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HOTEL BUSINESS

Fiercely *Independent*

Lindsey Ueberroth focuses on individuality & freedom to drive Preferred Hotels & Resorts forward



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Fiercely *Independent*

Lindsey Ueberroth focuses on individuality & freedom to drive Preferred Hotels & Resorts forward

By Adam Perkowsky
Managing Editor

As global travel rebounds and luxury demand continues to evolve, hotel owners are rethinking how best to balance scale, individuality and long-term value. For Preferred Hotels & Resorts, that conversation has helped shape a 58-year-old platform designed to give independent hotels global reach while preserving what makes them distinct—an approach that has fueled steady growth, high owner retention and a portfolio of more than 625 hotels across 80 countries.

Over the years, the company has refined a model that allows independent hotels to remain truly independent—while still benefiting from the scale, access and commercial power of a global brand.

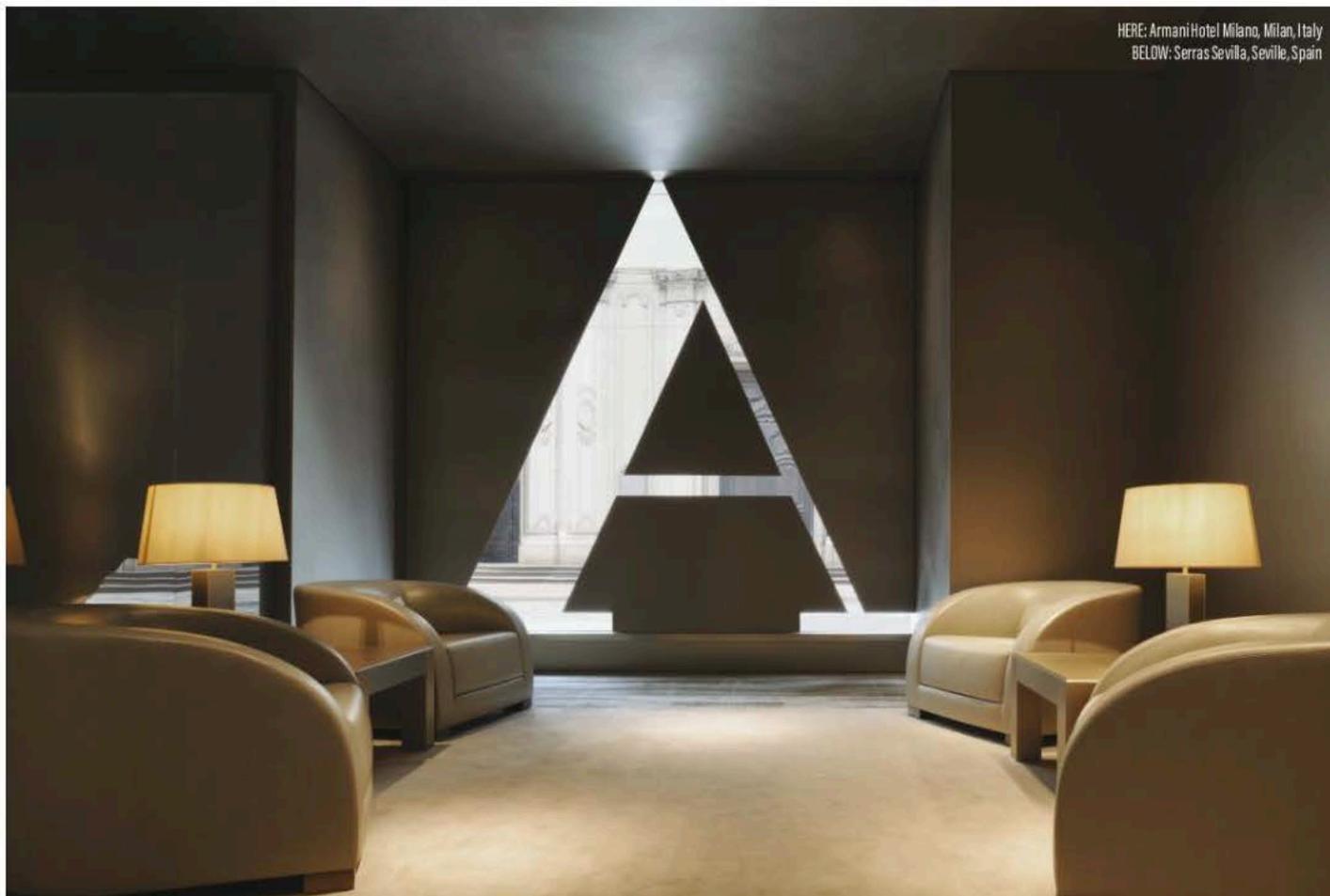
At the center of that strategy is Lindsey Ueberroth, CEO of both Preferred Hotels & Resorts and its parent, Preferred Travel Group, whose leadership reflects the company's balance of discipline and flexibility, heritage and innovation.

The company was founded in 1968 by 12 independent hoteliers who, as Ueberroth put it, “came together with a shared belief that they could compete against the big chains without sacrificing individuality.” She added, “What’s interesting is that some of those original hotels—like The Ritz-Carlton, Boston, as well as The Peninsula and Fairmont properties—were



Lindsey Ueberroth is Preferred Hotels & Resorts' CEO.

HERE: Armani Hotel Milano, Milan, Italy
BELOW: Serras Sevilla, Seville, Spain



considered independent at the time.”

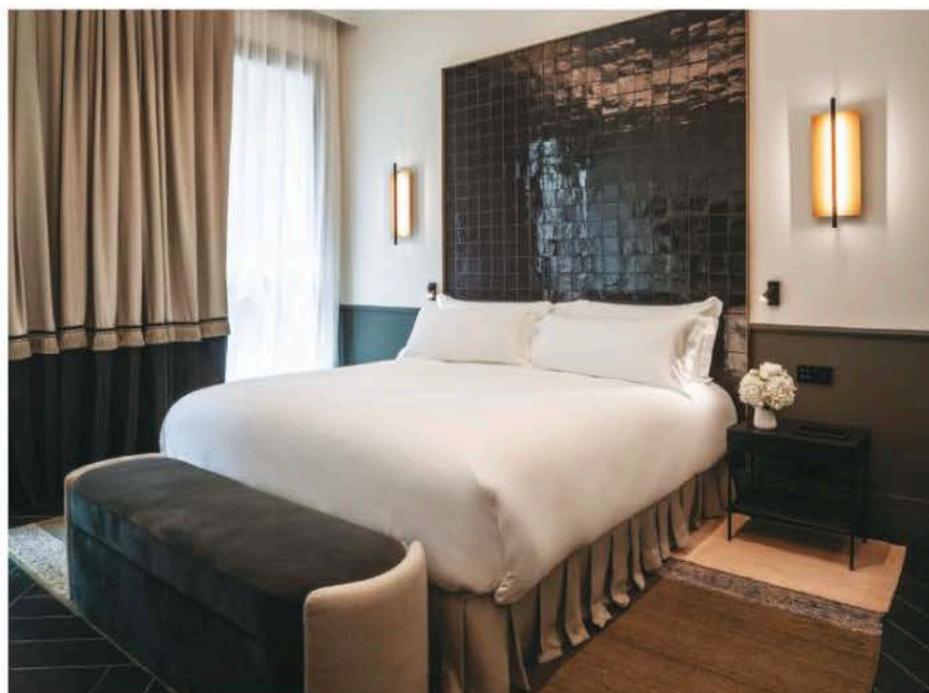
Those founding hoteliers understood that strength could come from shared marketing, distribution and sales power, without forcing hotels into a one-size-fits-all identity. “They believed that by partnering, they could create the same kind of strength as the major brands without standardization,” Ueberroth said. “That idea still defines who we are today.”

Over the decades, Preferred expanded its portfolio and geographic reach, growing well beyond its U.S. roots. A pivotal turning point came in the early 2000s, in the aftermath of 9/11, when the travel industry faced sustained disruption.

“At the time, the company was hotel-owned, with the owners themselves as shareholders,” she said. “When the industry was in turmoil, those shareholders were understandably more focused on running their own businesses and hotels.”

That moment opened the door for a new ownership structure, with Ueberroth’s parents, John and Gail Ueberroth, purchased the company.

“My family became involved, and we infused capital into the business and took on majority



COVER STORY

ownership," she said. "Today, we own about 97% of the company, while still maintaining independent hotel shareholders who benefit from the company's growth and success."

As luxury travel continues to evolve, the company's founding principles have become increasingly aligned with guest expectations. Today's luxury traveler is less motivated by opulence and more drawn to authenticity, emotional connection and a sense of place.

"To us, being independent means more than not being part of a major chain," Ueberroth said. "It's about distinct style, a strong sense of place and a deep connection to the local community. No two of our hotels are the same, and that individuality is exactly what today's traveler is seeking."

The company's own research underscores that shift. "Our luxury travel research shows that travelers want meaningful experiences and lasting memories—not just beautiful photos," she

said. "They're looking to feel something different when they leave. Independent hotels excel at storytelling, design and authenticity, and that's why this segment continues to grow."

That growth has not gone unnoticed by the major chains, many of which have launched their own soft brands in recent years.

"I've always said it's interesting that the big chains have gotten into our space," Ueberroth said. "They've launched their own versions of it, but it's not the same. The contracts and rules of engagement are still very chain-like. To me, that was a signal that the independent segment was not only growing—it was here to stay."

Access and authenticity

The shifting definition of luxury has become a central pillar of the company's positioning. "Seventy-eight percent of luxury travelers now define luxury by access and authenticity, not opulence," Ueberroth said. "Two-thirds

LEFT: Masseria San Domenico, Savelletri di Fasano, Italy

BELOW: Samsara Ubud, Bali, Indonesia



are looking for hotels that feel distinctive and reflective of local culture rather than interchangeable global brands.”

For owners, that shift creates opportunity—but only if they can access demand at scale.

“We offer the freedom of independence paired with the commercial strength of a global brand,” she said. “For guests, it means access to more than 625 independent luxury hotels worldwide, with the same scale and reach you’d expect from a major chain—but without the rigidity.”

That balance—scale without rigidity—defines Preferred’s owner value proposition. “At a very simple level, we provide independent hotel owners with scale, access and enterprise-level solutions across global sales, marketing, distribution and loyalty,” Ueberroth said. “Our platform includes global group and corporate sales, a robust loyalty program, procurement savings and preferred partnerships that help reduce operating costs.”

Preferred’s alliance program allows hotels to reduce merchant fees, leverage purchasing power and access distribution channels that might otherwise be out of reach.

“We bring the same commercial muscle as the major chains,” she said, “but with significantly more flexibility and a lower overall cost structure. Owners get freedom, supported by real strength and reach.”

Thoughtful growth

Despite its flexibility, Preferred Hotels & Resorts is selective about the hotels it admits. The company’s evaluation process looks well beyond physical attributes.

“Our approach to hotel acceptance is rigorous,” Ueberroth said. “We look first at destination and location, followed by a detailed evaluation of the property itself. Quality of the physical asset is essential, but service and operational excellence are equally important.”

Equally critical is alignment with ownership and leadership. “We want to be confident that we can deliver meaningful business value while partnering with owners who share our standards and vision,” she said.

That selectivity has not slowed momentum. The brand added 79 new hotels over the past year while maintaining a 93% retention rate.

“Retention is one of our most important metrics,” Ueberroth said. “We’re always aiming for 90% or better. In this environment, where there’s a lot of turnover, deeper engagement and long-term partnership really matter.”

HB Origins: Lindsey Ueberroth

For Lindsey Ueberroth, hospitality wasn’t a career choice she set out to make—it was something she grew into.

“If you’d asked me, even when I was in college, if I’d be in hospitality, I probably would have said no,” she said. “But growing up in hospitality, we traveled all the time. I always knew it was in my DNA—I just didn’t know this is where I would end up.”

When her father, John, was running Hawaiian Airlines, the family lived temporarily at Honolulu’s Colony Surf hotel. “I thought the book *Eloise* was a dream come true,” Ueberroth said. “Being a kid living in a hotel—I always loved it.”

Still, she began her career outside the family business. After graduating from college, she joined what was then Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) and worked in change management.

“It was a great experience because I was working with a lot of different companies going through major changes and transitions,” she said. “That really shaped how I think about leadership.”

When her family acquired Preferred Hotels & Resorts, the company “was actually in some trouble,” she said.

“So it was exciting to lend my experience during a period of real change.” Her father made it clear that she would earn her role. “Nothing was ever going to be handed to me,” she said.

Over the years, Ueberroth wore many hats. She helped open the

company’s Newport Beach, CA, headquarters; oversaw global and group sales; and worked in marketing, account management and hotel development, while focusing heavily on retention. “I spent probably the first 12 years doing a little bit of everything,” she said.

Before she stepped into the role of president, the company made sure it was the right move. “We brought in an outside consultant to evaluate whether I was the right fit,” she said. “We take being family-owned seriously, but we also want to make sure it’s not family-run. It had to be the right leadership.”

Her decision to fully commit came earlier, while traveling with her father and listening directly to hotel owners.

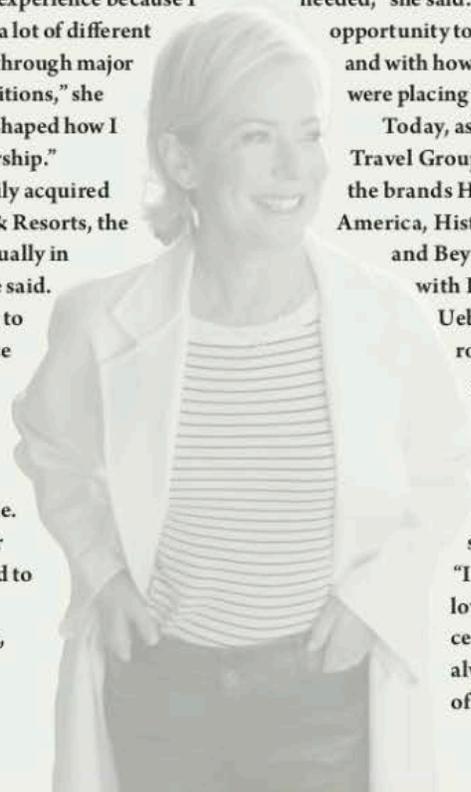
“I spent weeks hearing what was working, what wasn’t and what they needed,” she said. “I fell in love with the opportunity to facilitate that change—and with how much trust the hotels were placing in us.”

Today, as CEO of Preferred Travel Group—which also includes the brands Historic Hotels of America, Historic Hotels Worldwide and Beyond Green, along with PTG Consulting—

Ueberroth describes the role as both demanding and energizing.

“Running a global travel company is intellectually and emotionally stimulating,” she said. “I love that it’s global. I love that it’s very people-centric, and there’s always a healthy balance of fear and excitement.”

—Adam Perkowsky





Keswick Hall, Charlottesville, VA



The Cooper in Charleston is expected to open in March.

Serras Sevilla in Spain, Bernardus Lodge & Spa on California's Central Coast and Keswick Hall in Charlottesville, VA. The Cooper in Charleston, SC, which is expected to open in March, will be part of the Legend Collection.

"We're also excited about new-builds like The Newman in London and a new hotel in Florence," she said. "These projects reflect our focus on new markets and thoughtfully developed properties."

Owner alignment

One of Preferred Hotels & Resorts' most distinctive characteristics is its ownership base.

"One of the most reassuring things for me when visiting our hotels is seeing how involved the owners are," Ueberroth said. "Many of them personally show up and walk me through the property. That level of commitment creates incredible alignment, because it's their name on the door."

Approximately 80% of the company's hotels are family-owned. "They're not backed solely by funds," she said. "There's a family and a person behind them, and that personal investment aligns very closely with what we stand for as a brand."

Accountability remains central to the company's owner relationships. "Our hotel partners absolutely have the right to expect measurable KPIs," Ueberroth said. "Those KPIs can vary by property, depending on whether the focus is group, leisure, corporate or brand positioning in a new market."

KPIs are set annually and reviewed quarterly,



with an emphasis on incremental value creation.

"At the end of the day, we're focused on how we add value—shifting business from OTAs to direct channels, driving group demand, expanding corporate accounts and helping hotels access luxury consortia," she said.

For guests, the promise of Preferred Hotels & Resorts is not just consistency, but emotional connection. "Consistency is critical, but it has to be paired with highly personalized, locally inspired experiences," Ueberroth said. "Guests expect great beds and beautiful hotels, but what really matters is how they feel when they're there and the memories they take with them."

Technology plays a role, but people remain central. "You can implement all the technology you want," she said. "At the end of the day, it's the people on property who deliver the experience—

the bartender who remembers your cocktail, the server who knows your morning order, the housekeeper who leaves a thoughtful note."

Looking ahead

Ueberroth's growth vision for Preferred Hotels & Resorts is clear. "Five years from now, I want us to be the partner of choice for owners, management companies and developers," she said. "We want to be known as relationship-driven, innovative and best-in-class for independent hotels—helping owners elevate while preserving their freedom."

Growth will remain thoughtful, not arbitrary. "We're not growing for growth's sake," she said. "We're a family-owned company with a long-term vision. We're not trying to sell the business—we're deeply committed to doing this the right way." 