

b a s k TM

LUXURY IN
BALANCETM

ALONG THE COAST

WHERE TO ESCAPE THIS SUMMER

HONORING YOUR
SPIRITUAL CENTER
with YOGA

THE ART *of*
ENTERTAINING
ALFRESCO

PRIME FOOD FINDS
and SAVORY FLAVORS

NEUTRAL HUES
and SEASONAL STYLE TRENDS
FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD

SUMMER 2011

\$10.00US



Alan Fuerstman

Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Montage Hotels and Resorts, Alan Fuerstman took a few moments out of his crowded schedule to discuss with *bask* his vision of luxury, guest service, and the future of the Montage brand.

bask: Hospitality can be a challenging industry. How did you find yourself in this field?

Alan Fuerstman: I was never planning a career in the hospitality industry. My senior year in high school I took a part-time job as a doorman at a Marriott hotel. I went off to college and every summer came back and worked as a bellman at the hotel. Upon graduation, I had the opportunity to open a resort as bell captain. I shortly realized that I had fallen in love with the complexity, excitement, and the kind of impact we, as service providers, could make in the hospitality environment. I have been involved in the industry ever since.

b: How does the brand compare now to your original concept, almost ten years ago?

AF: To explain where it stands now in relation to my initial concept, it is important to understand how I initially envisioned the brand. As I saw it at the time, there was room for a new ultra-luxury hotel company, largely because of the needs and wants of a newly emerging luxury lifestyle. We had an opportunity to create a concept centered on guest service and culinary experiences. I wanted the feeling of Montage to be a humble one, one without the sense of pretension that seemed to have seeped into the older style of lavish hospitality; this new luxury guest was seeking an experience that was more comfortable and more approachable. We would still be dedicated to the highest quality in everything we did - we would just do so in a more relationship-oriented way.



b: How have you been able to maintain your standards within the Montage?

AF: The short answer? A passionate focus on our vision as a company and a determination to never compromise the brand. The long answer is that we have had many opportunities to grow that weren't in line with our original vision, whether they be new properties or the management of existing properties, and we chose to not go in that direction in order to maintain our brand integrity. For us, it's about measured growth in order to remain true to our brand promise.

b: How do you personally define "luxury?"

AF: For me, there are tangible components to luxury, and there are intangible components. The things you touch and feel, and the quality of the craftsmanship are important parts of the tangible luxury experience. The other dimension, the intangible, is how you are made to feel. It's a style of service, it is in the attention to detail, it's a deliverable that is reflective of understanding of time, which is the most precious commodity to a busy luxury consumer. It is how you are made to feel while you are enjoying the elements of luxury around you.

In the end, there are certainly the trappings of luxury, but there are other things that leave you with the impression that you have just enjoyed true luxury. For hospitality, that really focuses in on the quality of training for your employees in order to deliver. It means being able to read the needs and wants for each consumer individually. And it leaves you with a tremendous feeling of fulfillment when you've done it right.

b: What influences your concept of luxury, particularly in your profession?

AF: I am most influenced by style of service. To me, it's the comfortable elegance. I'm influenced by the arts; they are an important component to luxury. In fact, the name

"Montage" is an homage not only to Laguna Beach's artistic history, but it is also a nod towards this aspect of luxury and art. It's the visual arts, the musical arts, the culinary arts, and how they blend together that creates a super-luxury experience.

b: How do you embrace luxury in your personal life?

AF: I love to travel. Probably the most relaxing for me are beach destinations. Whether it's here in Laguna Beach, or somewhere on the other side of the world, like Fiji. I find them

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rejuvenating. I also love skiing, music, and staying active.

Exploration and experiencing other cultures are passions of mine. I feel that there is so much to discover in the world. With so much to absorb and learn, I find combining passion for the [hospitality] work with this passion for discovery. . . well, they intertwine quite nicely.

b: When you travel, do you find yourself critiquing other hotels and restaurants?

AF: I'm often asked as the operator of a luxury hotel, if when I travel, I find myself a big critic of other hotels and restaurants. And the answer is, "No, I'm only looking for things that I can learn from and do better. I'm not concerned if things are not so good. I'm really

focused on things that are memorable and different and that I can integrate into what we do." I had a great experience a few years ago in New York that illustrates my point. I had mentioned to the concierge that I was going to see the Jersey Boys. That night when I returned to my room from seeing the show, I found the Jersey Boys were playing on a CD in the room. And there was a note from the concierge that read, "I hope you enjoyed the show. Please enjoy the CD as an expression of appreciation for your visit with us." I was quick to spread that story with my team and share just how memorable that experience was, and to use that as a tool to motivate our team in making sure we are doing those kinds of things for our guests when we see the opportunities to do so. And that is the kind of take-away I look for in other hotels. It's a reminder that there are great hospitality examples all the time that we may emulate.

b: What would bask readers be surprised to learn about the visionary behind the Montage resort?

AF: That I prefer In-N-Out Burger over caviar? (laughs)

b: Are there any particular design elements or secret personal touches to each Montage?

AF: Physically, no. I feel the style of service is what most reflects on me and the company. The graciousness and the relationships we make with our guests are the signature details. Really, it's not any particular design element, so much as it is a genuine human touch.

b: Finally, what is in store for the future for you and the Montage?

AF: We are in growth mode. A growing company is a healthy company. Because of the early success of Laguna Beach, Beverly Hills, and Deer Valley, the opportunities are tremendous. We have quite a few projects we are considering: Mexico, Northern California wine country, the Bahamas, Hawaii, Europe, maybe even as far as China. I can tell you that gateway cities are important to us. And I feel that we really are destined to be a global brand.