



THE WORLD'S BEST HOTEL GENERAL MANAGER 2015

In Praise of the Chief Architect of the Hotel 'Guest Experience'.

The flavor of true hospitality would perhaps already be a thing of the past were it not for the industry's most committed veterans. To recognize these often-unsung soldiers of the hospitality trade, the *Mediazone Group* annually salutes one extraordinary General Manager most credited with creating that elusive 'wow' factor in every hotel he/she serves.

the nominees



Chatchawan Pankudrua
General Manager, Sheraton Krabi Beach Resort.



Charlie Dang
General Manager, Westin Beijing Financial Street.



Daniel Aylmer
General Manager, Westin Beijing Chaoyang.



Frank Wesselhoefft
General Manager, Six Senses Yau Noi.



Mark Francis
General Manager, Langham Place Beijing Capital Airport.



Martin Raich
General Manager of the Sheraton Hua Hin.



Pierre Barthes
General Manager, Mandarin Oriental, Pudong, Shanghai.



Peter Nilsson
General Manager, Six Sense Hideaway Hua Hin.



Yngvar Stray
General Manager, St Regis Beijing.

(Presenting these fine GMs alongside the properties they were managing at the time of nomination.)

Oversupply of rooms, staff shortage and looming costs leaving large hotel groups with little choice but to serve through automation. Is this the end of the institution that gives so much, for so little?

Not as long as industry veterans continue to innovate and fight the good fight to 'keep the lights on' for the weary traveller to put down bags, take a hot

shower, enjoy a warm meal and sink into dreams.

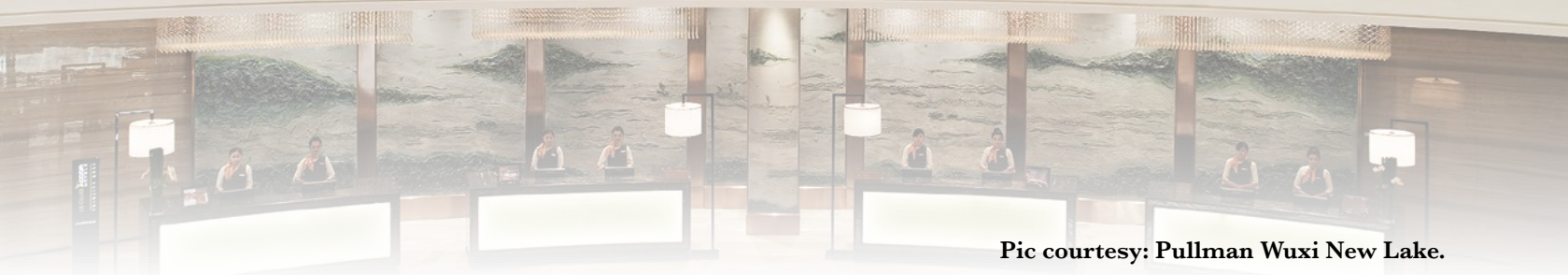
Our quest to salute these artisans of hospitality results in the annual nomination of one talented General Manager who satisfies our criteria and in doing so, does so much to keep the flame of hospitality alive.

Birth of the Concept

Asia's Mr. Hospitality Glenn Rogers has interviewed/profiled scores of key

hospitality personnel across the Americas, Europe & Asia to bring fresh news, views and analyses to readers of the Mediazone Group's niche established print and newly launched online publications.

The Group publishes Hong Kong's largest circulating and only English-language business annual of its kind owing its influence to the territory's most powerful who grace its pages. Alongside, it publishes six online niche publications



Pic courtesy: Pullman Wuxi New Lake.

that boasts a combined on-line target readership in excess of 7.5 million world-wide. It's latest acquisition is its on-line Luxury Hotels magazine catering to the luxury leisure and Meetings, Incentive, Convention & Exhibition (M.I.C.E) market.

With a staggering 73% of readers spending on average 110 nights per year in five star hotels, the hospitality industry became a "must-watch" industry for the Mediazone Group of Publications.

Reports on owners, suppliers, management companies and hotel reviews began flooding in but readers were uninterested, preferring to focus only on – the overall guest experience – the chief architect of which is – the hotel's General Manager.

Reports on nearly 1500 General Managers came in from across the Americas, Europe, the Middle East & Asia to a team of editorial specialists with one mandate – to find one General Manager -- a first among equals reputed to be a true inspirational leader possessing those sterling qualities needed to produce (to the guest) that unrivalled, consistent quality of true 5-star overall service.

Love, Lead & Learn

Combing through editorial reports of every hue, hotels from the Crillon in Paris to the Marriott in Mumbai the Board of Editors of the Mediazone Group of Publications were looking for reports, remarks and notes about General Managers who were seen to have shown exemplary leadership qualities including

but not restricted to;

- Proven track record of pre-opening success
- Keen understanding of the hospitality business on a global/regional/local scale
- Commitment to continuous improvement across all aspects of hotel management including housekeeping, food & beverage and guest relations
- Proven success with corporate social responsibility initiatives
- Accepted as mentor by colleagues across his/her career in hospitality
- Successful implementation of customer-satisfaction initiatives
- Respected by leaders of the public & private sector and the travel trade
- Proactive policy maker
- Strategic planner
- Unparalleled communication skills
- Proven initiative in media-related affairs
- Leadership in human resources/training
- Devotion to best business practices
- Results orientated
- Pragmatic negotiator
- Analytical & attention to detail
- Excellent crisis management talent.

Four months of scouring media-reports, collecting and cross-checking references and after consultation with industry experts we arrived at nine fine finalists – all exemplary General Managers co-incidentally each from a different country. Among the main hotel management companies/groups from which these hotels/GMs were chosen from remain;

IHG, Starwood, Marriott, Accor, Hilton, Hyatt, Wyndham, Shangri-La, Four Seasons, Millennium & Copthorne, Mandarin Oriental, Carlson Rezidor, Kempinski, Movenpick, Banyan Tree, Marco Polo, Choice and Best Western.

The Trade's Best Men

In alphabetical order we present nine of the world's best hotel general manager finalists alongside the Chief Judge's (Mr. Glenn Rogers, our CEO & Editor-in-Chief and Asia's Mr. Hospitality) comments. All mentions come alongside the names of the properties they were serving at the time of final nomination.

Chatchawan Pankudrua – General Manager, Sheraton Krabi Beach Resort.
From: Thailand

"Rarely is one fortunate to meet such a hands-on GM, immensely capable of inspiring so powerfully. Hugely respected by his team Chatchawan's devotion to the craft goes beyond all expectations."

Charlie Dang – General Manager, Westin Beijing Financial Street.
From: Singapore

"A value-proposition any which way, Charlie has that rare ability to experiment with the usual and create the unusual. A great leader, he has that knack for getting the best out of his team."

Daniel Aylmer – General Manager,
Westin Beijing Chaoyang.
From: United Kingdom

“Daniel possesses the Midas touch in so far as regardless of the hotel he leads, all aspects of operations seem to fall in sync.”

Frank Wesselhoeft – General
Manager, Six Senses Yau Noi.
From: Germany

“Few hospitality professionals rival his understanding of human nature. He brings this gift to bear on his dealings with staff and guests alike and the effect is .magical.”

Mark Francis – General Manager,
Langham Place Beijing Capital Airport.
From: Canada

“An exemplary visionary, Mark is one of those few professionals with the wisdom to prepare the market before the product is actually available. He can sell a

product that hasn't yet been built. That's talent!”

Martin Raich – General Manager of
the Sheraton Hua Hin.
From: Austria

“Unafraid to speak his mind, Martin's deft understanding of his industry helps shape the direction of the property he leads. Ever keen on the smallest detail he is a great motivator, embraces positive criticism and leads by example.”

Pierre Barthes – General Manager,
Mandarin Oriental, Pudong, Shanghai.
From: France

“Stickler for perfection, Pierre is loved by devotees of the craft and feared by those unwilling to give more than their best. An avid industry observer, Pierre is a strategist par excellence. In a hotel run by him, the harshest critic would be hard placed to fault-find.”

Peter Nilsson – General Manager,
Six Senses Hideaway Hua Hin.
From: Sweden

“Competitive to the core, Peter wants to constantly re-invent the 'best-guest-experience', packages his property brilliantly. Ever the pragmatist, he sports an enviable 'can-do' attitude.”

Yngvar Stray – General Manager, St
Regis Beijing.
From: Norway

“You know an Yngvar Stray-managed hotel from the moment the hotel car picks you up from the airport. Need I say more?”

From these fine nine it falls to us to pick one. Not an enviable task for any panel simply because of the multitude of variables, time and circumstances and of course the ever-prevalent human element. Alas, there can be only one winner and after much deliberation our choice is –

What the Guest is Interested in...and Not!

Regardless of brand or the number of stars a hotel has, the 'quality guest' has expectations of a luxury hotel. General Managers able to thrill guests enough to convert them into loyal brand ambassadors are true-to-blood captains of this amazing industry.

✓ Interested

- Personal heartfelt/warm reception
- Clean, spacious, welcoming lobby
 - Swift & professional Check-in
- Immaculately clean, luxurious rooms/suites
 - Luxurious bathroom features
- Outstanding, creative, authentic Food & Beverage Service
- Top-notch Rest & Relaxation amenities
- Courteous, proactive, attentive staff
 - One-Stop-Shop MICE facilities
 - Great concierge service
 - World-Class lounge service
- Choice of signature restaurants
 - Price of room
 - Price of mini-bar
- Quality of check-out service
 - Restricted floors

✗ NOT Interested

- Owner-management relationship
 - Staff retention issues
 - Overheads
 - Rising costs of F&B
- Housekeeping shortcomings
 - Being overcharged
 - Excuses
- Can't-do attitude
- Staff issues with management
- Management averse to complaints

Pierre Barthes, now General Manager of the Mandarin Oriental, Pudong, Shanghai, China.

An officer & A Gentleman

A veritable source of industry knowledge, Barthes boasts an enviable track record, which we follow since his tenure with the Mandarin Oriental in Macau (now the Grand Lapa) where till date he is remembered with regard.

Ever the hospitality artisan, he is known for his love of fine food, his affinity and respect for people and a total commitment to creating the as yet unrivaled 'total guest experience' across all the hotels he's served at (see *King of Hearts*). Described as an innovative General Manager with a reputation for bringing out the best in people, Barthes is his usual modest self.

"I don't take credit for what comes to me naturally," he said to Glenn Rogers the Editor-in-Chief of the Mediazone Group (and Asia's Mr. Hospitality) on Feb 11, this year. "It's part of my upbringing, I guess. It makes perfect business and personal sense to help people who want to learn improve and excel."

For his love affair with hospitality, he blames France.



Pierre Barthes

The World's Best Hotel General Manager 2015.

"I grew up in a country that comes to a total stand-still for lunch. Need I say more? France is in many ways, the cradle of hospitality and where it comes to attentive silver service few countries rival France."

Serving the Mandarin Oriental in Hawaii, San Francisco, New York, Macau, Beijing, Kuala Lumpur and (now) Shanghai, he's been at the helm

rain or shine.

"The markets are now more fluid than ever thanks to the Internet. The number of hotel rooms is growing inversely proportional to the number of new (staff) entrants into the industry. Aside from this talent crunch, costs keep escalating and hotels have to take innovation to new heights to stay profitable. But, that is the joy of business, n'est ce pas? Succeeding not in spite of obstacles but because of them."

"I am humbled to be chosen as World's Best Hotel General Manager 2015 by such an influential media group and particularly to see my name alongside the eight extraordinary GMs short-listed for this prestigious award.

"I owe this success to my colleagues across all the hotels I've served with, my guests who have helped me reach for the seemingly impossible and of course, France, my country in which I learnt that hospitality is not merely an art or a craft or a science. It is more than that. It is a calling. To excel you have to make it your life's mission to serve. I shall keep this recognition as a humble reminder that the race to perfection is won by every small step taken correctly and in the right direction." ■

GLENN ROGERS: *Asia's Mr. Hospitality and Chairman of the Board of Publishers of the Mediazone Group of Publications World-wide.*

"July 20 this year marks a red letter day for all true artisans of this noble craft of hospitality. We celebrate today, not merely a landmark record of service, but the vic-

tory of will and vision over adversity and the determination of the human spirit to flourish in the service of mankind.

For the trade, today shall serve as a reminder that the old adage 'what goes around comes around' is very much true.

As so many have testified, M. Pierre Barthes is not merely an accomplished professional. He is



a teacher, a guide, a friend, a confidante, a mentor and an idol all in one (as you in the trade like to put it) best-value-proposition.

He has led by example and inspired

countless who till date recall his professionalism, kindness, energy, tenacity, can-do-attitude, generosity of heart and his empathy, which many credit as being the hallmark of his character.

So on behalf of all the people whose lives he has touched, I couldn't be happier to present this Award to M. Pierre Barthes – an officer, a gentleman and a **TRUE** icon of our times.