

business life

WHERE NEXT?

TREND
TALEN
TECH
THOUGHTS
TRAVEL

July/August 2011

IN **SEARCH** of the
MISFIT ECONOMY:

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& INNER CITY GANGS
HAVE IN COMMON WITH
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58
MINS

Amanda Morison meets sportsman turned hotelier Carsten Rath, founder and CEO of Kameha Grand Zurich, a buzzy new luxury hotel designed by Marcel Wanders

BL Was it always your ambition to run hotels?

CR Not at all. I was on the verge of becoming a professional tennis player when I slipped a disc. It wasn't a sexy injury – it happened getting out of a bus. After that I was lost and depressed for a year. Then as I was travelling, interested in languages and wanted to meet people, I thought I'd become a hotelier.

BL And the rest is history?

CR Not exactly. I started at the bottom, and my first experience was at a horrible hotel in the Black Forest. But I got lucky. One guest was executive vice president of Kempinski, and he offered me a job.

BL What do you look for in your employees?

CR I don't look at skills, but really really look at attitude. It's about heart and empathy. Give people the freedom to be human; they're not trees or cows. Every member of my staff can make a decision that costs up to CHF2,000 (£1,380). It means most complaints are fixed immediately. For the Kameha Grand Zurich we had 8,000 applications, 800 interviews, and hired 160. It's important to reflect your guests and we employ 39 nationalities, who speak 48 languages. If a Russian checks in I want him to be approached in his own language.

BL Are you a fan of London?

CR It's up there with New York in terms of service, hotels and restaurants. The Rosewood blew me away. I had a disaster with emails that needed printing, and the doorman personally sorted it out and drove me to the airport.

BL Any other favourite hotels?

CR The best in the world is Brenners Park-Hotel & Spa in Baden-Baden. I also like the Peninsula Bangkok, and Ritz-Carlton Naples. The staff really care.

THE
HOTELIERS
#7 CARSTEN
RATH



"Hotels have always been innovation drivers"

BL What do you like most about the Kameha Grand?

CR You'll discover something new everywhere you look. I love the little details, like the giant ropes of gold coins in the bar. We're the first hotel to actively reward guests for being greener.

Choose not to have your room serviced and we'll give you a bottle of wine, airline miles or a voucher. This partly comes from me hating my room being barged into by staff every five seconds.

BL Do you keep up with technology?

CR It's not about great devices but about making things easier. Press one button and every light in your room will go out. Every room has four different plug sockets. The illustrations of Swiss flowers on bar tables are phone chargers in disguise. We're creating

a concierge app because guests want something they can use on their own phone.

BL What's great about your industry?

CR Hotels have always been innovation drivers. The Ritz Paris was the world's first to have electricity in each room. Berlin's Adlon was the first with hot and cold running water – Emperor Wilhelm II had his first bath there.

BL Any tips on dealing with jet lag?

CR I always take melatonin, which you can only get in the US. Drink a lot of water, and change time immediately to where you're going.

BL Funniest career moment?

CR I had an interview in Atlanta with Ritz-Carlton. I used the sauna, and two guys in black suits came in and got me out because I was naked. Next morning it was the running joke of the hotel – the first thing I was asked in my interview was to promise to always be dressed if I became GM! It was a good lesson in cultural differences. ■

For more, visit kamehagrandzuerich.com