HOW TO OPEN A HOTEL

Ever dreamed of opening your own hotel? **Marisa Cannon** talks to a handful of intrepid souls who have taken the plunge – and now have stories to tell

THE IDEA

PRESERVING A BUILDING

CHARLES & DEBORAH ROYCE, OCEAN HOUSE, RHODE ISLAND "For more than 100 years, Ocean House stood as an iconic, coastal New England destination. Not only was it known to travellers who ventured to the curative seaside climate of Watch Hill, Rhode Island, from industrial cities, but it was also a beacon to sailors. By the early 2000s, the hotel had fallen into serious disrepair and, as members of the community, it was difficult for us to watch. We didn't want to see Ocean House replaced, so we stepped in to secure the property and save the hotel. We really had no idea of the magnitude of the project we were taking on."

CONVERTING A HOME

KIM SCHINDELHAUER, PALACIO CAN MARQUES, PALMA, MALLORCA "The palace was my home originally, I'd owned it for 20 years, but it was just a bit too big. We'd always looked to make better use of such a wonderful building and, because the perception of hospitality was changing in Palma, we decided to convert it into a boutique hotel, opening in late 2018."

The restaurant at Palacio can Marques, Palma; James McBride and Chris Burch of Nihi Sumba, Indonesia. Left: the Tower Suite at Ocean House, Rhode Island

TAKING ON A CHALLENGE

CHRIS BURCH, NIHI SUMBA INDONESIA "My younger son loves to surf and we would often go to Bali. An associate of mine said, 'You've got to see this resort', and it was mostly wild at the time, with around 90 per cent of the people on horseback. I approached my friend and hotelier James McBride and we both came back to Sumba together, and decided it would just be too much to take on. But it was so beautiful and had stuck in my heart, so I made a commitment to buy it not knowing at the time what I would do with it."

BEING THE PERFECT HOST

KEVIN WENDLE, HOTEL ESENCIA, TULUM, MEXICO "I had had some success in media and tech and was looking for something as a retirement job. I love to entertain and open my home for friends and so many of them said, 'You really should open a hotel.' I started looking, which was part of the fun, and narrowed down where I wanted the hotel to be. I liked the idea of the Mayan riviera because it's one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in the world. Someone told me about Hotel Esencia coming on to the market, and it just had so much potential." →

GETTING STARTED

ANNA COVRE & FREDERIC TUBAU, PALAZZO CRISTO, VENICE

"We started with a brainstorming session. We told ourselves a story, visualised an atmosphere, made sketches. This gave us a theme to follow. We wanted to create a place different from everything else in Venice: neutral and contemporary to contrast with and also enhance the views. We also wanted to reference specific Venetian elements: walls painted the colour of the white marble of Venice; marble floors that are a reinterpretation of the entrance of the church of Zattere; exotic wood lacquer inspired by the private water taxis on the Grand Canal; sliding panels that mimic the portals of the Basilica San Marco; and green and pink velvet to remind us of the colours used in the boudoirs of the city's palazzi."

The fairytale château at Domaine des Etangs. Below: Monastero Santa Rosa; its owner Bianca Sharma

GARANCE PRIMAT, DOMAINE DES ETANGS, MASSIGNAC, FRANCE

"My father had restored some of the castle [originally built in the 11th century] after he bought the property in the 1980s, but when I took over I wanted to finish what he had started and create a strong concept for the interiors that would attract people from overseas. I wanted to respect the property's history but also bring about a sense of the present, creating a balance between tradition and innovation. We kept many of the antiques, for instance, but have included new fabrics and contemporary design to complement them."

BIANCA SHARMA, MONASTERO SANTA ROSA & SPA, AMALFI COAST

"Because it's a designated historic landmark in a Unesco protected environment, designing and renovating the property was a constant challenge. I knew it could be difficult to do renovation work in southern Italy, but I wasn't prepared for the amount of bureaucracy that was constantly interpreted differently by whichever authority was in charge at the time. Ultimately, however, I ended up with a very well renovated property that respected the original structure while providing the most modern of amenities for the guest experience."

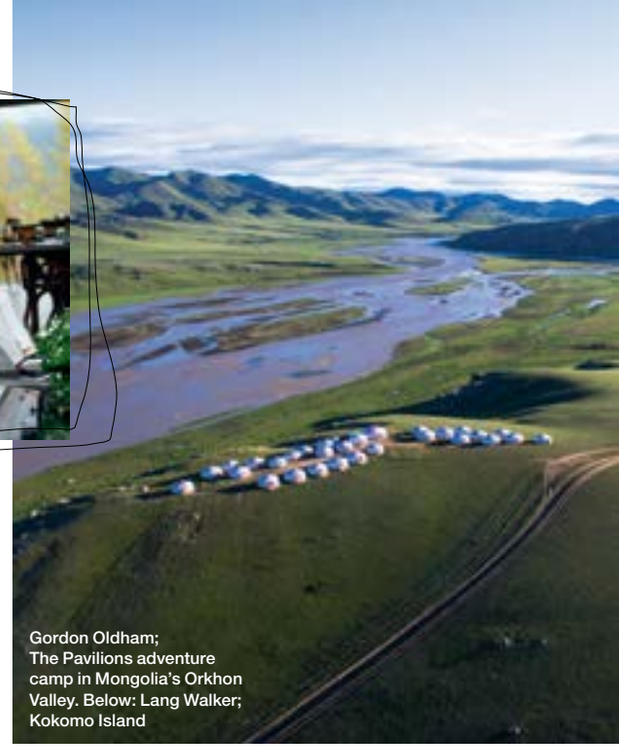
TIM HARTNOLL, BAWAH RESERVE, INDONESIA

"It was very important to me that we follow a sustainable plan. One of the first things I did was make it a marine reserve, banning fishing from the surrounding area. The build took over five years. We didn't use any heavy machinery – hand and local techniques only, to avoid any unnecessary damage to the land. Also it was key to stop the damage to the coral and the marine life in the surrounding area – we banned fishing and anchoring in the area and pushed to become a marine reserve, which we were proud to achieve."

NEED TO KNOW

GORDON OLDHAM, THE PAVILIONS HOTELS AND RESORTS

"You have to be diplomatic when you're in certain parts of the world. You have to bear in mind that you're the stranger coming to locals, and you have to respect what's there. I do tell the GMs that they must get involved in the community, because it's the right thing to do. Whether it's looking after the elderly or cats and dogs, get involved. Advice? Double the time and double the budget you think it will take."



Gordon Oldham; The Pavilions adventure camp in Mongolia's Orkhon Valley. Below: Lang Walker; Kokomo Island

KIM SCHINDELHAUER

"How you position the hotel is something you must think carefully about. IT infrastructure is a challenge too, linking the hotel with online booking systems, as well as the physical connectivity within the property – the walls are 1.5 metres thick, so providing good Wi-Fi and connecting all the rooms was difficult. We've found a great structure for our staff, though – I decided not to have a GM, but instead three 'team leaders', because I'm a big believer in team effort."

LANG WALKER, KOKOMO ISLAND, FIJI

"We try to source as much as we can locally, and most of the fish we have is from just outside the reef, but we bring in things like premium meat for the restaurants from either New Zealand or Australia. In terms of explaining cultural differences with local staff, I find if you find a humorous twist it helps." →

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GOOD IS IT A INVESTMENT?

Pinehaven is a luxurious lodge in Sundance Mountain Resort. Right: Shauna Redford

SHAUNA REDFORD, SUNDANCE MOUNTAIN RESORT

"Profit making is absolutely important. While I don't think it should rule every decision, sometimes I do wish it had been taken into greater consideration earlier in our history. And yet my father's [Robert Redford] independent spirit and determination to support things he cared deeply about also contributed to making a very special place and strong brand. Sometimes things that may not have made complete sense in the moment turned out to be quite visionary… others just a big bust that cost a great deal. But you can't have a creative person or business without failures and bad ideas. It's not about being predictable and safe. It's the hardest balance to manage in the business setting."

LANG WALKER

"You don't want to cut corners to make a profit, the intention is to get it right and have people returning. I could write a manual on what not to do, but the good thing is seeing it all come together. Just watching it transform from a jungle to what it is today – you sort of forget all the bad things." ■

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ABOUT OUR HOTELIERS

- **Charles Royce**, portfolio manager for Royce Pennsylvania Mutual Fund
- **Kim Schindelhauer**, chairman of the supervisory board of Aixtron SE
- **Chris Burch**, co-founder of fashion brand Tory Burch and founder/CEO of Burch Creative Capital
- **Kevin Wendle**, chairman and co-founder of K2 Media Labs
- **Anna Covre and Frederic Tubau**, interior designers
- **Bianca Sharma**, entrepreneur
- **Tim Hartnoll**, executive chairman of X-press Feeders
- **Garance Primat**, entrepreneur
- **Gordon Oldham**, senior partner at Oldham, Li & Nie
- **Lang Walker**, managing director of Walker Corporation
- **Shauna Redford**, painter