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HOTEL COLLECTIONS AND
SOFT BRANDS TAKING
THE INDUSTRY BY STORM

LINDSEY UEBERROTH
PRESIDENT & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS



INDEPENDENTLY MINDED

BY KATE HUGHES

The power of **soft brands** in an era obsessed with unique independent experiences

So far in 2017, two major hotel chains have announced the addition of a new soft brand to their brand portfolios. In January, Hilton's Tapestry Collection joined the chain's Curio Collection, and just a few weeks ago, Wyndham announced the launch of the Trademark Collection, representing the company's first foray into the soft brand space.

Soft brands are obviously popular, and this particular market segment is gaining share at an astoundingly rapid pace. While there may have been an explosion in chain-backed soft brands over the past few years, the idea of a hotel collection is nothing new. Preferred Hotels & Resorts—currently helmed by CEO Lindsey Ueberroth, who is featured on this month's cover and interviewed in the following pages—has been playing in this space for 50 years. Choice Hotels' Ascend Hotel Collection, the first soft brand collection from a big chain, launched a decade ago. Since then, more and more have joined their ranks.

So, what's been driving the immense growth in this area of the industry? There are two factors at play. The first, to put it simply, is scale. In an era of consolidation, the security and power that come with being backed by a major hotel engine is invaluable, especially during the shoulder seasons. "Having a brand behind an independent property helps fill many different needs that the property might otherwise not be able to afford to address," Julius Robinson, vice president of Marriott's Autograph Collection Hotels & Tribute Portfolio, describes. "Do you need the assistance of a global sales organization to drive corporate business during the week? Or do you need a strong rewards system to help leisure occupancy on the weekends? A big brand can help accomplish those goals in a way a smaller, independent sales team might not be able to."

But scale is just one factor. There's also guest demand for unique experiences. "Guests today are looking for something that is completely different from their past hotel stays, and often different from what mainstream brands can offer," Mark Shalala, vice president of development and upscale brands at Choice Hotels, says. "So, developers are looking for hotels that meet this demand."

And there's another reason developers are jumping on board quickly: The earning potential of soft branded properties, if properly supported, is enormous. "The rate cap for a soft branded hotel isn't limited by other properties in its

market segment or in its brand, because there are no hotels to compare it to," Shalala explains. "If you're delivering a great experience that guests like—it's local, it's authentic, and it's what people are really craving—you can charge a premium for that experience." As a result, many developers are seeking out markets with heavy branded inventory and finding a niche that can be filled with an independent property. The ability to fill those gaps with something that's different and unique—but still backed by a major chain's engine—lessens the risk of investing in an independent property.

In the right market with the right brand behind them, there is no question that independent hotels and the collections they belong to are making a major impact on the hotel industry. However, being in this part of the industry requires a passion for creating something new and exciting, something that doesn't already exist in the hotel space. "Hoteliers looking to enter this space really need to be committed to investing in and building out that individual hotel's unique brand and telling its story. The onus is on the owner to keep that individual hotel fresh and relevant," Brian Povinelli, senior vice president and global brand leader of Marriott's Premium Distinctive portfolio, explains. With so many options out there, it is imperative that hoteliers looking to join a brand do their research and learn as much as they can before signing a contract. ●



A guestroom at enVision Hotel Boston-Everett, a member of Choice's Ascend Hotel Collection, in Everett, Mass.

LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

LINDSEY UEBERROTH ON PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS' POSITION IN AN INDUSTRY NOW FULL OF COLLECTIONS AND SOFT BRANDS

Preferred Hotels & Resorts has been in the independent hotel collection market for half a century. Currently, the company's upper-upscale and luxury portfolio encompasses five collections—Legend, LVX, Lifestyle, Connect, and Preferred Residences. Today, these five collections are facing a wealth of new competition from soft brands, which have been entering the hotel market at a rapid-fire pace. *LODGING* caught up with Preferred's president and CEO, Lindsey Ueberroth, to get her perspective on this growing segment of the industry and why the independent hotel scene is more attractive to today's travelers than ever before. Here's what she had to say.

You've been in the independent hotel collection business for a long time. Why do you think the big hotel companies have been so eager to enter this space over the last few years?

I think there are a few reasons. The first is related to the internet and how it's made it easier for travelers to preview a hotel before staying there. Before that was possible, there was a comfort in the consistency that the chains provided while you were traveling—especially internationally. That paradigm has been completely turned on its head. Travelers now have more information about a hotel than they ever had before. Reviews, photos, and social media all give them a comfort with a property that was previously unachievable. And travelers love it.

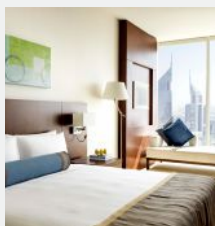
The second is that travelers are looking to stay in hotels that reflect their travel aspirations and personalities, not cookie-cutter properties. We like to call them independent-minded hotel travelers. I don't think most people look at themselves as cookie-cutter people. This element is driving a lot of growth around soft brands.

Additionally, from a major chain perspective, it's an opportunity to add another brand and expand their options. Individual brands can hit a saturation point. When that happens, that company's best option is to add another brand that expands their reach into previously saturated marketplaces. They can then approach developers and owners with something they couldn't offer with any of their other flags.



687

The number of hotels in Preferred Hotels & Resorts' portfolio, 217 of which are in the United States.



How is Preferred coping with the new soft branded competition entering the market?

Well, first let me mention that we're not losing a lot of hotels from our portfolio to these new soft brands. However, there is a lot more competition for development right now than we have ever experienced before. In the fairly recent past, independent properties were not really a viable investment for a lot of hoteliers. Now, with the exposure these properties are getting from the big hotel chains, independent properties are in the limelight. We just have to share that limelight with more people than in the past.

A lot of the soft brands launching today are targeting the stay experience toward millennials, but Preferred has been in the independent space for 50 years. Is the demand for independent hotel stays transcending demographics?

If you look at the new soft brands that have popped up, they're mostly in the upscale, upper-upscale market segment. Additionally, several of them were launched specifically to capture the millennial market. I think one of the reasons we've had so much success and continue to grow is our portfolio goes from upper-upscale all the way up to ultra-luxury. The breadth of our portfolio allows travelers to stay with us for a variety of reasons—business, family vacation, special event, or even just “I want to stay in an ultra-luxurious hotel.”

Additionally, new research has been showing that millennials don't want brands to cater directly to them. They even find it somewhat offensive. There's a real independent streak there, and a feeling of “Don't tell me what I like.”

Preferred has very broad shoulders as a brand, which allows us to cater to millennials, GenX, and Baby Boomers

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The Boston Harbor Hotel in Boston, Mass., is a member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Legend Collection.

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equally well. And those demographics like variety. It makes our portfolio fun.

Is there a single commonality that ties all of Preferred's properties together?

No, and that's the beautiful part! [laughs] Actually, staying in our hotels is meant to be an experience and allows our guests to really enjoy their destination. Achieving that goal requires a combination of an actual physical product as well as service. Our team members make each stay incredibly special, and that is consistent across our portfolio.

How do you market an experience to potential guests?

You have to know how to point potential travelers toward the authentic—and I know that word is overused these days—experiences that your guests are already experiencing. For the last two years, we've been using social media extensively to show what our properties are all about. In that period of time, we've had more than 20,000 people engage with it. Through social media, we've been able to create a strong community around the Preferred Hotels & Resorts brand that is specifically focused on the experience that our hotels provide. We have a robust social media presence, but we also encourage guests to use a hashtag, #ThePreferredLife, to find our properties more easily online. It's only common sense to use social media this way because travelers are using social media more and more as a travel planning tool. When they see that hashtag, we want them to say, "That looks beautiful. I want to go there."

How can you make sure your social media attracts the most eyes?

Well, if you look at our Instagram, for example, you don't see a lot of the traditional hotel rooms. It's activities and excursions, like people skydiving over the Palm Islands in Dubai. We're really trying to encapsulate the idea the hotel is an important piece of the stay, but we want to celebrate the overall Preferred life and the experiences it brings to our guests. We look at our hotels as an extension of that experience, which really elevates them beyond the physical hotel room. We want our guests to be thinking about all the wonderful things they'll be doing with their time, not just where they'll be sleeping each night.

Do you think the independent segment of the hotel market will continue to grow?

Hoteliers love being 100 percent independent and really enjoy the creativity that affords them with their property. In that respect, I completely expect this market to continue to grow over the coming years. Additionally, I embrace the added competition, which both keeps us on our toes

and indicates that soft brands and hotel collections aren't going anywhere soon. The demand keeps growing, and markets all over the globe are really embracing independent properties in a way they never have before.

From a personal standpoint, I get so much inspiration and so many ideas from our more than 600 hoteliers, and being able to celebrate that individuality across our portfolio is simply amazing. 🌍

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THE BRANDS



ASCEND HOTEL COLLECTION

Ascend Hotel Collection is a membership of upscale, independent hotels designed for travelers pursuing distinct experiences in unforgettable surroundings. For owners seeking freedom and control over their property's operations and design, Ascend delivers increased exposure and reservation potential with support from Choice Hotels.

PROPERTY PICTURED

enVision Hotel Boston-Everett, Everett, Mass.



AUTOGRAPH COLLECTION

Each Autograph hotel is "exactly like nothing else," offering a multitude of unique stories, authentic experiences, and great design. Launched in 2009, the soft brand includes 66 U.S. properties with 15,260 total rooms. As the brand's global roster grows, Marriott has started to categorize each hotel by experience (sporting adventure, natural retreat, historic exploration, etc.), as well as location.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Epicurean Hotel, Tampa, Fla.



BW PREMIER COLLECTION

In October 2014, Best Western announced its first soft brand offering, the BW Premier Collection. Hotels within the BW Premier Collection will not be part of the official Best Western membership, but they will be listed and can be booked on the Best Western website. Guests are able to earn and redeem Best Western Rewards points at all BW Premier Collection hotels.

PROPERTY PICTURED

The Florida Hotel & Conference Center, Orlando, Fla.



CURIO COLLECTION BY HILTON

Launched in 2014, Curio—A Collection by Hilton takes its name from the idea of a "museum curator" who curates a selection of distinctive objects. This soft brand from Hilton Worldwide focuses on upper-upscale, full-service hotels in locations around the world. The criteria for membership is that each hotel must be individual and, therefore, distinctive from one another. Curio is rapidly expanding and is set to add 47 properties to the collection's global portfolio.

PROPERTY PICTURED

LondonHouse Chicago, Chicago, Ill.



HISTORIC HOTELS OF AMERICA

Founded in 1989 by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Historic Hotels of America recognizes and celebrates historical properties in the U.S. The collection features properties that have faithfully maintained their authenticity, sense of place, and architectural integrity. To be selected for membership, a hotel must be at least 50 years old, been designated by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior as a National Historic Landmark, or listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

PROPERTY PICTURED

The Omni Homestead Resort, Hot Springs, Va.

GENERAL INFORMATION

FEES

- **Brand Launched:** 2008
- **Competitive Set:** Autograph Collection, Curio Collection, Tribute Portfolio, BW Premier Collection, Luxury Collection, The Unbound Collection, Aloft, Courtyard, Hilton Garden Inn, Hotel Indigo, Hyatt Place, AC Hotels, independent hotels
- **Target Customer:** Travelers pursuing distinct experiences in unforgettable surroundings
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 170/10,451
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 60

- **Application:** \$5,000 (as part of initial fee)
- **Initial:** \$375/room; \$30,000 minimum in 2017
- **Royalty:** 5% GRR in 2017
- **System:** 2.5% GRR

- **Brand Launched:** 2009
- **Competitive Set:** Preferred Hotels & Resorts, Leading Hotels of the World, Curio by Hilton, Kimpton
- **Target Customer:** The individualist—a fiercely independent guest who seeks unconventional hotel experiences and prefers a hotel with unique character and details that are authentic and truly original
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 66/15,260
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 72

- **Application:** \$75,000 or \$300 per guestroom (whichever is greater)
- **Franchise/Royalty:** 5% GRS
- **Marketing:** 1.5% GRS

- **Brand Launched:** 2014
- **Competitive Set:** Autograph Collection, Curio, The Luxury Collection, Preferred Hotels & Resorts, Leading Hotels of the World
- **Target Customer:** Travelers seeking urban and destination experiences around the world
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 16/2,446
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 24

- **Application:** \$4,000
- **First Year:** \$25,000 for fewer than 200 rooms; \$30,000 for 2,000 rooms or more

- **Brand Launched:** 2014
- **Competitive Set:** Tribute Portfolio, Autograph Collection, Unbound by Hyatt
- **Target Customer:** Travelers seeking one-of-a-kind discoveries and authentic experiences
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 32/7,626
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 47

- **Application:** \$75,000 plus \$400 per room for more than 250 rooms
- **Royalty:** 5% GRR
- **Marketing:** 4% GRR

- **Brand Launched:** 1989
- **Competitive Set:** Historic Hotels of America is the only official program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation for recognizing and celebrating historic hotels
- **Target Customer:** Heritage and cultural leisure travelers, from millennials to seniors
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 310/100,000
- **In the U.S. Pipeline:** 100+

- **Application:** \$500
- **Initial:** \$4,500
- **Annual Royalty:** \$8,500
- **Annual Marketing:** \$8,500
- **Reservation:** 12% bookings
- **Membership/Quality Assurance:** \$750/year

THE BRANDS

GENERAL INFORMATION

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IBC HOSPITALITY

The InnDependent Boutique Collection, or IBC, is currently one of the largest independent global hotel networks. IBC hoteliers enjoy a technology platform with distribution and brand-like benefits that enable independent hotels to reclaim their revenue and guest data by providing a “one-stop shop” with a suite of hotel services and software that includes online revenue generation, hotel management software, InnCentives guest loyalty program, a preferred partner network, and more.

PROPERTY PICTURED

The Edgewater, Madison, Wis.

- **Brand Launched:** 2008
- **Target Customer:** Independent hoteliers as well as business and leisure travelers seeking local lodging and authentic experiences on a global scale
- **U.S. Properties:** 1,200

● Not disclosed



INTERCONTINENTAL ALLIANCE RESORTS

IHG launched InterContinental Alliance Resorts in 2010 when it signed an agreement with the Las Vegas Sands Corp. under which IHG would provide access to its marketing programs and distribution channels to the Sands’ two mega-resorts: The Venetian and The Palazzo. High on the list of those marketing programs was IHG’s loyalty program—now known as IHG Rewards Club—which allows Sands guests to earn and redeem points for their stays.

PROPERTY PICTURED

The Venetian, Las Vegas, Nev.

- **Brand Launched:** 2010
- **Competitive Set:** Fairmont, Grand Hyatt, JW Marriott, Westin, W Hotels
- **Target Customer:** Business and leisure travelers
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 2/6,986

● Not disclosed



L.E. HOTELS

L.E. Hotels has independently owned and operated properties throughout the world. Hotels in the collection benefit from reservations and marketing services designed to increase visibility and sales. L.E. Hotels recently introduced the Luxe Collection to single out hotels that are highly ranked by guests for quality of service. The brand is rapidly growing its portfolio, with 67 total properties in the global pipeline.

PROPERTY PICTURED

The Garland, North Hollywood, Calif.

- **Brand Launched:** 1999
- **Competitive Set:** Preferred Hotels & Resorts, Leading Hotels of the World, Design Hotels, Small Luxury Hotels of the World
- **Target Customer:** Leisure, corporate, and group travelers; travel agents, group/event/meeting planners, and corporate travel teams; and independent boutique and lifestyle hoteliers in the upscale, upper upscale, and luxury segments
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 23/3,423
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 67

● Not disclosed



LEADING HOTELS OF THE WORLD

In business since 1928, Leading Hotels of the World today represents more than 390 properties across more than 75 countries. The Leaders Club loyalty program provides guests with a range of benefits from room upgrades and the opportunity to earn free nights to airport transfers and daily breakfasts. In 2017 so far, the Leading Hotels of the World added fourteen new hotels in thirteen different countries.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Palácio Tangará, São Paulo, Brazil

- **Brand Launched:** 1928
- **Competitive Set:** Independent, luxury collection hotel brands
- **Target Customer:** Curious travelers and frequent luxury travelers
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 30/8,595

● Not disclosed



THE LUXURY COLLECTION

Founded in 1994 and now under the Marriott umbrella, the Luxury Collection has 83 global properties around the world. Though the collection has only been around for a little more than 20 years, many of the Luxury Collection properties are more than a century old, bringing an authenticity to guests’ stays. The carefully curated brand is growing at a sustainable pace, with 31 properties in its global pipeline.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Palace Hotel, San Francisco, Calif.

- **Brand Launched:** 1994
- **Competitive Set:** Leading Hotels of the World, Rosewood, Curio Collection, Waldorf Astoria
- **Target Customer:** Explorers, collectors, and affluent leisure travelers
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 14/4,185
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 31

- **Application:** \$85,000 plus \$300 per room in excess of 200 rooms
- **Franchise/Royalty:** 5% GRS
- **Marketing:** 1% GRS (capped at \$450k/year)

THE BRANDS



MAGNUSON HOTELS

Magnuson Hotels markets more than 1,000 hotels across six countries and three continents. Founded in 2003, Magnuson has become one of the fastest growing hotel brands. The brands fall under two collections—Magnuson Independent Collection and Magnuson Branded Collection, which includes Magnuson Grand, Magnuson Hotel, and M Star. All Magnuson Hotels are individually owned and operated, and aim to create a welcoming and personal guest experience at great value.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Great National Abbey Court Hotel & Spa, Nenagh, Ireland



PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS

Launched nearly 50 years ago, Preferred Hotels & Resorts provides marketing and distribution support to 687 luxury hotels and resorts around the world. Hotel members are aligned with one of six distinct collections—Legend, LVX, Lifestyle, Connect, and Preferred Residences. In the United States, the portfolio ranges from The Montage Beverly Hills to The Sherry Netherland in New York.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Baccarat Hotel, New York City, N.Y.



QUORVUS COLLECTION

Aimed toward the contemporary global traveler, the Quorvus Collection by Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group offers luxury hotels immersed in local culture. Their current locations in Edinburgh, Muscat, Kuwait, and Kampala fulfill Quorvus Collection's core lifestyle elements of wellness, replenishment, and presentation that encompass the body, while inspiration, entertainment, and connectivity fulfill the needs of the mind.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Hormuz Grand Hotel, Muscat, Oman



SMALL LUXURY HOTELS OF THE WORLD

Founded in 1990, Small Luxury Hotels of the World represents 520 hotels worldwide in more than 80 countries. The portfolio ranges from hotels and resorts to country houses targeting affluent travelers. SLH's Club program has more than 350,000 consumers signed up, the majority in the desirable 35- to 54-year-old demographic.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Nobu Hotel Ibiza Bay, Illes Balears, Spain



TAPESTRY COLLECTION BY HILTON

A newcomer in the soft brand market segment, the Tapestry Collection by Hilton provides travelers with new opportunities as it takes the guesswork out of booking decisions with the reassurance of the Hilton name. With six properties in the global pipeline, this new collection provides reliability and value when it comes to independent hotel choices. The first Tapestry Collection by Hilton property is Hotel Skyler in Syracuse, New York.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Hotel Skyler, Syracuse, N.Y.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- **Brand Launched:** 2003
- **Target Customer:** All-inclusive leisure and corporate traveler seeking modern and clean facilities in the economy market
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 1048/99,007
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 246

FEES

- **Independents:** \$500 set up fee and per reservation charges
- **Branded:** 5% of revenue (marketing, reservations included); PIPs not required

- **Brand Launched:** 1968
- **Competitive Set:** Autograph Collection, Curio Collection, Leading Hotels of the World, The Luxury Collection
- **Target Customer:** Transient leisure, corporate individual, association, and group segments who seek a one-of-a-kind hotel experience that delivers the authenticity of a destination.
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 217/53,493
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 90

- **Implementation:** \$100/room
- **Royalty:** \$200-\$350/room annually
- **Marketing:** \$15,000-\$20,000 annually
- **Reservations:** Varies by channel

- **Brand Launched:** 2014
- **Competitive Set:** Leading Hotels of the World, The Luxury Collection, Autograph Collection
- **Target Customer:** Modern luxury business and leisure travelers
- **Global Properties/Number of Rooms:** 3/542
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 2

- Not disclosed

- **Brand Launched:** 1990
- **Competitive Set:** Leading Hotels of the World, Relais & Châteaux, Design Hotels, Preferred Hotels & Resorts
- **Target Customer:** Modern luxury travelers
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 19/1,505

- Not disclosed

- **Brand Launched:** 2017
- **Competitive Set:** Independent hotels, Ascend Hotel Collection
- **Target Customer:** Travelers seeking original experiences that are at the same time approachable and familiar
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 6

- **Application:** \$75,000 plus \$400 per room in excess of 250 rooms
- **Royalty:** 5% GRR
- **Marketing:** 4% GRR

THE BRANDS

GENERAL INFORMATION

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TRADEMARK HOTEL COLLECTION

Officially announced in June at the NYU International Hospitality Industry Investment Conference, Wyndham's Trademark Hotel Collection is the first soft brand targeted at upper-midscale and above properties. At launch, the brand's pipeline includes more than 50 hotels and drew the interest of owners of both existing hotels and new construction opportunities in top urban markets around the world.

NO IMAGE AVAILABLE

- **Brand Launched:** 2017
- **Competitive Set:** Upper-midscale and above independent hotels.
- **Target Customer:** Everyday travelers seeking a hotel that allows them to experience the destination on their terms
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** Not disclosed
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 50+

- Hotels will contribute a percentage of GRR to combined fees (6.5%) following an initial affiliation fee.



TRIBUTE PORTFOLIO

Tribute Portfolio hotels create an experience that is all about the guest. Established by Starwood Hotels & Resorts and now owned by Marriott, this soft brand allows for distinct hotels in noteworthy locations. These independently owned hotels maintain their personality while accessing the benefits of the Starwood Preferred Guest loyalty program. Every Tribute Portfolio hotel thrives on style and superior service and celebrates individuality.

PROPERTY PICTURED

La Posada de Santa Fe, Santa Fe, N.M.

- **Brand Launched:** 2015
- **Competitive Set:** Curio Collection, Leading Hotels of the World, Preferred Hotels & Resorts, independent hotels
- **Target Customer:** The modern maverick; Business and leisure travelers
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 13/4,461
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 12

- **Application Fee:** \$50,000 plus \$200 per room in excess of 250 rooms
- **Franchise/Royalty Fee:** 5% GRS
- **Marketing Fee:** Included in program fee (hotels pay a program fee of 3.5% GRR, which covers marketing, sales, reservations, and other centralized services for the hotel)



THE UNBOUND COLLECTION BY HYATT

The Unbound Collection by Hyatt aims to give guests the freedom to be extraordinary at unique properties all over the world. Launched in 2016, the collection already has several properties in its global and domestic portfolio, including the Royal Palms Resort and Spa in Phoenix, Arizona, the Driskill Hotel in Austin, Texas, and the Hôtel du Louvre in Paris, France.

PROPERTY PICTURED

Royal Palms Resort and Spa, Phoenix, Ariz.

- **Brand Launched:** 2016
- **Competitive Set:** Autograph Collection, The Luxury Collection, Curio Collection, Tribute Portfolio
- **Target Customer:** Individual business and leisure travelers; small meetings
- **U.S. Properties/Number of Rooms:** 3/671
- **In the Global Pipeline:** 2

- Not disclosed



What factors influence a soft brand's success?

"Distribution. Having global distribution capabilities gives a soft brand a major competitive advantage—both for customers and developers. A lot of soft brands have the bulk of their portfolios in North America, with very little distribution outside that market. There are significant opportunities for growth all over the globe."

JANIS CANNON
SVP, Upscale Brands
Choice Hotels

What advice would you give a hotelier looking to join a soft brand?

"Have a clear idea of the long-term game plan for your hotel. Interview soft brand companies before you commit; that way you know what a collection is all about, who the target customer is, and whether that brand lines up with your own vision. This is a critical conversation to have before signing a deal."

JULIUS ROBINSON
VP, Autograph Collection Hotels & Tribute Portfolio, *Marriott International*

