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ALAN FURSTMAN AT
MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

The Art *of* LUXURY

BY STEPHANIE WILSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY FLOREZ

ALAN FUERSTMAN, FOUNDER AND CEO OF MONTAGE HOTELS & RESORTS,
TALKS TO *HAUTE LIVING* ABOUT HIS NEW BRAND OF LUXURY THAT IS
REDEFINING FIVE-STAR SERVICE IN LAGUNA BEACH AND BEVERLY HILLS.

For decades, when one thought of five-star hotel properties, two brands came to mind: Four Seasons and Ritz-Carlton. These conglomerates dominated the luxury hotel field across the country and around the world. But something happened as these brands' portfolios grew. Properties began to pop up in secondary and tertiary markets, and the average traveler in these destinations was not necessarily best served by five-star brands. The result was a growth of "five-star" hotel properties that were not of a standard of luxury one should expect to find from a revered hospitality brand.

Enter Alan Fuerstman. He had an extensive background in top-tier hospitality management, with stints at Bellagio in Las Vegas; The Phoenician resort in Scottsdale, Arizona; Sheraton's Luxury Collection properties; and a smattering of St. Regis properties. These various roles, which ranged from vice president of hotel operations to president and managing director, allowed Fuerstman to see first-hand what it took to run a true five-star property. And he saw a void that needed to be filled.

"As I was looking at the luxury hotel landscape around the year 2000, I saw that there was an opportunity for another ultra-luxury brand. I looked at the brands that were dominating the market—the Ritz-Carltons, the Four Seasons—and saw that they had gotten pretty large as companies—40 to 60 hotels and growing. I

thought that ultra-luxury was best served by a smaller, highly focused company, and I thought the time was right for a new brand."

Thus, the now-revered Montage Hotels & Resorts brand was born, a bold move that has earned Fuerstman honors as Resort Executive of the Year from Ypartnership, the Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International, and the University of Denver's School of Hotel, Restaurant & Tourism Management. Currently operating two locations—Montage Laguna Beach and Montage Beverly Hills (with Montage Deer Valley in Park City, Utah, under way and Montage Los Cabos in Los Cabos, Mexico in the planning stages)—Montage Hotels & Resorts has certainly filled the niche for a boutique-like brand that offers the level of service expected of a five-star property in a primary market.

Montage Laguna Beach opened its doors to much fanfare in 2003 (it was named one of "The World's Best Hotels" from *Travel + Leisure* magazine for four years running and received the coveted Five-Diamond honors in 2009). The Beverly Hills locale, which opened November, 2008, was the first property Fuerstman looked at for new development, but he had an opportunity to establish the brand in Orange County before opening up in the heart of Beverly Hills' Golden Triangle. He chose these two locations based on their luxurious surroundings. The Orange County hotel has a stunning perch on picturesque



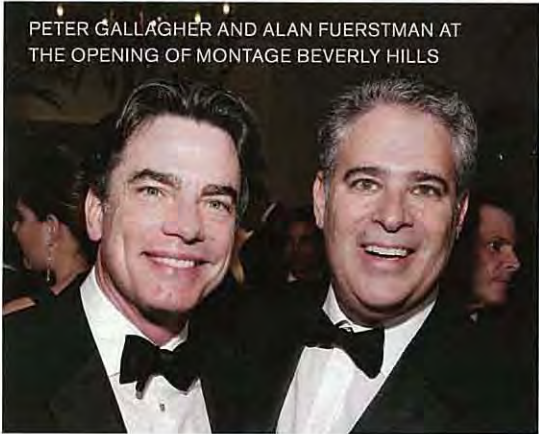
FUERSTMAN FAMILY



DEBBIE ALLEN, GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE PRODUCING DIRECTOR GIL CATES, WARREN BEATTY, ANNETTE BENING AND ALAN FUERSTMAN



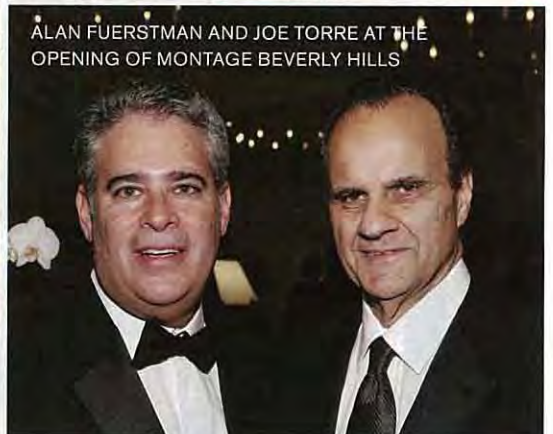
PHIL AND ROE DESPLAI, HEATHER LOCKLEAR, ALAN FUERSTMAN AND SUSAN FUERSTMAN AT STUDIO RESTAURANT, MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH



PETER GALLAGHER AND ALAN FUERSTMAN AT THE OPENING OF MONTAGE BEVERLY HILLS



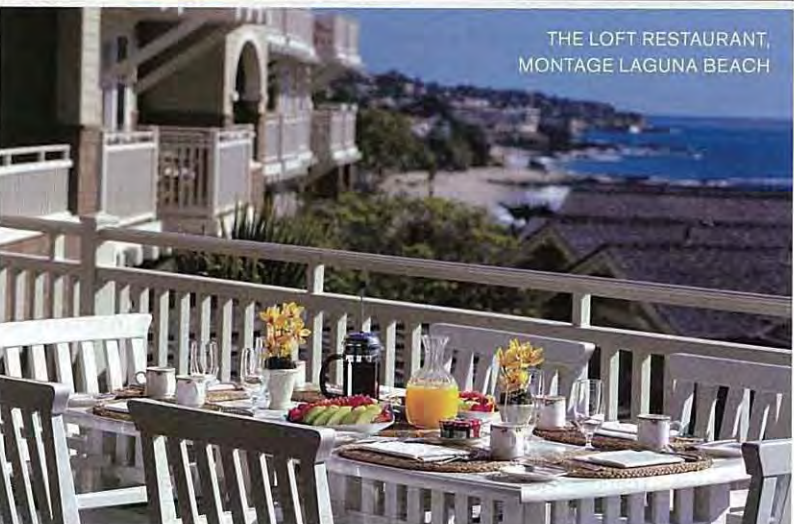
ALAN FUERSTMAN, SUSAN FUERSTMAN AND JACK NICKLAUS IN ROYAL ISLAND, BAHAMAS



ALAN FUERSTMAN AND JOE TORRE AT THE OPENING OF MONTAGE BEVERLY HILLS



STUDIO RESTAURANT, MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH



THE LOFT RESTAURANT, MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

cliffs in the midst of the artistic community of Laguna Beach, and the region's history as an artist's colony is reflected throughout the property. It is evidenced by muted color schemes, period lighting, authentic Early California plein air landscapes, and fantastic artworks displayed throughout. The property features 250 hotel rooms, including an assortment of beach bungalows.

Instead of opting to make his properties cookie-cutter, which he saw as a negative tactic that many other hotel companies utilized, he opted for the ground-up construction to embody a true sense of place. "The Craftsman-style architecture is very befitting of southern California," he explains. With distinctive period elements such as classic wood and stone architecture, crown moldings, rich dark wood, copper gutters, and a shingle-style roof, the resort's unique design reflects this bygone era.

The newer Montage Beverly Hills embraces the Spanish revival architecture that is prevalent in the area. "There is a strong European influence in the architecture and design of the property," says Fuerstman, "and it has a very local feel to it—a tremendous sense of place."

But it's not enough to have a gorgeous location in the midst of a luxury lifestyle enclave to call it a five-star brand. Service has to be up to par. And Montage has it all covered, as evidenced by the name. Fuerstman wanted a company moniker that would represent the artistic colony of properties he was building, but despite promises of a hefty bonus to whomever at his advertising and PR teams could come up with a fitting name, none of the hundreds of options they produced struck him as the ideal fit. Merely one week before the official announcement of the brand, he sat down in front of a computer and opened an art reference dictionary and began scouring for inspiration. "When I got to the letter M, I saw Montage—an artful compilation, collection. And I thought to myself, 'Well, that's exactly what this is going to be—a collection of hotels and resorts. We're going to create a collection of diverse people to come together and do

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—ALAN FUERSTMAN



MOSAIC POOL, MONTAGE
LAGUNA BEACH



MONTAGE BEVERLY HILLS

ROOFTOP POOL, MONTAGE
BEVERLY HILLS



GARDENS, MONTAGE
BEVERLY HILLS

remarkable things.” The word rolled off his tongue; he could imagine future guests saying, “I’m staying at the Montage.”

Today, each of the locations in this artful collection of properties puts an emphasis on the utmost levels of service that was the foundation of the brand. This is reflected not only in the white-glove service, but also in the amenities. In Laguna, the 20,000-square-foot indoor/outdoor oceanfront Spa Montage has an accolade list that rivals that of the hotel itself, including five stars from *Mobil Travel Guide*. The two-story Spa Montage at the Beverly Hills outpost reflects the same Andalusian style as the property, with a co-ed mineral pool as a central gathering spot. The fantastic consistencies don’t end there either. “[At our properties,] you’ll also see great restaurants,” says Fuerstman. “You’ll see the style of service, the graciousness, and the attention to detail. The personalization is very consistent from property to property, hotel to hotel.”

What you will also see is a residential component in each of the locales. While the Laguna Beach options are sold out, there are still some opportunities within Montage Residences Beverly Hills, which are priced from \$5 million to \$20 million. Owners of these fantastic units, which occupy the upper three floors of the hotel, not only enjoy the Mediterranean-style fixtures, finishes, and architectural details, they also have access to the amenities of the hotel property. “One of the unique attributes when you’re buying our residence is that you are really buying a lifestyle,” explains Fuerstman. “You’re living the life within a hotel with tremendous amenities, service, and staff.”

While only a select few will have the opportunity to buy into the Beverly Hills lifestyle, the pending Deer Valley locale, in Park City, Utah, scheduled to open in 2010, will feature 81 residences in addition to the 174-room hotel. While at first glance, it may seem like Park City might be the ultimate “secondary or tertiary market” that Fuerstman was trying to avoid, he is quick to point out the allure of the region. “The mountain is consistently rated in the industry as a No. 1 ski destination in North America, and we think it’s a beautiful complement to what we are creating as a luxury hotel resort brand.” With easy access from both coasts and year-round activities, Montage Deer Valley is on track to be a classic mountain resort that calls to the upper class. The first international property, Montage Los Cabos, is in the development stage, but one can rest assured that it will also embody the class and prestige that has already come to be expected of the five-diamond brand. ●

AT MONTAGE
LAGUNA BEACH

