

THE TAKEAWAY

Laurence Geller on what's wrong with boutique hotels, millennials—and other topics

By ALBY GALLUN

Laurence Geller is head of Geller Capital Partners, which owns the Waldorf Astoria in the Gold Coast and the new Conrad Chicago just off North Michigan Avenue. The 69-year-old Brit founded Strategic Hotels & Resorts in 1997.

You have some pretty strong opinions about boutique hotels that are aimed at millennials, oozing cool with trendy decor and design. What's the matter with them?

The strange thing that happens is that millennials grow up. Millennials have got all the staying power of a snake slithering on the floor. They're fickle.

Are you still running marathons?

Not very fast. My fastest time was 3 hours and 11 minutes all those years ago. I will be very happy with a 5-hour marathon these days. My knees—oh, do I hurt for months afterward.

Speaking of hobbies, you've written two novels inspired by your experiences in the hotel business. Can we expect a third?

You can. The working title at the moment is "Room Service." Strangely enough, one of the heroes will be a millennial hotelier.

When is that coming out?

My guess is I can finish it during 2017, so it'll be a 2018 book. But at one point I got so angry I killed the main character. That was a bad mistake, so I have to rewrite.

You recently opened a dementia care facility in London, and you're busy with Alzheimer's-related causes. Why is this issue so important to you?

My father died at the age of 90 from dementia. But he still had plenty of memory. My mother had full-onset dementia at the age of 96 when she died.



"Room Service" has been postponed until its protagonist can be resurrected.

Wow, 90 and 96—that's amazing, but I bet it was hard.

I watched what it did to my family. My sister had to stop working, and I paid her wages. When my parents were in a full dementia state, they were funny, they laughed, they didn't know from one thing to the next. But much of the time they had lots of moments of lucidity, and I watched them struggling to get out of "prison." It was like a death sentence that they couldn't escape.

What do you miss the most about your previous job, and what do you miss the least?

I miss having \$4 billion or \$5 billion of assets. I like the scale. On the other hand, I can focus at the Conrad on the menu and the ingredients. I can focus on whether I want a fireplace or I don't want a fireplace. I don't miss the boards, the bureaucracy, the public market issues, the analysts.

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