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A Hotelier's Take on Eco-Friendly Rooms

By JOHN L. DORMAN

If you have ever slept on a Heavenly bed mattress, you can thank Barry Sternlicht for that memorably comfortable experience. He founded Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide in 1995, elevating brands like Sheraton and Westin while creating the chic W Hotels in 1998. (“I was inspired to do W by my trips in Asia where I saw that the hotels were meeting places,” Mr. Sternlicht said.)

Mr. Sternlicht, who left Starwood Hotels in 2005, is now the chief executive of Starwood Capital Group, where he has developed a new line called 1 Hotels, designed to immerse guests in eco-friendly accommodations. The ethos of 1 Hotels is intended to reach beyond its lobby doors, he said.

“Our behavior impacts weather patterns and the ozone layers here,” Mr. Sternlicht said. “We all impact one another so it’s one world.”

1 Hotels is set to open three properties this year; one in Miami on March 20, one near Central Park in New York in April and another on the Brooklyn waterfront at Brooklyn Bridge Park in November. Basic amenities for 1 Hotels include a triple-filtered water system, yoga mats and Keetsa mattresses. A week before the debut of 1Hotel South Beach, Miami, Starwood Capital’s new luxury brand Baccarat will open its first hotel, a property in New York. Following are edited excerpts from a conversation with Mr. Sternlicht.

Q. What was your motivation in creating 1 Hotels?

A. I decided that if I was going to do something in hotels again that it had to be about more than another brand. We’re not a brand, but a cause. The concept is all about doing a little better every day. It’s a journey, but I think people will see that we’re designing luxury hotels but doing it in an ecologically sensitive and conscious manner.

How long had you been thinking about this kind of project?

About eight to nine years.

When establishing a brand, what is an important concept to follow?

We developed a building called the Visionaire, which at the time was one of two LEED Platinum [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] residential towers in New York. We were cultivating a group of clients who bought those condos and wanted their kids to grow up in a LEED building. And they paid a little more for it. Today, when you’re marketing a brand, you can’t try to appeal to everybody. You should speak to a group of people and create them as loyalists.

Will you build new locations only in places that take advantage of nature?

We're in the urban market and hope to be in the resort market soon, so it's more about the building or the site than it is about the location. We don't have to be in a park. It's wonderful to be near a beach or a river, or near Central Park, but that's not required.

What went into developing the menus for the restaurants in the hotels?

The food items are all farm-to-table. We have Jonathan Waxman, a purveyor of California delicacies, leading the restaurant at Central Park, with Tom Colicchio [who founded the Craft restaurants and serves as a co-host of Bravo's "Top Chef" series] at South Beach and Seamus Mullen [known for his Spanish cuisine] at Brooklyn, respectively. While all the menus will be different, they will feature what you'd expect — great vegetables and fresh organic foods to eat.

What has been the best piece of advice you've received from someone who has stayed at any of your hotels?

The best advice is often the compliments received, and they are often about an associate who did something exceptional. I tell my teams that it's the random acts of kindness, the unexpected, that people remember most.

What made you choose the Brooklyn Bridge Park location?

Brooklyn is a magnificent site, right on the water overlooking the skyline of Manhattan. Also, what I liked about the particular site is that it's in a park.

Where do you see growth opportunities for Baccarat?

I see Baccarat in major gateway cities like Paris, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong and exotic resort locations.

When you want to unwind, where do you like to travel?

Nantucket. I like to go to my simple cottage by the ocean, or really any beach!

In five to 10 years, where do you see 1 Hotels and how do you think this concept will influence the hotel industry at large?

W Hotels set off a firestorm of competitors. I think we have the desire and the capital to be as big as the market will let us, on an international stage. We have hired a director of impact and are building bee farms on our properties. I expect a reasonable growth goal of 20 to 25 hotels, and if we inspire look-alikes, I'm O.K. with that. But they can't have our name.

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