

In Search of Hotel Excellence: St. Regis Bal Harbour

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By Larry Mogelonsky



I had heard about the new St. Regis in Bal Harbour on the northern tip of Miami Beach (opened January 2012) long before my recent vacation there. After all, a capital expenditure of nearly one billion dollars does not easily hide in today's hospitality investment circles. This is enough to make anyone curious, especially a marketing consultant such as myself.

So, did this new landmark hotel meet and surpass all the pre-launch hype? While on property, I dined with the General Manager, Marco Selva, to discuss just this in addition to a thorough site inspection.

For those not already familiar with this property, the St. Regis Bal Harbour sits on land formerly occupied by the Americana resort, and subsequently reflagged as the Sheraton Bal Harbour. The five-acre beachfront block sits directly opposite the Bal Harbour Shops, considered to be the finest open-air mall in the world by those who have no real need to look at prices (read: snazzy).

The property's 243 rooms and suites are flanked on each side by private residences, a logical way to generate the necessary upfront capital to make such a grand venture possible. Each of these wings has separate motor entry ramps and service quarters, thereby minimizing congestion. Ingeniously, the hotel's ballroom-level entrance is one floor below the lobby; it works rather brilliantly when you see it in action.

Stepping out of one's vehicle and into the St. Regis lobby is a truly awe-inspiring experience. The hotel owes a lot to designer Yabu Pushelberg's keen sense of broken sightlines, powerfully oversized furnishings and world-class contemporary artwork. (The artwork alone is worthy of a visit, and would not look out of place in MOMA.) Proceeding to reception enamors with a heightened sense of anticipation of good things to come – a key takeaway. In essence, this 'sense of arrival' – critical to escalating a guest's positive first impression – provides a bold statement of lush décor and extravagance.



Assembling the team to execute the service needs of this property was no small matter. In speaking with Mr. Selva, he indicated that his greatest desire was to seek a staff component with a profound luxury hotel background. "I wanted to meet each team member personally, to see the commitment to service in their eyes. For only then would I know if they were serious about the task we were initiating here in Bal Harbour." My stay confirmed Mr. Selva's goal. Each staff member I spoke with was not only performing his or her job, but was also executing individual touches to make me feel comfortable. There was not one situation where I felt that a staff member was merely going through the motions and not committed

to their craft.