relationship – it's a rare thing for it to work. Something like 87% of them don't make second generation and 95% don't make third generation. It's an interesting dynamic. You go through some tough times and then have to make the rule to not chat work over Sunday lunch!"

Danny's vision

F&B was a clear focus for Pecorelli when he was handed the reins from his

“ A LOT OF IT ISN'T ROCKET SCIENCE BUT IT'S TRYING TO MAKE IT A LITTLE LESS 'HOTELY' ”

father, and he immediately knew that he wanted to evolve this segment of the business. His strategy worked and each of the four hotels in the group now boast reputations for their food offerings alone. At the peak, the group has held four Michelin stars across three restaurants (Latymers at Pennyhill Park with two, the Pass at South Lodge and ByBrook at the Manor House) and 19 AA Rosettes and lured some talented chefs to take up residence in the kitchen.

In 2007, Michael Wignall joined as executive head chef at Pennyhill Park in the first real chef coup for the group, while an extensive investment into South Lodge meant fine-dining restaurant the Pass was created, and food across the portfolio was on the front foot.

Despite the collection now holding just two Michelin stars – "we lost them when the chefs went" – Pecorelli explains that dining is always something that they are hoping to 'push more'.

"You look now and it feels very different and is a lot more experimental.

The way you treat people is different. On the food front I really wanted to evolve it. Food was a big thing, both at the Michelin-star level and the more relaxed level. We did have four stars which was a fantastic achievement for an independent group and then we lost them but now we are back up to two and are hoping to push that more.

"Afternoon tea; now we sell tens and tens of thousands of afternoon teas and we turnover more on that than we do on lunch – that wasn't even a thing 20 years ago."

Train and retain

Exclusive Hotels and Venues has nurtured some real foodie greats and the group has born some hugely talented chefs, who have been given the freedom and creativity to shine through and develop. Pecorelli's interest in encouraging future hospitality stars also saw the launch of the Exclusive Chefs' Academy, which is dedicated to giving aspiring chefs the opportunity to train with the group.

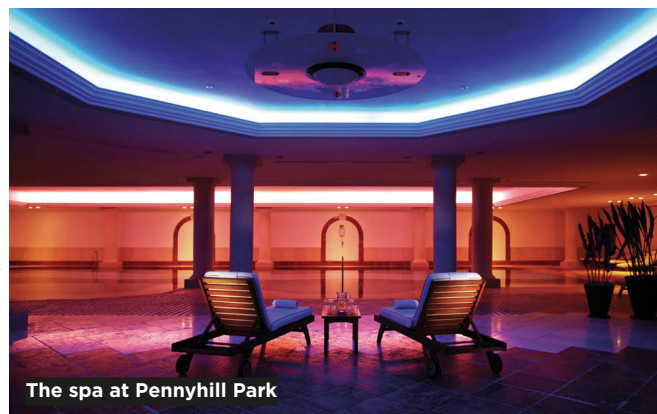
The intensive programme gives budding chefs the chance to learn in two years what might typically take five and gives each trainee experience across the brand's restaurant portfolio, seeing exactly how service works in busy, five-star kitchens.

A similar training scheme for spa therapists is also soon to start as well.

It's these training platforms and attention to staff evolution that ensures the longevity of so many employees within the Exclusive group, putting in programmes that help to fill the educa-



South Lodge



The spa at Pennyhill Park

tional gaps.

“It’s tougher to get staff, it’s not impossible,” Pecorelli says. “We set up a lot of infrastructure to train and develop staff and we’ve invested very heavily into that and it’s now paying dividends. We’ve had five years on the trot of improving retention every year.”

Exclusive Hotels now employs over 700 people and is reported to have an annual turnover of £49m; no mean feat for a family-run business that started with one modest hotel by one man.

Keeping up with the peaks and troughs in trading combined with the demands of guests and how people ultimately want to consume things requires a constant focus on what’s going on around you. Pecorelli explains that he strives to ‘think differently’ and is inspired by most things, ripping pages out of magazines and experiencing new things to catch on to new ideas.

He says: “We were the first to put Aquavision TVs in the bathrooms and now everyone is doing it so we needed to think of the next thing. Now in some of the suites at Pennyhill Park we have put in horizontal showers and no one out there is doing that.

“We’ve put falconry in here (Lainston House) and I was worried it might be a bit old fashioned, but actually it’s been so en vogue for us. We have a vulture and that is a different angle for us on that aspect.”

It’s this stringent approach that keeps the business evolving; conjuring up new innovations gives guests a reason to return. This year the two venues – The Royal Berkshire and Fanhams Hall – will benefit from the installation of dedicated new creative zones, with table football, ice cream machines, popcorn makers, Astroturf lawns and putting greens pushing the boundaries of a traditional meeting space as Pecorelli stresses the importance of keeping the meeting product ‘really current’.

Spa at South Lodge

2018 will also see a major new expansion completed within the portfolio. The Spa at South Lodge will be the result of a £14m creation of a three- and four-storey spa, complete with 14 treatment rooms, pool, thermal suite and gym, as well as a spin studio, nail bar and male grooming bar, when it opens its doors at the end of the summer in 2018. It’s promising to be a showstopper with ef-

forts being made to ensure every finer detail is considered.

“We always look at things from a hotelier’s point of view and work out how everything is going to be different at every touch point. We didn’t put in a retail area at Pennyhill so we have done at South Lodge and we wanted to make it different so we’ve created a bit of a play area. We have stocked all the testers with two mirrors and two chairs so people can come and have a go, plus we’ve put a fridge in the hairdressers with beers and will offer a glass of fizz too.

“A lot of it isn’t rocket science but it’s trying to make it a little less ‘hotely’.”

Business analysis

Each hotel in the group runs to a set brand framework, but Pecorelli stresses that while there are these perimeters, each manager is given the freedom to roll out something to unique to their own property. “You have got to allow people the freedom to put their own stamp on it and I don’t mind as long as it’s got personality,” he adds.

Adding personality is great, but it’s been made even more difficult this year with the increasing cost pressures facing every business in the industry.

Pecorelli says despite this, the group has ‘grown organically’ putting it down to a mixture of clever strategising and expansion that keeps the group safely in the black.

“We tend to do a combination of growth through average room rate or price increases or better yielding and then always having projects on the go that are expanding our revenue opportunities,” he adds.

The latest acquisition in January

TALKING BREXIT...

“There is still people coming into the UK but the mix has changed. We’ve seen some really good Polish guys go back, which is a shame. We employ 31 nationalities at last count, so we are seeing our mix change more with Romanians, Bulgarians, coming in. We were 61% Brits and 29% Rest of the World.

“I don’t tend to worry about it too much because nobody really knows and you can talk yourself into a corner, so just knuckle down, focus on the guys who are working for you, focus on building your employee brand so good people want to come and work for you, and then see what happens.”

MASTER INNHOLDERS GENERAL MANAGER CONFERENCE

Danny is also vice chairman of Master Innholders and comes up with the content agenda for January's conference. The title of this year's event is 'The Spirit of the Time' and commemorates the 40th anniversary of The Master Innholders, held on the January 15 and 16 at the De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms in London.

- **Cyber security, the evolution of food, brand creations, hotel design and business leadership** will be topping the agenda at The Master Innholders 25th General Managers' Conference.
- **The New Innovators session**, presented by co-founder of ZZZ Oliver Rees, will focus on enhancing disruptors' mindsets and demystifying cyber technology.
- Hospitality consultant Amanda Afiya will chair a panel **debate on food trends** with expert input from Gorgeous Group founder Robbie Bargh, store director of

Selfridges David Jarvis and chef patron of Tredwells & group operations director of Marcus Wareing Restaurants Chantelle Nicholson.

- Brand consultant Tim Watson will share his expertise on **simplifying the process of brand creation**.
- Can Faik, editor of SPACE and Hotel Spec, will chair a panel debate between leading international hotel, spa and restaurant interior designers to **discuss the future of hotel design**. Together they will assess and challenge the current philosophies of design and discuss how they can best be utilised to drive revenue, loyalty and innovation.
- **Rio 2016 Gold Medalist hockey player Crista Cullen MBA** will share her experience of running a medal winning team and successful business. Leadership and business expert Nigel Risner will demonstrate to delegates

how they can operate their businesses at peak performance whilst winning the hearts and minds of their teams.

Always one not to miss, Danny wanted to bring topics to the fore that challenged the norm and encouraged people to think outside the box. "I've gone forget Brexit, because there is almost no point in discussing it, it's what's interesting at the time. I want hoteliers to learn and be challenged by it and come away thinking about it.

"It's thinking about what's your rule book? Because if you've got the same rulebook as everybody else, then you become the same. There is a lot of very good five-star hotels out there but they are all the same, so how do you differentiate yourself?"

All the money raised from the conference goes back into funding Master Innholder scholarships, at Cornell University, Lausanne and Cranfield, which are open to everyone.

2017 was the 11-bedroom pub in Castle Combe, located down the same road as The Manor House, which was never in the plans but was sold to Exclusive as a result of the former owner bringing the opportunity to Pecorelli before it even went to market.

He says that the pub added £1m of business this last year and he is expecting the spa to bring in £4m 'pretty quickly'. Pecorelli is also planning to add in a micro brewery to the pub at Castle Combe, adding to the experiential aspect that consumers are hungry for.

The pressures on costs for Exclusive have been 'relentless' this year, and the group has had to absorb just under £600k of rates increase, £120k of apprentice levy costs, £120k of utilities and wage roll, if the group made no changes, would go up by £1.4m.

He says: "You have so much pressure on cost, if you physically add footprint it helps and it's one way of staying ahead. The Manor House was 48 rooms and the

reality is that model is getting tougher and tougher so you've got to expand."

Weddings have been flat this year for Exclusive, but with the spa development being constructed at South Lodge, Pecorelli admits that 'nobody wants to get married surrounded by building work'. MICE has grown, but it's always been a major focus for the brand. "We've always work on that (MICE) our business split is 40% MICE, 40% leisure and then 20% weddings, functions, events.

"It's always been like that and actually one of the reasons we've always been able to grow because even when the recession hit, far more leisure went through, so we changed our mix to more leisure, but now meetings is coming back we push that down a bit more and we always try and keep in those two markets."

Expansion

Looking back on the natural expansion of Exclusive Hotels, it's been around one

acquisition every five years, as Pecorelli says they are not a company aiming to make money by 'flipping businesses' and wants to leave a legacy he can pass down to his children. He admits that often an opportunity comes along that he has to turn down; as a private family group, he stresses that earning a living and ensuring there is enough money in the investment pot is number one priority.

"You have to be quite pragmatic with it, because it's not often that the right property comes along, at the right price at the right price. Occasionally I've had to walk away from stuff I would've loved to have done."

For Pecorelli, he sees a long future here. "It's a very personal thing. There are still quite a few things I want to get done, build a few rooms at Pennyhill Park, build some more rooms at Royal Berkshire and I've probably another hotel in me. You've got to enjoy it, I absolutely love this industry and that's the key thing." ■

KITCHEN DESIGN FOCUS

DESIGNING A FIRST-CLASS KITCHEN

WE GIVE YOU AN AVALANCHE OF INFORMATION ON KITCHEN CONFIGURATION, PRODUCT SOURCING AND DESIGNING THE BEST FIT OUT TO ENSURE YOUR FOOD SERVICE IS AS SEAMLESS AS POSSIBLE FROM CREATION TO THE PASS AND ONTO PLATE.

THE CHEF'S PERSPECTIVE...

MICHELIN-TRAINED CHEF CRAIG MATHER HEADS UP THE KITCHEN AT THE EMPIRE ROOM RESTAURANT AT THE ROYAL HARBOUR HOTEL, RAMSGATE. HE HAS HELD THE POSITION FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS AND WORKS CLOSELY WITH OWNER JAMES THOMAS TO DECIDE ON THE DESIGN AND FEEL OF THE FOOD AT THE 30-COVER RESTAURANT.

Ensure everything is within close

proximity. I have just been helping one pub redesign their kitchen, the space is good for the size of restaurant but the plans had no refrigeration and preparation/unit space where the cooking area was so the chefs would have had to walk across the kitchen each time to get something out of the fridge.

Don't always take the kitchen companies plans and prices first time.

Speak to other restaurateurs or chefs for their opinions rather than having it put in then realising the problems after.

The budget has to be managed. It's so easy to want the highest quality but that does cost a lot of money. Think about the food prices you will be charging and does that warrant the Rolls Royce of kitchen ranges.

Buy what is needed for the style of food you have planned. If a pub with a traditional menu is planned then a larger fryer and a char grill maybe needed but for a small restaurant serving a more refined style of food you would probably only need a small table top fryer but maybe a plancha or a solid top stove as well as a stove.

Having a brand new sparkling kitchen where there's not enough work space or refrigeration to hand with close proximity to the cooking and serving area then the chef or chefs are not going to be able to the full benefit of the redesign.



SPACE MANAGEMENT

WE SPOKE TO THE KITCHEN EXPERTS TO GET THE INSIDER KNOWLEDGE ON HOW TO BEST UPGRADE YOUR EQUIPMENT AND CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOLS TO FIT YOUR SPACE.



A SINGLE COMBI CAN DO THE JOB OF SEVERAL SEPARATE PIECES OF EQUIPMENT"

SAYS SIMON LOHSE, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF RATIONAL UK

Compact multifunctional combi ovens are ideal when upgrading kitchen equipment as they relieve the pressure on space in the kitchens. and can cook just about everything.

Combi ovens, such as the Rational Self-CookingCenter, can roast, poach, bake, toast, braise, steam, grill and pan fry - all at the touch of a button and all with consistent quality. Everything from fish to bread to pizza can be cooked to perfection in a combi oven.



KITCHEN DESIGN FOCUS

“MODERN MACHINES MEAN PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE CAN BE MORE PROACTIVE”

SAYS PAUL CROWLEY, MARKETING DEVELOPMENT MANAGER OF WINTERHALTER UK

A successful kitchen design, and the best use of space, considers how many dishes need to be washed and looks at the throughput of the warewasher – will it cope?

Planning workflow, such as working out how to get the dirties to the wash area, then get them back to the service area when they're clean, is also an integral part of kitchen design.

For smaller venues there is a choice of undercounter dish and glasswashers. For larger operations utensil washers, pass through and rack machines are available. Redesigning the kitchen area is a chance to get the latest equipment and streamline operations. Operators should look

for the latest energy saving systems when purchasing new warewashing. Manufacturers are making great strides in producing more environmentally-friendly warewashers, which can significantly cut operating costs.

Lack of maintenance will ultimately contribute to the long-term failure of a machine. If it is well looked after, serviced regularly, cleaned properly, the manufacturer's guidelines followed and thorough training provided for staff, the lifecycle of a product should be very long indeed and it will work at optimum efficiency.

Modern machines mean preventative maintenance can be more proactive than ever. For example, a



full diagnostics can be conducted by connecting machines to a laptop. Or a machine can be set up to notify the operator when preventative maintenance is due, with a symbol on its control panel.

Connected equipment will bring a whole new and different type of efficiency to kitchens. Operators can monitor equipment like never before and will be able gain efficiencies because of the power of the data at their fingertips. These are efficiencies like reduced downtime through identifying components that are about to fail.



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KITCHEN DESIGN FOCUS



THIS YEAR WE'VE SEEN OPERATORS SHOWING KEEN INTEREST IN INDUCTION RANGES"

SAYS SHAUNE HALL, PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CHEF, FALCON FOODSERVICE EQUIPMENT

Naturally the equipment operators buy reflects the latest food trends. This year we've seen operators showing keen interest in induction ranges with fan assisted ovens, pump filtration fryers, chargrills (both gas and electric) and integrated sous vide / water baths.

When upgrading equipment look at build quality, durability, performance, 'cleanability' and user-friendly controllability. With the increase in theatre kitchens and front of house cooking, aesthetics will continue to be an important buying factor.

That's where the latest cooklines, such as our F900 series, really score. They deliver the looks and hygiene benefits of a one-piece top with the functionality of a modular suite. What's really important is that, as well as looking great, they make life easier for everyone - easier to access for service, maintenance and cleaning, and it's easier to rearrange units in case of a change of menu, change of chef or a breakdown.

Buyers will be paying more and more attention to aesthetics, along with ease of cleaning and servicing.



Energy efficiency is going to continue to be a growing consideration - the more efficient the equipment, the more desirable it will be.

BH PRODUCT PICK



Name of product: Bespoke cooking suite with induction for GBR at Dukes Hotel.

Suitable for? The design and installation for GBR demonstrates the flexibility of Valentine/ Cuisinequip cooking suites for boutique hotels.

About: In this busy environment induction cooking comes into its own as Dukes London's executive head chef Nigel Mendham explains: "I knew all about the theory behind induction cooking and for the launch of GBR we switched from gas powered range cooking to induction from Cuisinequip. We now have a much better working environment for the kitchen brigade, and I think it's 100 times better in terms of speed and accurate cooking control. The whole team has taken to induction extremely well and it is making a great impact on positive service."

Web address: www.valentinefryers.com
www.cuisinequip.com



MANUFACTURERS ARE DESIGNING EQUIPMENT THAT CAN OFFER A MINIMAL FOOTPRINT"

SAYS SIMON FROST, DIRECTOR OF SALES & CHAIN ACCOUNTS, HOSHIZAKI UK

Available space is one of the most common constraints for hoteliers when specifying equipment for a kitchen. As technology and manufacturing capabilities enhance, manufacturers are designing equipment that can offer a minimal footprint, yet achieve maximum capacity.

Designed to fit where other cabinets are either too small or too big, the Gram Compact Range Compact units feature a choice of different heights and widths, each intended to suit the bespoke needs of a busy catering environment. Using the latest technology, the cabinets also offer excellent energy efficiency standards, outstanding build quality and an unparalleled reliability.

Similarly, with ice machines, operators can choose from a huge range of units from a host of manufacturers. The Emerald Class range of ice machines feature the naturally occurring R290 refrigerant. Innovative technology controlled via microcomputers monitors and manages the production process to ensure the optimum amount of ice is produced at any one time, despite a compact footprint.



KITCHEN DESIGN FOCUS

UNDER THE HOOD

WE DISCOVER HOW SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S BEST BOUTIQUES TOOK ON THE TASK OF STREAMLINING SERVICE AND CREATING A MASTERPIECE IN THE KITCHEN FOR THEIR CHEFS.

THE COTTAGE IN THE WOOD & 1919 RESTAURANT AND BAR, MALVERN

Length of kitchen redesign:

One month

Budget: £45K**Covers in the restaurant now:** 76**What work was done?**

Alongside the renovation of the 1919 Restaurant and Bar, the reconfiguration of the kitchen's storage spaces and positioning of the pass were key undertakings of the redesign. All kitchen equipment was replaced including stoves, hot tops, fridges, ovens and the chefs pass.

What were the main considerations?

The main consideration for the space was to ensure the new kitchen layout

and equipment would allow for an efficient operation which could cope with a 50% increase in covers to the restaurant. Following the development of all 1919 menus, the kitchen also needed to provide enough prep space to increase the intricacy of dishes, and house all the equipment. Ensuring that the whole kitchen was utilised fully and in the most efficient manner was also a significant factor, while future-proofing the kitchen so that it could adapt to new demands as the hotel's refurb plans continue.

What was the chef's number one priority?

The 1919 Restaurant and Bar's head

chef, Mark Redwood, wanted to guarantee that the layout of the kitchen was appropriate for the number of covers in the restaurant, and ensure the right equipment was to hand to enable experimentation with different ingredients and dishes.

Suppliers used? The main supplier used for the refurbishment was Nisbets Catering Equipment, which supplied equipment such as a Hoshizaki Ice machine, Foster prep fridges, a Robo mixer, and Vogue shelving. A variety of items from Parry and Rationale were also installed, alongside new table-top convection ovens, and gas rings, a chargrill and equipment from the Falcon Dominator range.



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Available on Gram refrigeration products, excludes the Compact, Standard Plus, Snowflake GII and chest freezer products.

KITCHEN DESIGN FOCUS

ODDFELLOWS ON THE PARK, CHEADLE, MANCHESTER



Length of kitchen redesign: Initial designs were created by Sterling Food Service Design in January 2016. Final design agreed and placement of orders in May 2106 with C & C Catering Equipment Ltd. The kitchen was completed in line with the hotel opening in April 2017.

Budget: Much of the budget was tied into construction costs. The budget for equipment and installation was circa £250k. The main cooking equipment was specified to be Charvet so the budget had to be

achieved around this.

What work was done?

It was a brand-new kitchen, created around the restoration of a Victorian hall. The challenges lay in the Victorian building where a basement needed converting for the prep kitchen and cold stores. The main kitchen on the ground floor also needed new build construction to create the space. C & C used their fabrications arm to create a bespoke stainless steel fabricated finish where the attention to detail is critical in the

successful installation

What were the main considerations for the space?

The space had to be created within the constraints of the building and the planned operations within the hotel. The hotel had to carve out and create the space necessary for the specification of kitchen that was required.

What was the chef's number one priority?

At the time of early design, there was no chef appointed. Simon Radley consulted and led the design from Oddfellows Hotels and the priority was a kitchen that worked under the busy constraints of not only the food and beverage operation, but events and occasions. There was also the need for quality and longevity. Head chef, Ian Moss came on board during the final stages and his priorities aligned with Radley's original strategy.

Suppliers used? Charvet, Williams Cold Rooms, Gram Cabinet Refrigeration, C&C Stainless Steel Fabrications, Leightech Extraction System, Unox Combination Ovens, Scotsman Ice Machine.

“THE CHALLENGES LAY IN THE VICTORIAN BUILDING”



KITCHEN DESIGN FOCUS

THE SALUTATION, SANDWICH, KENT

Length of kitchen redesign:

12 months design, six months execution.

Budget: Always more than you expect.

Covers in the restaurant now: 70

What work was done?

The kitchen and restaurant have taken over what was formerly the private end of the house, which meant stripping everything back from the existing domestic kitchen, living room and boot room to start again from scratch. As the owners pared back to the original structure, the design evolved to incorporate the re-emerging architectural features. For examples, beautiful Lutyen's arches that had originally been boxed off were re-incorporated to house independent chef stations, in turn freeing up space to reconfigure the pass and so on.

ONE OF THE KEY THINGS ALWAYS TO BEAR IN MIND WAS TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT WAS GOING TO BE GREAT TO WORK IN"

What were the main considerations for the space?

The requirements of a Grade-I listed building framed much of what was done – both in terms of conservation considerations and an overriding desire to let the beauty of the architecture shine through. The space has a towering glass atrium above the pass, sets of columns, archways and fireplaces all incorporated – all the sorts of things that cause headaches for designers who secretly prefer to start with a square box. On top of which, it was always the intention



that the kitchen would be visible to guests, so sightlines from different seats started to become extremely important, as well as the overall visual impact of the space.

What was the chef's number one priority?

As per the above, the design was really a fine balancing act between listing requirements, aesthetic considerations and the need to have an optimally configured workspace for the kitchen team. One of the key things always to bear in mind was to create an environment that was going to be great to work in, that would be somewhere the team enjoyed

spending time. So it's full of natural light, everything is where it should be, and the chefs have the unusual opportunity to directly interact with guests in the Tasting Room, which overlooks the whole thing.

Suppliers used and equipment installed?

Salix were the lead designers and oversaw the primary install. Owners have also been working with a Charvet range and refrigeration mostly by Williams, including the large walk-in fridge and freezer. Winterhalter has been the choice for all of the plate-and-glass-wash, with Hoshizaki the brand preferred for ice-making.

ON-TREND TIPPLES

BREXIT, TRUMP, SNAP ELECTIONS, NUCLEAR TESTS, A ROYAL ENGAGEMENT AND A GLOBAL WINE SHORTFALL HAVE ALL MADE THE LAST 12 MONTHS OR SO A LITTLE MORE EVENTFUL THAN WE EXPECTED. HERE MAJESTIC DETAILS THE WINE TRENDS THAT ARE SET TO HIT THE HEADLINES AND GET SALES FLOWING NEXT YEAR.

1. Bigger = better

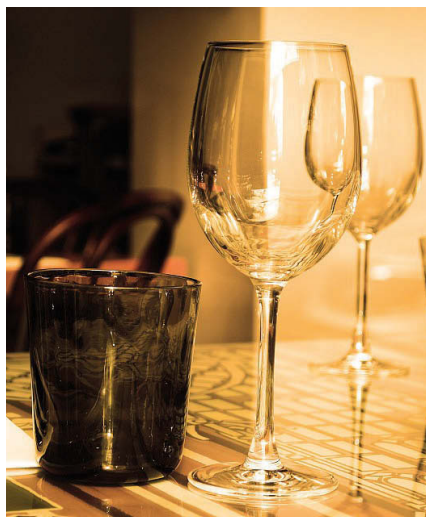
Magnums are big news. In 2017 already, we've seen a 378% increase in year-on-year sales of super-sized bottles under £20. Rosés and house reds in 1.5 litre measures are proving particularly popular for weddings and parties, where a big celebration warrants big bottles! Wines in magnums also take longer to reach their optimum drinking age, this adds to the intensity, making them the connoisseur's choice for premium wines. So expect BIG things for 2018. "It's all about socialising around a bottle," explains Richard Weaver, buying director at Majestic. "Magnums create brilliant centrepieces for dinner parties and events – particularly if you're cutting back on your eating-out spend."

2. El Niño hits South American wines

Abnormal weather in South America has resulted in low yields that have dismayed winemakers on both sides of the Andes, so Chile and Argentina may no longer be safe bets for wines at the £6 or under price point. In the immediate future, the emphasis for these regions is likely to shift from quantity to quality.

3. Eastern Europe makes a brilliant bet to beat harvest blues

Eastern European wines have been steady ships on the choppy waters of dismal European harvests and Brexit-related supply blues. Sales were up +1365% year-on-year in the £5 – £10 price band at Majestic in 2017. Initial reports suggest Hungary's harvest is down only 3% (compared to an EU-wide average drop of 14%), whilst Romania is looking at a 60% harvest



increase. Your mid-week bottle may increasingly originate from Hungary's Central Valley – rather than Chile's.

4. Beyond the pale

It may well be time for pale ale, the star of the craft beer movement, to leave the limelight – according to Majestic. A recent survey of buying habits across all of Majestic's 210 stores suggests customers are increasingly interested in local red ales or stouts, with only 8% choosing pale as their beer of choice.

5. Prosecco isn't going anywhere... yet

Write off Prosecco at your peril! Sales of this light sparkling style is still booming despite warnings from dentists that the bubbles and sweetness can be a challenge for your gnashers. However, with another difficult harvest in Northern Italy (where some yields are down as much as 30%), sparkling wines from Sicily or Central Italy will be good value alternatives to stave off price increase pains and bring some sparkle back to your wine bill.

6. Forget gin, Brits are favouring a new tippie for 2018

Majestic have recorded a 25% increase year-on-year in sales of sherry in 2017. What used to be Granny's favourite has dropped its age appeal by 50 years, with it being entirely acceptable for those in their 20s and 30s to be seen with a sherry glass in hand. And it's not just sherry that's undergoing a renaissance. Other fortified friends are making a comeback with port sales seeing an 18% volume increase in 2017 and the unsung Madeira currently up 224%, versus the same period in 2016.

7. The craft whisky scene is about to discover brandy

Brandy looks set to be the next spirit to receive the 'craft' treatment, following in the footsteps of whisk(e)y. Iconic brandy branding, a focus on provenance and increasing appearances in the ingredient lists of top cocktail experts has led to a new experimental take on the spirit. Majestic points to Armagnac as heir-apparent to flashy whisky brands. Try it in cocktails.

8. Honey gin

Experimenting with different botanicals and flavours has made gin the success story of 2017, with sales up 110% vs last year at Majestic with over 120 new lines added throughout the year. Some may feel that gin hype is a load of rhubarb – but rhubarb itself has been key in driving the trend, with rhubarb gin sales up 170% year to date. Expect more flavours in 2018, like the newly launched honey gin, which is set to hit the shelves in the New Year.

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HOSPITALITY THAT'S HAND PICKED

HAND PICKED HOTELS HAS BEEN ROOTED IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS, AND DESPITE TOUGH TRADING CONDITIONS IS STRIVING TO ADAPT TO THE EVOLVING MARKETPLACE AND CHANGES IN CONSUMER DEMAND. 2018 LOOKS TO BE THE YEAR OF GROWTH FOR THE 20-STRONG GROUP AS DOUGLAS WADDELL, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR, SETS HIS SIGHTS ON STREAMLINING SERVICE AND REFRESHING STRATEGIES TO CONTINUE ITS LEGACY.

Since 2001, when Hand Picked Hotels was first founded, the hospitality industry has come on leaps and bounds in terms of innovation, the levels of competition and the savvy of the price-conscious consumer. And for a 20-strong hotel brand sitting in the four-star sector, thriving throughout it all hasn't been an easy ride.

Julia Hands created the group almost two decades ago with her financier husband Guy Hands, most widely known as the chairman of Terra Firma Capital Partners, one of the largest private equity firms in Europe.

The ambition was simple; to create 'an individual collection of hotels and architecturally stunning country house hotels' and nurture the brand into a group of 20 hotels known for their quality and consistency to service and hospitality.

Operations director Douglas Waddell

came on board in 2006, at a time when the Hand Picked Hotels group comprised 14 properties across the country and when acquisitions and growth were very much on the agenda. The likes of Buxted Park Hotel in Ashdown Forest, Rhinefield House Hotel in the New Forest, Rookery Hall Hotel in Cheshire and Wood Hall Hotel in Yorkshire, were just some of the staples in the portfolio.

"My appointment meant we could really focus on the operations of the business," Waddell begins, "from the early days the vision was to have 20 hotels and that was said to all the teams and the media; we wanted to grow."

And in 2008, that growth came in abundance, with the takeover of three properties.

New Hall Hotel in Sutton Coldfield, a 60-bed hotel set in 26 acres in the Midlands; Audleys Wood Hotel in Hampshire, a 72-bed hotel with 2 AA Rosette restaurant and Hendon Hall Hotel in North London, a four-star 52-bed hotel

with links to King Henry VIII.

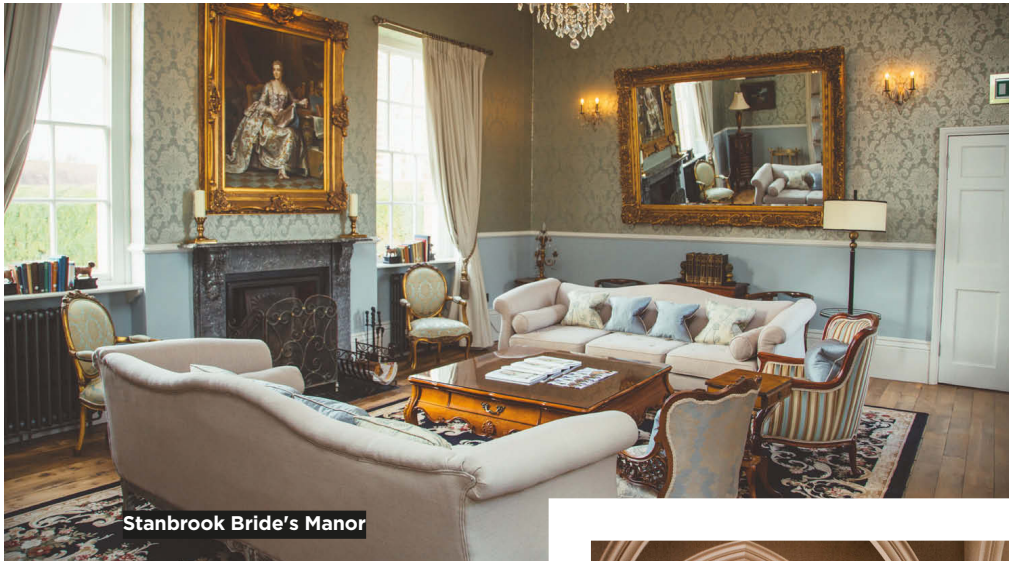
The properties slotted in well, each one boasting an extensive, intricate history, a common thread between all the HP Hotels in the portfolio and a core focus of the brand since its inception. Waddell, who came from a background with the likes of Thistle Hotels and the Esporta brand of health and fitness clubs when he joined Hand Picked, says that these acquisitions came at a time when the industry was prospering.

"2006, '07, '08 – they were great years," he says. "Then 2009, '10 '11, they were the toughest, through the recession and since then all the cost pressures have been mounting."

It's understandable then that expansion slowed slightly in the years that followed, with smaller acquisitions spearheading the growth in 2011 and 2012 as the group battled tough trading conditions.

In 2012 Bailbrook House was brought into the fold, and just a year later Fawsley Hall and St Pierre Park Hotel





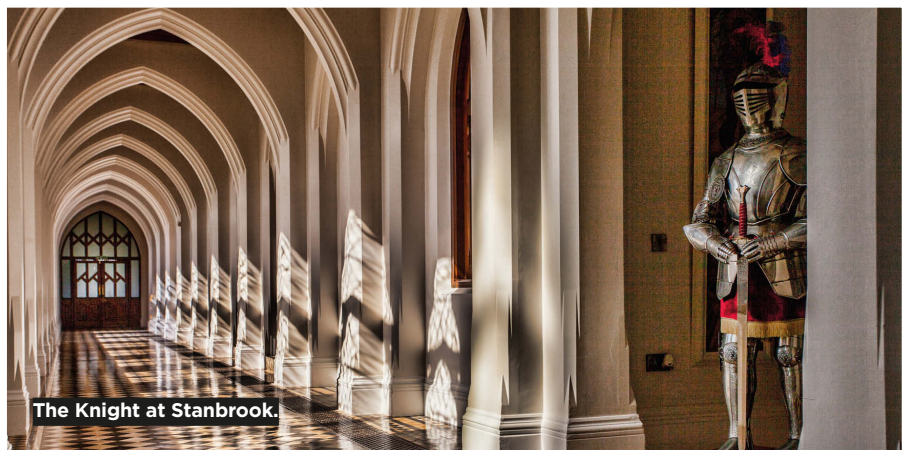
in Guernsey were acquired to bring the portfolio up to 19. 2014 saw another property from the Channel Islands, the Grand Jersey Hotel & Spa, St Helier, Jersey, join the group to hit the 20-hotel target.

Also during this year, while operating profit rose from £8.3m to £8.9m, Hand Picked Hotels fell to a £9.1m loss before tax, as a result of depreciation and interest charges and down from £6.9m in 2012. Sales saw a drop from £59.9m to £58.1m.

Despite the marginally disappointing figures, founder Hands remained positive and pointed to the investments the group was making into its portfolio, with a £4.1m fixed asset expenditure. Bailbrook House was launched that year following a £10m transformation which was an impressive achievement for the group. Hand Picked Hotels fought on, where so many others fell by the wayside.

In 2015, the group reshuffled again and sold off Seiont Manor and the Priest House in Derbyshire, with Waddell citing their size as the reason behind the sale. "They were too small and non-core," he explains, "and if you look, we've replaced them with bigger acquisitions. The slightly larger hotels – we can still run them as a Hand Picked Hotel but they are more robust, during the downturn especially. From a business perspective, trying to make money from a 40-bed hotel is harder than one with 100-bedrooms."

This same year however, persistence and clever business minding meant that



figures looked healthy, as group turnover increased by 3.7% to £62.4m, losses were reduced to £3.5m and overall occupancy increased by 1.2% and revenue per available room by 5.6%.

The stability and longevity of the brand's senior team has a huge part to play in the group's resilience, with Waddell making up a team of directors each with at least 10 years under their belt. Just 18 months ago another revenue and marketing director was appointed to support this rapid evolution.

This brings us to today and how would Waddell describe business across the portfolio right now?

"The hotels are doing ok but it's the cost pressures and it's a very challenging marketplace so we are working very hard to put the right business in place and control cost without compromising service. The consumer is very savvy and if you pass too much of it on they ain't going to book.

"The thing with us is our profit has

WE ARE WORKING VERY HARD TO PUT THE RIGHT BUSINESS IN PLACE AND CONTROL COST WITHOUT COMPROMISING SERVICE"

kind of stuck and we need to get it going again. We want our results to be better, as do our owners.

"It's still tough out there and we now have the uncertainty of Brexit. Practically we have the issue of the exchange rate, so food and wine have got more expensive, and the position of people. Across our brand 75% of our people are from the UK and the 25% are European. We want to ensure the right deal is done to secure their future."

He admits that the kitchens have suffered from a high turnover of staff and retaining people has 'probably been the

hardest'. He says the group has been relying on agencies to help level out the peaks and troughs in the workforce, but stresses they need to 'work harder' to keep the kitchen teams."

The tough landscape of the industry right now hasn't meant the group has stalled on spreading its wings however.

The latest market move from HP Hotels was the acquisition of Stanbrook House in 2017, a former Benedictine monastery which was taken over in March before undergoing a three-month renovation into a country house hotel. The Grade-II listed property was previously owned and operated by Clarenco, a hotel and venues group and being run as an exclusive-use venue, which is where it suffered financially.

After a short 'bedding in' period, Waddell has now had time to assess the business and its strengths and weaknesses, before kickstarting a development plan at the 56-bedroom hotel.

"There is still a lot to be done," he says. "We don't just go in on day one with the builders – you really need to understand the mechanics of the business – what works and what doesn't and now we are pretty much there. We are trying to run it as a hotel, and as such there are mixed segments so you have to be able to differentiate weddings, leisure, and business and in its current format, it struggles to do that. But we have a plan and we will

be working on that over the next year."

While Waddell didn't specify exactly what the plans would entail, he didn't rule out a bedroom extension to help commercially, and will run the hotel as a genuine, seven-days-a-week Hand Picked Hotel, built around engaging with its local community.

Ultimately the business will be led by its F&B offering, which is an integral part of the DNA at Hand Picked.

"F&B is a dominant part of what we do," explains Waddell. "We spend a lot of time on our breakfast offering. That's really important for us. Dinner is another priority and we spend a lot of time getting this right. I think 2 AA Rosettes is a good benchmark. The challenge that all companies face is trying to keep F&B modern, relevant, up to date."

He says that the changing landscape of how guests want to consume food now – in a less formal environment and at varying times of the day – is shaping how the brand will operate going forward, but with a core clientele of older customers, getting the balance right for everyone is crucial.

"We have a wide demographic across the group; people who have been with us from the start and now we are starting to attract a slighter younger clientele who want a more informal offering, and that's a challenge.

"A word we are trying not to use is 'fine dining'. The advent of the high street has really driven the growth of the more relaxed feel. 15 years ago the standard of food in Britain wasn't as good as it is now. So it's a very competitive marketplace."

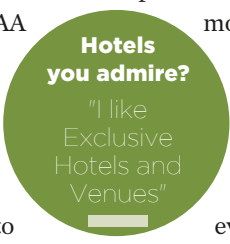
Markets in focus

One common denominator Waddell picks out as a challenge across the group is the battle in the weddings market right now. Competition is at an all-time high, while the group benefits from having a number of unique settings in the portfolio, Waddell admits it 'has become more challenging'.

One sector that has seen growth however is family parties and celebrations. "We've done really well in building our reputation for family events," explains Waddell. "For example events like 40th, 50th, 60th birthday parties; people are spending more money on them. Some of our smaller properties can do exclusive use and that works really well for us."

"We are pushing for more meeting business, more training business and team building; it's a market we've started working on and there is still a lot to do but it's a real area we want to continue to focus on.

"A lot of the business for our hotels comes from within a 15 mile radius so they have to be out there, networking, being seen; often a lot of our hotels can be more famous than the brand and that's a challenge for us," Waddell adds.



THE COMPLETE HAND PICKED HOTELS PORTFOLIO

2001

- Brandshatch Place Hotel & Spa, Kent
- Buxted Park Hotel, East Sussex
- Chilston Park Hotel, Kent
- Crathorne Hall Hotel, Yorkshire
- Ettingham Park Hotel, Stratford-upon-Avon
- L'Horizon Beach Hotel & Spa, Jersey
- Nutfield Priory Hotel & Spa, Surrey
- Norton House Hotel & Spa, Edinburgh
- Rhinefield House Hotel, Hampshire
- Rookery Hall Hotel & Spa, Cheshire
- Wood Hall Hotel & Spa, Wetherby,
- Woodlands Park Hotel, Surrey

2008

- Audleys Wood Hotel, Hampshire
- Hendon Hall Hotel, Hendon, London
- New Hall Hotel & Spa, Birmingham

2012

- Bailbrook House Hotel, Bath,

2013

- St Pierre Park Hotel, Guernsey
- Fawsley Hall Hotel & Spa, Fawsley

2014

- Grand Jersey Hotel & Spa, Jersey

2017

- Stanbrook Abbey, Worcestershire

A Hand Picked future

So with clear objectives set out from the start and ever-evolving strategies to keep up with the changing demands of the consumer, Hand Picked Hotels is well equipped to take on the next 12 months in business. "It's not just about acquiring, it's about what you do when you acquire. We don't want trophy hotels we want working, commercial hotels that we can make into HP properties. We are a smaller company and are nimble footed, if we like something we can just do it." **BT**



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THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT



2017 WAS A TOUGH YEAR, WITH BREXIT ROLLING ON, CRIPPLING COST INCREASES, AND STAFF SHORTAGES WIDESPREAD ACROSS THE INDUSTRY. HOWEVER AS WE BEGIN 2018, OPTIMISM AND AMBITION IN THE SECTOR IS IN ABUNDANCE. SO WE LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT 12 MONTHS IN BUSINESS AND ASK WHAT PLANS ARE IN THE PIPELINE FOR THE COUNTRY'S TOP HOTELIERS AND HOW THEY INTEND TO 'KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON' AMID SO MUCH UNCERTAINTY.

FOR THE SMALL GROUPS...

RETREATS GROUP

About: Three boutique hotels in Wales, Twr y Felin, Roch Castle and Penrhif Hotel.

Paula Ellis, group manager

says: "Twr y Felin, St Davids, Pembrokeshire has achieved outstanding success in its first 18 months as Wales' first contemporary art hotel, and as such a new extension is planned for 2018. This will include 20 new luxury bedrooms, a dedicated reception area and a larger restaurant to meet the high demand for dinner of both resident and non-resident guests. Awarded AA Hotel of the Year Wales, 2017-2018 Twr y Felin is home to award-winning two Rosette Blas Restaurant, which also serves guests of sister properties, 12th century Roch Castle and former priory Penrhif."



HAND PICKED HOTELS

About: A portfolio of 20 UK country house hotels in the four-star and five-star markets.

Douglas Waddell, operations director says: "The outlook for 2018 is positive for Hand Picked Hotels. Whilst there are natural peaks and troughs throughout the year - and the general economy continues to present some challenges for the sector as a whole - we are expecting to maintain steady growth in our room revenues, similar to last year.

"We're also looking to grow our conference and events side of the business in 2018 and strengthen our meetings product to ensure we remain engaging and competitive for residential and day delegate events. Key to that is our focus on food and beverage, which is a fundamental part of the decision-making process, so we can capitalise on ever-changing food trends and remain flexible and agile for meeting bookers."

LUXURY FAMILY HOTELS

About: A collection of six family-focused boutiques across the country, including Fowey Hall in Cornwall and New Park Manor in Hampshire.

Adrian Burley, group marketing director says: “2018 promises to be a great year for Luxury Family Hotels, with two exciting new developments in Cornwall. Firstly we will be launching our first ever foray into glamping with a super luxurious safari tent at Fowey Hall with two bedrooms, a free standing bath and incredible views over the Fowey Estuary from the private deck. In late spring, we will also be opening four brand new villas at the Polurrian Bay Hotel. With three bedrooms and a first floor open plan living area with large terrace and spectacular ocean views, these villas will benefit from full access to the facilities at the adjacent hotel.”

ICONIC LUXURY HOTELS

About: A group of four hotels; Chewton Glen, Cliveden, 11 Cadogan Gardens and newest acquisition Lygon Arms.

Andrew Stembridge, executive director says: “In all of our properties, we are forecasting for leisure to remain incredibly strong with the weak pound fuelling domestic staycations and overseas visits, especially from the US. Having invested heavily in 2017 across The ILH (Iconic Luxury Hotels) portfolio, with a new cookery school and an additional super-Treehouse at Chewton Glen, a new Spa at Cliveden, a comprehensive refurbishment of The Lygon Arms and new technology in our Central Reservations Office we are in a strong position to make the most of this opportunity and continue to grow market share. A royal wedding will undoubtedly reignite interest in the UK and drive business particularly to our Chelsea property, 11 Cadogan Gardens and to Cliveden with its long history of Royal connections. Operating costs will undoubtedly continue to rise throughout 2018, which will challenge conversion however now that we have four hotels, we are beginning to benefit from collective purchasing and have robust team retention strategies in place to help control labour costs.”

STAR HOTELS

About: A European collection of luxury boutique hotels, with The Gore, The Pelham and The Franklin making up the London portfolio.

Maurizio Redaelli, cluster general manager says: “The hotel market will continue to be extremely competitive with an increase in room supply of 3.7% (5,000 more rooms) one third of which in the Premium and Luxury category. Occupancy in London will stay almost flat with a growth of 0.5% and with an ADR increase of 2% which means that the overall RevPAR increase predicted for 2018 of 2.5% will have to be obtained mostly through a recalibration of each hotel's business mix balancing the need of increasing higher yield segments and the one of supporting the hotels in low demand periods. In line with the prediction of the markets we aim at focusing on the corporate and business agencies for next year to grow our share on both their transient and small/medium group business and of course more than ever on our key target the high end agencies in several key feeder markets (US, UK, Middle East) to continue building a core of individual repeat customers.”

“ OCCUPANCY IN LONDON WILL STAY ALMOST FLAT WITH A GROWTH OF 0.5% AND AN ADR INCREASE OF 2% ”

EDEN HOTEL COLLECTION - BOVEY CASTLE AND MALLORY COURT

About: Bovey Castle, a five-AA-red star property with 3 AA Rosette restaurant and Mallory Court, a 43-bedroom property in Warwickshire.

Greg Fehler, director, says: “At Bovey Castle the challenge is to keep those high standards and increase revenues in 2018. One immediate challenge is the slight

downturn in wedding business year on year – this will be a focus from now as all other areas are showing good signs of growth particularly in exclusive use conferences and corporate golf activity.

“At Mallory Court where the Elan Spa opened in April of this year the challenges are slightly different in that this is a very well-es-

tablished hotel with high standards (recently awarded 3 AA Red Stars and 3 Rosettes) so here the challenge is to integrate into the spa market ensuring this enhances other aspects of the business. The corporate market at this hotel continues to grow despite negativity around the economy so we are looking to continued growth in this sector for 2018.”

THE VINEYARD GROUP

About: *The group owns and operate two hotels in Newbury and manages hotels from the north east to Hertfordshire, from five-star to three-star and from 20 to 120 rooms.*



Andrew McKenzie, managing director, The Vineyard

says: “2017 brought its challenges and I am under no illusion that 2018 will be any different. The perfect storm of consumer caution and the rising cost of doing business due to increased labour, raw materials and regulatory costs creates a very difficult landscape.

“More than ever it pays to have mended the roof whilst it was sunny; investments in training, staff development and marketing will be called into action like never before and being on top of refurbishment programmes will be critical. In tricky times you can never rest on your laurels.

“Thankfully the banks are still prepared to lend to well run businesses with robust business plans and we have some very exciting plans for organic growth within our existing properties, making sure our physical assets work as hard as they can for us. Watch this space!”

THE NETTLETON COLLECTION

About: *A South West collection of hotels, including Boringdon Hall Hotel in Plymouth, Fistral Beach Hotel and Spa and The Esplanade Hotel in Newquay.*

James Nettleton, owner, says: “The plan for 2018 is to continue investing in this success throughout the company. At the five-star Boringdon Hall, we are creating two new luxury bedroom suites, plus a yoga studio.

“At the Fistral Beach Hotel, we plan to double the size of Fistral Spa and create a further 15 self catering apartments. At the Esplanade Hotel we are having a comprehensive refurbishment throughout to capitalise on the increasing demand for quality family hotels in Newquay.

“Whilst we have recently invested in the properties in the company, we believe the most valuable asset is our people. Our management team have tremendous knowledge, passion and diligence and I realised this could be useful to others also. So we created our management company - Philema Hospitality Management which will make itself available in 2018 on a consultancy or as a complete management solution for other hotel or spa owners. In house we are investing significantly in training and development of our employees, plus creating the Gaia Spa Academy.”

FOR THE LUXURY BOUTIQUE HOTELS...

THE GREEN HOUSE HOTEL BOURNEMOUTH

About: *A restored, 32-room Grade II Victorian villa in the heart of Bournemouth, with sustainability at its core.*

Olivia O’Sullivan, general manager says: “Plans for 2018 are big for the Green House. After the successful

launch of our outdoor pizza oven with hut attached in 2017, we decided to go big for 2018! The garden at the front of the hotel is transforming into an Eco garden. Every plant and tree has been considered for its durability as well as its carbon footprint in travelling to us. It is a space

that will make our brides want to say “I do” whilst providing a garden where our guests can relax over cocktails and dinner, not forgetting a quiet section for wildlife with benches made from recycled pallets and a bug hotel!”

THE ROYAL CRESCENT HOTEL BATH

About: *The only hotel to be situated in Bath’s famous Royal Crescent. The hotel is operated by Topland Hotels.*

Jonathan Stapleton, general manager: “It is right now hard to say with any confidence how 2018 will fully pan out. All we do know, is that with the cost of doing business still rising and the continued investment in our greatest asset, people, with a 4-5% increase in wage cost, improving NOI next year will become even more challenging.

“This combined with a diminishing labour pool and current busi-

TOP LINE REVENUES WILL LIKELY ALSO BE AT SOME RISK, ESPECIALLY WE PREDICT IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2018”

ness uncertainty across the UK, resulting in decisions being either put off or taken with shorter and shorter lead times, top line revenues will likely also be at some risk,

especially we predict in the first quarter of 2018.

“What we are hopeful about, is an increase in US business through our US partners, also from China, for we are not forecasting at this time any tangible growth from either the UK or European markets.

“This could well mean the delaying of further investment in the product, until such time as confidence in the UK market in particular strengthens, also in light of increased room inventory/competition in most destinations.

FARNCOMBE ESTATE

About: The Cotswolds estate, home to three properties, luxury hotel and spa Dormy House, private house hotel Foxhill Manor and design-led boutique, The Fish.

Chris Ward, commercial director says: “2018 is set to be a very exciting year at the Farncombe Estate as we undertake a £4m investment in the Fish Hotel. We will reopen the property on March 6 following the upgrade. We are launching a brand new seafood restaurant called ‘Hook’ by culinary director Martin Burge, upgrading all our existing bedrooms, creating a small cinema, adding an outdoor woodland play zone for kids and a dog agility course. We will also be adding new rooms in the form of three treehouses, five Hideaway Huts (double Shepherd Huts in the woods) and 10 rooms in our Coach House.”



THE PAINSWICK

About: Launched in 2016, the hotel is part of The Calcot Collection and was one of the best new openings of its time.

Luke Millikin, general manager says: “After a successful 2017 we can’t wait for an exciting 2018! Our weddings and events bookings are very strong, coupled with a positive growth in accommodation occupancy and rate (proving our business model is right for our target markets). Our new head chef, Jamie McCallum, launches our new lunch concept focusing more on simplicity and offering smaller plates perfect for grazing, without compromising on quality. We will also draw upon his vast experience to offer masterclasses, so the local community can learn a chef’s trick or two.”

OLD STOCKS INN, STOW ON THE WOLD

About: A 17th century former coaching inn that was transformed into a 16-bedroom boutique in 2016.

Charlotte Tuck, general manager says: “This year is a big one for us, as we get set to expand our offering and create a new high-end self-catering element to the Old Stocks experience – the Old Stocks Bolt Hole.

“It’s a big step for us to take, but we’re confident that by applying our teams’ passion and care for going that extra mile for our customers, we can shake up the Cotswolds’ self-catering market and give people an experience that combines the luxury of staying in a hotel with the freedom and flexibility of having their own private space to enjoy with friends and family.”

BELMOND LE MANOIR AUX QUAT’SAISONS

About: A 32-bedroom Raymond Blanc masterpiece home to a two-Michelin star restaurant.

Jan-Paul Kroese, general manager says: “We hope to have another amazing harvest from our remarkable organic kitchen garden. This year it has not only supplied our chefs with an abundance of fresh produce, but it has been the home to our new gardening school. The Raymond Blanc Gardening School is the first of its kind to be located in the grounds of a two-Michelin starred hotel and restaurant. For 2018, we will host exciting new courses, sharing our passion for garden to plate. We will be introducing our guests not only to our expert gardeners but to some of the wonderful consultants who guide us in specialist areas of growing: Will Sibley, Espresso Mushroom Company.”

THE STAFFORD LONDON

About: One of London’s most respected boutique hotels, home to 50 bedrooms and The Game Bird restaurant headed up by James Durrant.

Stuart Procter, general manager says: “2018 is promising to be yet another memorable year at The Stafford London. After a record 2017, which saw the launch of The Game Bird restaurant and the multi-million pound refurbishment of our Carriage House rooms, we will be continuing to invest with the renovation of The American Bar. The renovation promises to be an exciting evolution of the bar and will honour the style, atmosphere, memorabilia and service the bar is renowned for.”



ASKHAM HALL

About: A 13-bedroom Grade-II listed building set in picturesque Cumbria.

Charles Lowther, owner says: “2018 is set to be an exciting year, as we launch our newly-renamed restaurant ‘Allium’ in the Spring. The focus on food quality and the connection with produce direct from the land will remain the same, but we really want to give the restaurant the distinctive identity it deserves. At the same time, we’ll be launching three new bedrooms – two with disabled access – in what was originally Askham Hall’s old stable block. The history of the building is immense, and there will be plenty of thoughtful touches, including the original leather tack once owned by the 5th Earl of Lonsdale to make each room unique.”



LUCKNAM PARK

About: *The five-star luxury country house hotel set in 500 acres of English land in Chippenham.*

Harry Murray, chairman says: “During the past year Lucknam Park Hotel and Spa (now ESPA) has won numerous awards and recorded its best ever year. We are therefore optimistic that business will continue to grow in 2018.

“There is however a need to review operational procedures because of increased costs of labour, food, beverage and utilities. Recruitment will become even more difficult as the availability of migrants continues to fall. To combat this there will be even more emphasis on training, development and retention.

“In the New Year Lucknam Park is planning to extend the number of family cottages available to guests by adding two more. Currently there is one three-bed cottage which has been extremely popular with regular guests.”

WATERGATE BAY HOTEL

About: *Owned by the Ashworth family for almost the last 50 years, the property is set in the Bay in Cornwall.*

Will Ashworth, CEO, says: “In its 50 years of family ownership, Watergate Bay Hotel has been transformed into a must visit, year-round coastal destination. It continues to grow and exciting plans to improve facilities for visitors to the beach and our hotel will be going ahead in 2018. The year begins with an extended area of our Swim Club including an outdoor sauna. A new, purpose-built building will replace the existing RNLI hut, giving a more robust, permanent home for the lifeguard service and an area for the Watergate Bay Surf Lifesaving Club to call their own. And, a food offering, with the working title of ‘Crab Shack’ opening in 2019, enhancing the overall Watergate Bay experience year-round.”

BARNSLEY HOUSE

About: *A member of The Calcot Collection, Barnsley House is a luxury 18 boutique hotel in the Cotswolds, which runs alongside the Village Pub situated on the same road.*

Michele Mella, general manager says:

“2018 will be a good year for us. We have finished 2017 very strongly with forward bookings for both national and US market looking healthy. We are embarking on a major project and uplifting our six pub bedrooms with the project completed in time for March Gold Cup. We are also going to celebrate an important date in the history of Barnsley House, Rosemary Verey centenary and many events will be planned around the iconic gardens. We have also backed the trend and haven’t had many issues with staffing last year with the Calcot Academy developing our own talent pool.”

STANWELL HOUSE

About: *An independently owned and run 29 bedroom boutique on Lymington High Street, home to two restaurants.*

Robert Milton, owner says: “Whilst expectations for 2018 are high in terms of UK sales, without sounding pessimistic, it’s making sure that the sale isn’t diluted through commissions and ‘flash sales’ and that focus to the bottom line isn’t lost as costs rise steadily.

“‘Relaxed’ dining goes from strength to strength (perhaps the days of fine dining have reached their peak) and we look forward to using our new restaurant and terrace over the summer months. We always look forward to taking guests out for picnics and sailing days on our hotel yacht and exploring the beautiful Isle of Wight and surrounding area that we are fortunate enough to be located in.”



KAYWANA HALL, DEVON

About: *This cosy boutique hotel is home to four bedrooms and is targeted towards adults only.*

Tony Pithers, owner says: “The continued uncertainty over Brexit will continue to unsettle the market in 2018. South Devon saw no increase in Europeans visiting as a result of the weak pound in 2017 and I don’t see this changing in 2018. Continued investment in facilities, growing our repeat business and moving away from reliance on OTAs are the keys to increased turnover and profitability in 2018. I am excited about our new website launching early 2018 and planning for our new guest lounge and breakfast room to be built at the end of our swimming pool.”

BROWNER HALL, CUMBRIA

About: *A boutique bed and breakfast set in the Yorkshire Dales.*

Amanda Walker, director says: “We have had a busy year at Browner Hall, and want to continue to build upon our successes going into 2018. Last year we put a lot of work into developing the customer experience. In 2018 we intend to develop this further by expanding our F&B offering. We will be extending the dining room and relocating and upgrading our kitchen. We anticipate work will be completed in mid-February 2018. To help support this expansion we will also be recruiting new team members, to make sure we have top talent helping us continue to delight our guests.”

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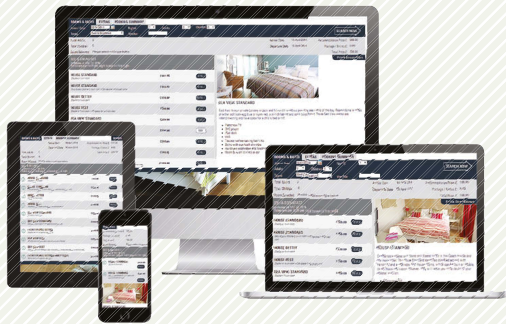
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BOOKING IN

WE'VE SHOPPED AROUND SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO, TO FIND A SELECTION OF SOME OF THE BEST BOOKING ENGINES AND ONLINE PORTALS TO HELP YOU ATTRACT MORE CUSTOM AND ENSURE YOUR HOTEL AND ITS OFFERING GOES VIRAL

HOTEL PERFECT



Name of product: Hotel Perfect's Direct Booking Engine

Description: This contemporary fully responsive and easy-to-use Booking Engine encourages your customers to book direct, allowing you to grow your commission free business and reap the rewards. Each direct Booking Engine is customised to the hotels brand and is full of enticing visuals. The simple two-step process converts browser to booker within seconds.

Customers can add to their room booking with experience enhancing extras such as flowers, chocolates and champagne.

Customer will also have confidence in booking with you on your website, as we offer a secure payment gateway.

With an inhouse development team, you can be assured that we are always working on customer lead future enhancements.

USPs:

- Commission free bookings.
- Brand aligned with your website
- Showcase your property with multiple images
- Fully responsive, customers can book from any device
- Quick and simple 2 step booking process
- Autonomy to create 'Special Offers' and incentive vouchers instantly
- Real time rates and availability upload
- Secure Payment Gateway

Website address: www.hotelperfect.co.uk

WELCOME ANYWHERE

Name of product: Welcome Anywhere Plus

Description: After what it describes as an 'exhaustive consultation with its customers', Welcome Systems Ltd, the online hospitality booking software experts, has completely revamped the reporting suite in its hotel property management system (PMS) 'Welcome Anywhere Plus.'

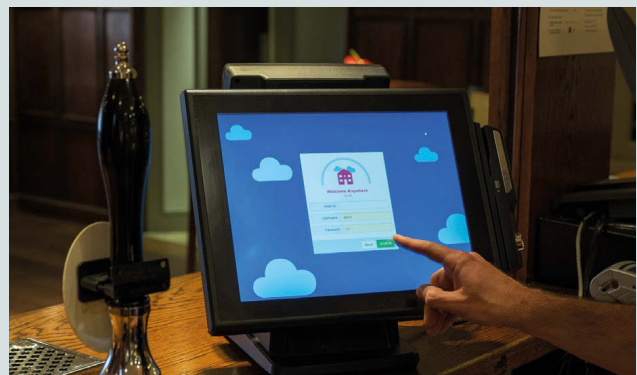
The development continues Welcome Anywhere's drive to innovate in line with market demands and suit clients' continual needs for a 24/7 bookings service that delivers the best guest experience.

"The market is swamped with PMS offerings but I can say with confidence that Welcome Anywhere is the real deal for B&Bs, independent hospitality providers, small hotel chains and pubs with accommodation," comments John Jones, managing director of Welcome Systems Ltd.

USPs:

- A new online dashboard offering instant hotel and accommodation data.
- Full mobile compatibility throughout the app.
- Instant adjustment and performance information on average daily rates, marketing cost per booking, direct revenue ratio, and total revenue per available room and per client.
- The Booking.com Opportunity Centre, designed to identify opportunities to supercharge room performance and profitability.

Website address: www.welcome-anywhere.co.uk



AVVIO



Name of product: Booking engine, digital marketing and website design.

Current hotel clients: Avvio works with over 450 hotels and accommodation providers across the UK and globally, some of these include The Ampersand in London, Manorview Hotel Group in Scotland and Sopwell House in Hertfordshire.

Description: In October 2017, Avvio became the first company in the world to provide the hospitality industry with a booking engine driven by artificial intelligence. Allora uses powerful Machine Learning and other AI tools to improve the experience for all website visitors, and increase their likelihood to book direct. The premium booking platform for websites of independent hotels, hotel groups and serviced apartment operators.

Avvio's booking technology suite is supported by cutting-edge website design and award-winning digital marketing agencies, as well as revenue and distribution consultancy services.

USPs:

- Avvio is the only booking engine technology provider in the market to guarantee a minimum growth of 25% in direct bookings when you switch your hotel or serviced apartments website to Avvio, coupled with web design and digital marketing services.

Website address: www.avvio.com

FIZ

Name of product: Fiz

Description: Fiz is a B2B content distribution platform providing the online travel industry with one of a kind content. Fiz populates travel websites with high quality, real-time, destination content on attractions and POIs. Fiz synthesises attraction information, reviews and more to ease the customer journey and allow hotels and travel companies to make their location come to life. Fiz offers widgets, API or destination guides to display fully customisable destination content.

Current clients: Oliver's Travels, Bespoke Hotels, LetsGo2 LateRooms, Le Boat, Stores Hall, Dictionary Hostel, St James Court

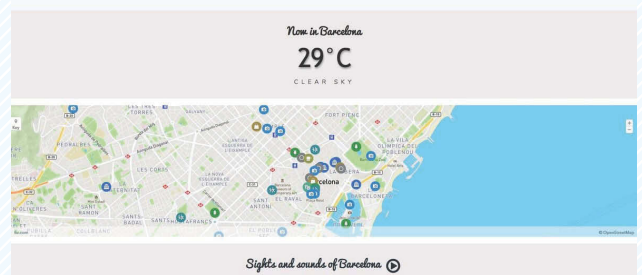
USPs:

- Fiz provides dynamic, up-to-date information on attractions in clear, user-friendly formats - either as maps, widgets or individual 'placelets'.
- Reviews, contact information, photos and more are current and algorithm even synthesises information from all top providers (Google, Yelp, TripAdvisor etc.) providing a 'meta' star rating. Attraction ratings are refreshed every month meaning you're only getting the very latest feedback.
- Content is easy to install and fully customisable. Clients can create unique collections and descriptions of POIs, in keeping with SEO keywords and targeting specific audiences.

Website address: www.fiz.com



One of the undoubted cultural capitals of the world, Barcelona continues to mesmerise its 24-hour shopping, dining and drinking scene with the last back-langer of the Mediterranean seaside. Barcelona is one of those rare cities where secondary attractions would be the crowning 'highlight' of any other, with wonders like the Sagrada Família and Park Güell enjoying UNESCO rights and other world-class attractions like a handful of second prizes. Home of Gaudí, Dalí, Picasso and Miró, every street is a work of art to be treasured as you make your way through the bustling, cobblestoned Gothic Quarter or stroll in the colourful Gracia, moving through quirky modernist masterpieces to imposing medieval towers and sleepy piazzas.



SETTING THE RIGHT TONE

MAKING SURE ALL YOUR HOTEL MARKETING IS SINGING FROM THE SAME HYMN SHEET IS VITAL IN CREATING A CONSISTENT AND COHERENT BRAND IMAGE. DAVID BARRETT, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF PIC PR, EXPLAINS JUST HOW TO SET THE RIGHT TONE WITH YOUR HOTEL'S COPYWRITING WHEN IT COMES TO PROMOTING YOUR PROPERTY.

Words mean something. Whilst they can often look pretty, there's much more to them than simple looks alone. You want them to be engaging, you want them to leap off the page and seize hold of the reader. Otherwise, what's the point?

A website, a brochure, or a Facebook page that looks incredible can easily fall down when it comes to its copy. If the written word fails to do justice to the imagery, then hard work can go to waste. Tone plays a huge part in this.

Now, we (Pic PR) are in our sixth year as a communications agency. Over the last few years we've had the pleasure of working with some of the best hotels in the UK (and abroad). However, when we get called in to help with their comms, 'tone of voice' almost always is never on their agenda, until we say so. Yet tone of voice is one of the best marketing techniques in terms of creating brand loyalty and engagement.

We will get asked to take over a hotel's social media, or to write their e-newsletters, but these activities aren't just about the 'doing.' They aren't just about getting some tweets out there, because everybody else is. It's about writing smart, clever copy that makes people want to smile, know more about you, and indeed book with you.

Whenever a new hotel client comes onboard with us, we will always start the campaign with a 'tone of voice' workshop. Looking at their brand now,

what it means to them, the outside world etc. And then really delve into the details into what tone they should be adopting.

If you're in the process of doing this now, or it is something you're going to be looking at soon. Then here are five

quick tips from me on how to set the right tone with your hotel copywriting:

1. Do it justice

Defining tone isn't easy – neither is choosing it and using it. You need to consider your audience and make it



appropriate. Is your hotel demographic looking for five star and luxury? Then your tone needs to convey this. Likewise, a three-star family resort is likely to have a different approach. Weigh up who you are looking to attract and use this as the tonal benchmark for everything that you do.

2. Consider the medium

You need to consider the medium. The tonal approach of a novel is going to be far removed from your hotel's marketing material. After all, you are a business. You're not looking to induce tears from your readers, aiming to sway them to take a certain side (other than yours, of course), or ratchet up the tension. You're looking for an upbeat, persuasive tone that offers reassurance in the process of

presenting prospective guests with the information that they're after. Whilst humour can often be good if utilised appropriately, you're not aiming to provide fodder for genuine laughs out loud. A wry smile can generally be considered as sufficient reward for your wit and repartee.

On the humour note though, there is a lot to be said for giving your hotel some personality (something I talk a lot about). Whilst I wouldn't recommend frivolity, the light-hearted approach can often reap rewards. As part of this, you need to bear in mind the aspect of your marketing that you're currently taking to task.

Social media can sometimes benefit from a dose of humour, as can certain marketing materials. But be wary of being too flippant. When it comes to your website, whilst some sections might be suitable for drawing out the odd chuckle, the majority will need to convey an element of gravitas in order to demonstrate the fact that you're a serious venue with a professional approach. This goes for most of your printed material, so avoid being too liberal with your one liners.

3. Avoid cliché

One thing to avoid is cliché. And that's not necessarily easy. Huge numbers of hotels will fall into the trap of churning out the tried and tested. How many times have you seen venues described as exclusive, luxury or romantic? Although it is hard to offer up something different – they're all accurate descriptions that the majority of guests can appreciate, which makes them clichéd for a reason.

So there's a challenge for you. Why not see if you can create some marketing copy that conveys an accurate sense of

what guests can expect without using clichés? You'd be a breath of fresh air if you did.



4. Straight talking works

Don't be afraid to talk plainly either. Hotels often make the mistake of being overly elaborate in their choice of descriptive words. Too many adjectives restrict the flow of the text, making it stilted and difficult to read. You want to convey your hotel's offering clearly, concisely and in a manner that's enjoyable for the reader.

5. Be consistent

This is so important. A variation in tone will look both unprofessional and, to an extent, confusing. When creating a website, e-newsletter, social media content plan using the same copywriting team (or person) throughout can help to improve the uniformity of your wording.

Informative, consistent, articulate content is an essential part of communicating your hotel's brand. Make sure that it's presented with the right tone to appeal to exactly the right guests. **BB**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

For more advice on your hotel's tone of voice call David on **01386 882474** or email **david@picpr.com**. Furthermore visit **www.picpr.com**

@BHOTELIER #OUTANDABOUT

SEE WHAT THE BOUTIQUE HOTELIER TEAM @ZOEYMONK & @AMJUDGE HAVE BEEN UP TO THIS MONTH; FROM THE HOTEL LAUNCHES, SUPPLIER VISITS AND HOSPITALITY EVENTS.

A lunch with Victoria Rose, PR manager for Harbour Hotels treated us to a busy Barrafinna in London's Soho to catch up over some tapas ahead of the brand's new acquisition announcement.



A lunch at two-Michelin star London restaurant The Ledbury was the highlight for us in December. We were invited there with tableware specialist William Edwards, who worked with the eatery's head chef Brett Graham to partner for a new bespoke range, called Snipe, which is now available to boutique hotels everywhere.



The newest Soho House showstopper will be Kettner's Townhouse when it opens this month, and we were lucky enough to get a taster tour prior to the launch.



Managing director of Exclusive Hotels and Venues Danny Pecorelli showed us around Lainston House in Winchester and its trendy cookery school after we sat down for a chat to discuss business.



New general manager at Sunborn London Arun Kumar was keen to show us around the unique boutique hotel in London and tell us his plans for growth.



Bath Priory looking resplendent in the winter sunshine during our trip there to interview CEO of Andrew Brownsword Hotels Stephanie Hocking.



Diary

YOUR SNAPSHOT GUIDE TO INDUSTRY EVENTS HAPPENING IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

January 8, 2018

UK Restaurant Manager of the Year

Royal Garden Hotel, London
www.restaurantmanageroftheyear.co.uk

January 15-16, 2018

Master Innholders General Managers' Conference

De Vere Grand Connaught Rooms, London
www.masterinnholders.co.uk

February 13, 2018

Revenue Management 3.0 - Where's Next?

Radisson Blu Portman Hotel London
www.hotelspeak.com/event-organizer/revenue-by-design

February 21-22, 2018

Business Travel Show London

Olympia London
www.businesstravelshow.com

March 5-8, 2018

Hotelympia

ExCeL London
www.hotelympia.com

March 6-8, 2018

Expowest Cornwall

Royal Cornwall Showground Wadebridge, Cornwall
expowestcornwall.co.uk



March 7-8, 2018

Lakes Hospitality trade Show

J36 Rural Auction Centre Crooklands
www.lakeshospitalitytradeshow.co.uk

March 7-11, 2018

ITB Berlin 2018

Messe Berlin Berlin, Germany
www.itb-berlin.com

May 2-3, 2018

The Food & Drink Trade Show

Three Countries Showground Malvern
thefoodanddrinktradeshow.co.uk

May 9-10, 2018

Eye for Travel Europe 2018

ETC Venues Bishopsgate London
events.eyefortravel.com/travel-distribution-summit-europe



BOUTIQUE HOTELIER

MEDIA ALERT

HOTELYMPIA BUMPER EDITION GET INVOLVED!

In March, the hospitality industry will flock to London's ExCeL for Hotelympia and Boutique Hotelier will be there.

For suppliers and manufacturers, our bumper March issue plus extended distribution at the show means that you can get your products and services seen in front of a larger audience and also means if you don't have your own stand, you'll still benefit from a presence.

We have a number of options available, from inclusion in the Hotelympia preview, to advertorials and company profiles, which can all help spread the word about your business.

Consistent advertising is also key, so why not use the bumper March edition to kick start a campaign across the year to really promote your products and deliver the right message to our readers – over 3,000 owners, general managers and the people who pull the purse strings at the UK's leading luxury lifestyle and boutique hotels.

To find out more information then please do contact Josh Waddell on josh.waddell@itppromedia.com

GETTING TO KNOW...

WE GRAB 60 SECONDS WITH PAUL COOKSON, GENERAL MANAGER AT ACROSS THE TWO QUIRKY BOUTIQUE HOTELS ODDFELLOWS TO FIND OUT HIS BIGGEST PET PEEVES, HIS FUTURE IN THE INDUSTRY AND WHO HE'D LOVE TO INVITE ROUND FOR DINNER.

HIGHLIGHT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

Opening Oddfellows On The Park - the whole process from the concept to final delivery was just an amazing experience. It was like giving birth to a wonderful new child!

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE THREE GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE, TO DINNER, WHO WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

I'd like to have the three people who have mentored me - Richard Young from Lords of the Manor, Peter Hazlerigg from Regency Hotels, and of course, Jonathan Slater, who I've worked with for 15 years next year at The Chester Grosvenor and now at Oddfellows.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS' TIME?

With Oddfellows, with more hotels under our umbrella. Doing exactly what I do now!

BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU EVER RECEIVED?

Never cross the line - with your team especially. You need to respect your team to earn that respect back.

YOUR FIRST JOB? Straight out of my hospitality management degree, I became trainee manager at Lords of the Manor. Working under the beady eye of Richard Young!



PAUL COOKSON
GENERAL MANAGER,
ODDFELLOWS HOTELS

BIGGEST SERVICE BUGBEAR?

I was in a restaurant the other night where a waiter had his thumbs in the bowl. That completely put me off my meal. Basic cleanliness and appearance is so easy to achieve and there is no excuse to fall short of it.

IF YOU WEREN'T A HOTELIER WHAT WOULD YOU BE DOING?

Undoubtedly a social worker. I have three boys and young teams at both hotels. It's important that kids get the right start in life. I pride myself on trying to provide that.

WHICH OTHER COMPANY (INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE INDUSTRY) DO YOU MOST ADMIRE AND WHY?

Inscape School in Cheadle - we are working with their young autistic adults to offer them 'industry insight' sessions. The staff really inspire me with their over-and-above dedication to these children that need that extra bit of support.

WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU DO WHEN YOU GET TO WORK IN THE MORNING?

Whichever hotel I land in first, Chester or Cheadle, I am walking the floors by 7.30am, along with my head housekeeper or maintenance manager.

YOUR DREAM JOB? This one. Maybe with hotels in the Scottish Highlands and one in the Caribbean!

IF YOU WENT ON STARS IN THEIR EYES, WHO WOULD YOU PORTRAY? Gary Barlow. He's a Cheshire institution.

SOMETHING YOU WISH YOU KNEW BEFORE JOINING THE INDUSTRY: The extremes that people will go to get a freebie!

LAST HOTEL YOU STAYED AT? The Goring. It was impeccable.

IN ONE WORD...

FAVOURITE FOOD? Roast beef

FAVOURITE UK CITY? Canterbury

FAVOURITE REQUEST ON THE JUKEBOX?

Black Velvet..

FAVOURITE DRINK? Sauvignon Blanc

FAVOURITE HOLIDAY DESTINATION? Scotland

FAVOURITE FILM? Shawshank Redemption

FAVOURITE GADGET? Beard trimmer!

FAVOURITE THING YOU OWN? My patterdale, Alf.



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Engine



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