

CHINA'S TALLEST HOTELS

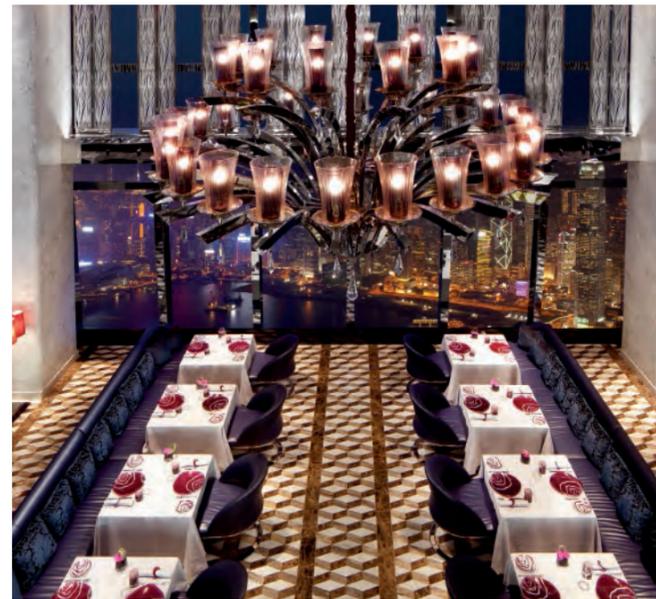
SKYSCRAPERS DELIVER HEAVENLY VIEWS
AND EXTREME CHALLENGES

BY: RON GLUCKMAN





The Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong



Hotels have grown enormously over the years, not only in stature and sophistication, but in sheer size. Every few years, another skyscraper supplants the last as the world's tallest, often with a lavish new hotel coddling guests on its upper floors. Skyscraper hotels take guests a few steps closer to heaven. But for hoteliers, they can be headaches.

"The logistics are extremely complicated," concedes Nicolas Senes, assistant director of Food & Beverage at Four Seasons Hotel Guangzhou, in the top floors of the 103-story Guangzhou International Finance Centre, among the world's 10 tallest towers. "You really have to plan ahead, and plan well. That's the critical thing."

Senes details scores of considerations in moving staff, food and supplies up the nearly 440-metre-tall building. But the main factor?

"We're completely dependent on lifts. There are 18 dedicated to the hotel, for guests and back house", he says, "but getting everything up and down is a constant challenge."

Nobody knows this better than Juan Samso, manager of the Ritz-Carlton, Hong Kong, the world's highest hotel. On the 118th floor is the aptly-named Ozone, highest bar on the planet. Views are literally out of this world, drawing scores of hotel guests and visitors. An estimated 90 percent of customers come from outside, highlighting the huge importance of these iconic properties. On a typical day, the Ritz's outlets serve 600-700 people. Last New Year's Eve, the Ritz was rocking, with nearly 1,700 people packing Ozone alone. Such success can be overwhelming.

"Everything in a building like this requires critical planning. In a normal hotel, everyone has a different agenda," he explains. "Movement is spread out. But here at the Ritz, everyone has the same agenda, to get up, or down."

Even with 80 high-speed elevators serving the mixed-use building and lightning-fast computer controls, accommodating everyone becomes a balancing act. The lifts are so critical to the building's operation that elevator maintenance workers are on site 24-7 says Samso, who adds, "I've become a master of the elevator!"

Skyscrapers have enjoyed renewed vitality over the last two decades, particularly in Asia and the Middle East, home to 17 of the world's 20 tallest buildings, according to the Council for Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH). As lighter, stronger construction materials propel buildings to ever greater heights, lift technology has evolved rapidly to keep pace.

Just a decade ago, double-decker lifts were commonplace, serving pairs of floors simultaneously. Staging areas allowed guests to shuttle between lifts dedicated to different sections of a building, often utilising the same shaft. Nowadays, express lifts race longer distances, without stops, as buildings are sectioned for use. In the Ritz, for instance, you zip straight up to the lobby on the 103rd floor, like on a space lift.

Yet technology cannot eliminate the physical gap confronting supplies and services. As towers grow dramatically taller, the gap broadens. Consider a skyscraper



RITZ - CARLTON, HONG KONG

Web: www.ritzcarlton.com/hongkong
 Address: International Commerce Centre,
 1 Austin Road West, Kowloon, Hong Kong
 Phone: +852 2263 2263
 Manager: Mr Pierre Perusset
 Owner Company: Sun Hung Kai Properties
 Number of Rooms: 312
 Rack Rate from: HKD 7,400 + 10% service charge



Park Hyatt

hotel as two distinct parts: an orbiting pod dependent on ground-level services. What guests experience is up top. But the essentials are down below, in a kind of base station.

Typically, most food storage is at ground level, along with most supplies. Pastries are prepared and breads baked in basement levels. Linen is washed below, since energy is saved by not moving supplies or water skyward unless necessary. Still, outlets above must be stocked and serviced regularly. Making it all work requires military-like precision.

"You develop systems," says Marco Avitabile, Hyatt's regional vice president of Food and Beverage for the Asia Pacific Region. He oversees five dozen hotels, many of them skyscrapers, including two in Shanghai that were, for a time, both the world's highest. The Grand Hyatt earned that honour in 1999, when it opened in the 421-metre Jim Mao, still considered one of the grandest new skyscrapers of modern times. In 2008, the Park Hyatt opened in the 492-metre World Financial Centre, right next door.

You develop skyscraper common sense. Employees take uniforms with them as they depart the high floors, leaving them down below in the laundry room, where they are cleaned, and picked up the next day by staff arriving for the journey skyward.

Like other super-tall hotels, the Hyatt stocks staples and does some food preparation at entry floors. But all

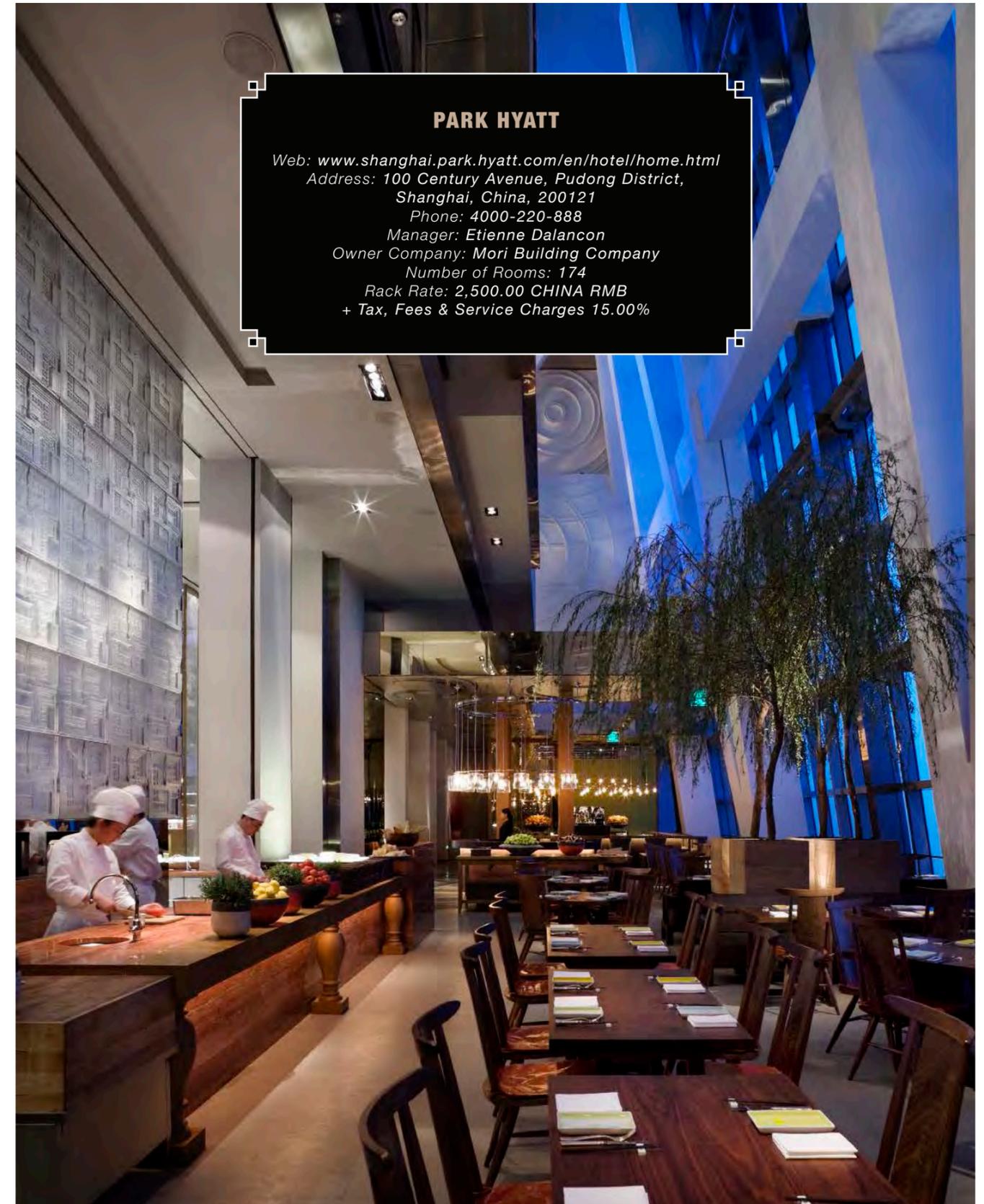
restaurants have their own kitchens high above. "You need to have production of food as close to the guest as possible," he explains.

Behind the scenes, everything moves like clockwork. Cleaning crews refresh the venues each night, while food ordered for the next day begins moving skyward each morning, in time for breakfast. "You learn to be very well prepared," he says. "You need to have everything organised. Every minute counts."

Improvisation and innovation is critical at such heights. "You have to be creative and work as a team," says Senes. Four Seasons staff uses WeChat and other message services. "If you need something, like a steak, we message that, and someone coming up can bring it. Otherwise, it could take 20 minutes if you send someone down."

But it's all worth it, he says, when he sees the look on the faces of guests. "It gets harder and harder to wow customers these days. They seem to travel everywhere. But when they come up in the elevators, get out, you see that look, the wow factor."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Ron Gluckman is a journalist with a keen interest in skyscrapers; he's visited all the world's highest hotels. Based in Asia for two decades, he contributes to Time, Travel & Leisure, Forbes, the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Discovery, Town and Country and CondeNast Traveler.



PARK HYATT

Web: www.shanghai.park.hyatt.com/en/hotel/home.html
 Address: 100 Century Avenue, Pudong District,
 Shanghai, China, 200121
 Phone: 4000-220-888
 Manager: Etienne Dalancon
 Owner Company: Mori Building Company
 Number of Rooms: 174
 Rack Rate: 2,500.00 CHINA RMB
 + Tax, Fees & Service Charges 15.00%

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL GUANGZHOU

Web: www.fourseasons.com/guangzhou
Address: 5 Zhujiang West Road, Pearl River New City,
Tianhe District, Guangzhou, China
Phone: 86 20 8883 3888
Manager: Bahram Sepahi
Owner Company: Yuexiu Real Estate Investment
Trading Company Limited
Number of Rooms: 344 (including 42 suites)
Rack Rate for a Standard Room: CNY 1780 per night room

