



Ritz-Carlton Montreal boss on the changing face of luxury – and the importance of a good night’s sleep

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Andrew Torriani, 52, is a hospitality triple threat – president, CEO and general manager of the Ritz-Carlton Montreal. Which is all the more impressive when you consider his first job at the hotel: busboy. After taking the reins in 2006, Torriani led the historic property through a much-needed four-year restoration. He spoke from Montreal with The Globe about the changing face of luxury – and the importance of a good night’s sleep.



MULTIMEDIA

When it comes to travel, savvy gents aren’t afraid to spend

The renovation was a huge undertaking. What was your biggest concern?

We wanted to upgrade the hotel – bring it into a modern phase – and yet not lose the spirit of Ritz-Carlton. You know, Ritz-Carlton has been around 103 years now. We wanted to make sure people felt connected with the fact that it was an old, classic, palatial hotel. That was the key.



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Guests get an eyeful at this hip Rotterdam hotel

How did you incorporate your own wants and needs as a traveller into the redesign?

My father was a hotelier so we lived and breathed and worked in hotels from early ages. Whenever I go somewhere I always look at those unique features that properties have. And one of the things that I’ve found is that a lot of hotels have gotten complicated in terms of technology, and in a way it becomes way too difficult to do things. We were looking for things that would simplify – like having a USB port next to the bed, as opposed to having to get someone to bring an adapter so your European plug will work.



MULTIMEDIA

Luxury tents, yurts and cabins: How our need for comfort has changed the way we camp

Hotels are focusing a lot on technology nowadays. You can order everything with a smartphone, even open the door. It makes things easier – but does it take away from the glamour and magic of the luxury experience?

I find it’s the way that applications are being designed that often makes people uncomfortable and lose that personal touch. You have to make sure you have a simple interface. There are many people, especially people who are travelling a lot, who just want to get things done quickly. You don’t want to make things more complicated and longer to do with the technology. I think that’s where people lose the value. And us, in luxury, I think we always have to have the human contact. If you do say, ‘Send me some towels,’ let’s have some form of human interface – ‘Is it just towels you need? Can I bring you something else?’ – to endorse that luxury feel.

So we won’t be seeing robot butlers at the Ritz any time soon?

[Laughter.] I can’t say that will never happen, but I really believe luxury is trying to interface with people in a way that is like, you can do everything for them. Right now the more you remove the people from the equation, the more you lose that sense of luxury.

Speaking of the changing face of luxury travel, how is today’s luxury traveller different than the one from 10, 20 years ago?

As people learn things in luxury, they expect them. Take sheets: If you look 20, 30 years ago, you wouldn’t necessarily have had 800-thread-count sheets. Today, in high end, you pretty much have to be in that 600-800 thread count. Everybody’s tried them and said, ‘Oh that’s great.’ You wouldn’t be able to have a 400 thread count. There’s evolution going on all the time. Technology, comforters, more comfy beds. Beds now are far away from what you would have had 20 years ago.

Beds have become an industry all to themselves it seems.

That’s all about providing comfort and not having people wake up with backaches. You need to find something that’s incredibly reliable. You don’t want people saying, ‘That was an uncomfortable night.’ Because those things spinoff fast. You know, someone sleeps badly all night and they come downstairs and they’re not always the most friendly people.

This interview was condensed and edited.