

SLEEPER

GLOBAL HOTEL DESIGN

JULY | AUGUST 2019



Belmond Cap Juluca

The acclaimed operator redefines barefoot

AHEAD Americas

The awards for hospitality experience and

Blique by Nobis

Nobis Hospitality Group remasters an industrial

Inside Sleeper

JULY | AUGUST 2019

85

Hotel Reviews

- 036 **Belmond Cap Juluca** Anguilla
- 044 **Blique by Nobis** Stockholm
- 050 **Hard Rock Hotel** London
- 059 **The Hoxton** Chicago
- 064 **NoMad** Las Vegas
- 072 **Rosewood** Hong Kong
- 081 **Hôtel de Paris** Monte-Carlo Monaco
- 086 **Gorgeous George** Cape Town
- 093 **Monkey Island Estate** Bray-on-Thames
- 100 **Life House Little Havana** Miami
- 106 **The Spa at Mandarin Oriental Jumeira** Dubai

Features

- 108 Brand Standards... **Preferred Hotels & Resorts**
Emerging as a major industry name without owning, operating or managing any hotels, Preferred Hotels & Resorts' collection model is challenging the traditional approach.
- 149 Company Profile... **Brintons**
Committed to the concept of thinking globally and acting locally, carpet maker Brintons continues to design pioneering lines using a balance of technology and craftsmanship.

Cover Story

- 036 **Belmond Cap Juluca**... Anguilla
Designed for sipping champagne alongside rather than swimming in, the showstopping pool at Belmond Cap Juluca is clad in handmade emerald glaze tiles, selected by Rottet Studio to harmonise with the landscape of Anguilla.

Departments

- 020 Check In
- 022 Drawing Board
- 113 Business Centre **Hotel Analyst**
- 118 Business Centre **STR**
- 121 Events **AHEAD**
- 132 Events **Sleeper**
- 136 Events **HI Design Europe**
- 141 Events **Radical Innovation**
- 144 Events **Sleep & Eat**
- 155 Product Profile **Furniture**
- 174 Product Profile **Visual Identity & Branding**
- 179 Specifier
- 194 Check Out





Collector's Edition

PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS

Emerging as a major player without owning a single property, the success of Preferred Hotels & Resorts signals the rise of a model that could alter the hospitality landscape.

Words: Kristofer Thomas

Representing over 750 hotels, resorts and residences across 85 countries, Preferred Hotels & Resorts is a collection model offering strategic advantages to the owners, operators and companies behind luxury hotels by way of consultative support brand association and connectivity, as well as distribution, sales and revenue solutions. Member properties are divided into distinct experiences and experiential sub-collections as opposed to locations or label, affording guests the freedom to tailor their stays from the off.

Preferred Hotels & Resorts
Network as of July 2019
750+ Hotels
160,000+ Rooms
85 Countries

Preferred Hotels & Resorts sits as something of an outlier in the context of this section's previous entries, in that the California-headquartered group does not actually own, operate or manage any hotels. Part of the soft brand revolution, it is instead part of a growing community of collections comprising independent hotels that fly no flag but still adhere to a set manifesto of core brand standards. Scratching the itch for experiences beyond the often sterilised and heavily-branded mega-conglomerates whilst assuaging guests wary of lower standards beyond reliably branded circles, the model has seen Preferred grow to encompass over 750 disparate properties around the world and claim the title of the world's largest independent hotel group.

Whilst the largest chains are just now stepping into this field – see Hyatt's Unbound, Hilton's Curio and Marriott's Autograph, all structured and launched in the last decade – Preferred Hotels & Resorts has evolved steadily alongside the market since its inception in the late 1960s, charting guest tastes and flowing with the tidal shifts of industry disruption whilst adapting in line with transformed hospitality function and form.

"The beauty of the Preferred Hotels & Resorts model is that travellers can stay within our portfolio nearly anywhere they want to go, and have 750 one-of-a-kind options to choose from, with each property providing a unique perspective on the destination," explains Lindsey Ueberroth, CEO, Preferred Hotels & Resorts. "Hotel chains cannot claim the same, and given booming consumer preferences for individualised stays, we feel that Preferred Hotels & Resorts and other soft brand models are far ahead of the curve."

THE HISTORY

Founded in 1968 initially as a referral organisation for hotels with similar high standards, by the association's

10th anniversary it had expanded internationally to encompass 14 European members and its first Asia Pacific hotel. The brand subsequently outlined the prerequisite criteria for admittance: a minimum of four stars from the Mobil Travel Guide and four Diamonds from AAA, amongst others. Over time these guidelines have moved away from the rigid star ratings to favour anonymous third party inspections, a move that has generated experiences beyond the realm of the strictly conventional.





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“By defining hotels through experiences versus brands or stars, we have helped to simplify part of the travel planning process,” Ueberroth notes. “We feel that our five collections – Legend, L.V.X., Lifestyle, Connect, and Preferred Residences – better resonate with today’s traveller, who does not always equate luxury with stars.” By its 25th anniversary, Preferred was well under way in establishing itself as a major hotel player, embracing emergent technologies and the nineties economic boom to advance its distribution, booking and sales platforms.

2004-2005 saw John Ueberroth take the reins as largest shareholder of holding company IndeCorp – now Preferred Hotel Group – and Chairman of the board. Gail and Lindsey Ueberroth joined as Vice-Chairperson/Chief Marketing Officer and Executive Vice President respectively, setting the stage for the family-oriented direction to come and accelerating expansion worldwide.

In 2010, when Lindsey was named CEO, the collection had grown to 650, and with the creation of guest and membership benefit programmes and a growing slate of ever-specific experience categories including golf and LGBT-friendly hotels – and with announcement that the company had generated over US\$1 billion in reservation

revenue for its hotels still to come – the decade since and the current iteration of the brand has proved fruitful.

THE HOTELS

“Due to their independent nature, no two properties in our portfolio are alike,” Ueberroth explains. “We do not impose a specific design aesthetic on our hoteliers because the ability to allow guests to choose from a variety of options that meet different life, style, and cultural preferences is intrinsic to our brand identity.”

From the sleek and modern Hotel Hendricks in the heart of New York to the secluded tranquillity of Leleuwatu Resort on Indonesia’s coast, the Preferred collection is best characterised by the wide diversity of its portfolio, arguably the quality most essential to the model’s success.

Opening its doors earlier this year in central Palma’s Old Quarter, Can Bordoy Grand House & Garden features an intimate 24 suites and design by Mallorcan studio Ohlab incorporating many of the 16th-century structure’s Gothic relics and baroque touches, whilst Sao Paulo’s Hotel Unique sits at the opposite end of the spectrum, with Ruy Ohtake’s bold modernist structure housing an offer tied closely to its urban garden setting.



Both convey respite and an oasis amidst busy streets, but both also showcase the wide variety available to guests. Likewise, few major chains can offer customers the luxury Manhattan outpost Baccarat Hotel – replete with jewelled chandeliers, vivid streaked marble and mid-century furnishings – alongside the 39-acre grounds of Montage Los Cabos, an expansive resort at the tip of the Baja Californian peninsula, in the same breath.

Aligning itself with the culture of worldwide members as opposed to forcefully implementing and foregrounding its own brand, Preferred gives the hotels forming its collection room to breathe and express themselves. Whilst many may boast of the authentic and unique nature of their properties, it is difficult to truly claim these attributes without allowing for a large degree of independence. “We find that this approach helps us to forge equal partnerships between the brand and the hotel – one where we support the owner or operator’s vision of luxury hospitality,” Ueberroth confirms.

GIVE & TAKE

As such, this equal standing is perhaps the second most important dimension to the model’s success. Whilst Preferred gain a bolthole, boutique or resort, the member in turn receives access to a wide network of sales resources, tech and booking support, and listed presence on the experience platform. As opposed to going it alone

and running the risk of falling into a void of internet advertising or relying solely on word of mouth, the model allows members to band together under a common banner, and with the Preferred name by now holding the reliability of a large chain, it could be viewed as closer to the give-and-take, back-scratching makeup of a trading bloc or political union than it is a traditional hotel company.

“We want our relationships with member hotels to be mutually beneficial partnerships and our approach to be consultative,” Ueberroth explains. “They retain control of their asset and its management, free of the restrictions imposed by hotel chains and homogenised hospitality groups, which in turn allows them to deliver authentic experiences and to quickly react to new trends.”

In a luxury market quickly shifting to value experience and the less tangible aspects of travel and hospitality over traditional interpretations, this model could have the capacity to eventually challenge the reinforced hegemony Ueberroth refers to – that’s if it hasn’t already.

However, much like the collection she oversees, Ueberroth values diversity. “Consumers still want choice – with needs and desires changing from trip to trip,” she concludes. “Both the soft brand or independent model and harder approaches must continue to co-exist to ensure we cater to our ultimate end goal – genuine hospitality and guest satisfaction.”