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Parisian perfection

The eighth Forum HOTel & Spa, held at the iconic Four Seasons George V, focused on the art of 'achieving the unachievable' in spa services

[Report by Sarah Camilleri]

Once again, Paris's Four Seasons George V was a suitably chic backdrop for Forum HOTel & Spa this May. The eighth annual edition of this popular hospitality forum, seamlessly organised by Vladi Kovanic, director of VK Organisation, was supported by *European Spa* magazine and a number of premium brand partners.

This year's programme, on the theme of 'Perfection', offered bi-lingual business presentations, industry panels and break-out sessions for 156 international delegates. A range of suppliers presented their latest launches and there was plenty of time for networking, as well as the Black Diamond Spa Awards.

A never-ending quest

Delegates enjoyed presentations from internationally renowned expert speakers representing many facets of luxury hospitality. The opening address was delivered by British guest of honour Adrian Bridge, CEO of The Fladgate Partnership – which includes Taylor's, Croft and Fonseca Ports – and founder of the award-winning Yeatman Hotel in Porto, Portugal, which is home to an extensive Caudalie Vinotherapie Spa.

Bridge's eloquent presentation tracked his journey to invest in, develop and design a unique luxury wine spa hotel – now a member of the Relais & Châteaux Collection. As when creating world-class wine and

ports, he noted, a great deal of time and attention to detail was necessary to realise an award-winning spa concept. "True luxury compounds the need for perfection," he said. "Perfection is not achievable, but if we always chase perfection we can achieve excellence."

Echoing the importance of paying attention to every detail, Italian architect Alberto Apostoli, a specialist in wellness design, later likened the creation of a perfect spa to "producing a great movie".

Self-design and psychology

A well-received presentation by the founder of Linser Hospitality, Dr Franz Linser, highlighted the role spas could play to help develop people's self-awareness and self-acceptance. Remarking on the significant growth in mental health issues and the prevalence of depression, stress and 'burn out', he asked spas to consider how their services could evolve to become more holistic, sustainable and customer-focused.

Continuing the focus on spa guests and perfection in service, Jeremy McCarthy, Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group's director of spa, gave a thought-provoking presentation on 'the psychology of spa'. Emphasising the importance of implementing spa services that positively influence lifestyle behavior, he suggested that training in motivational interview techniques could help therapists to deliver personalised treatments. ▶



Guest of honour Adrian Bridge with Forum HOTel & Spa's Vladi Kovanic



Delegates discuss the latest innovations with spa suppliers



Organiser Vladi Kovanic welcomes an international delegation to the event



Roger Allen of Resources for Leisure Assets throws the spotlight on optimising business performance

Forum HOTEL & Spa, Paris



Delegates take time to network and share best practice during breaks



Dr Franz Linser with Vladi Kovanic



Rochele Silveira of the Kurotel Longevity Medical Center and Spa with Vladi Kovanic



Perfection was the fitting theme for this year's Forum HOTEL & Spa



Pure Altitude's Marie-Paul Leblanc-Peru and Durbuy Wellness' Fabienne Troupin



Finalists of this year's Black Diamond Awards



Thermarium's Mario Stiefler explores positive wellbeing and health



Delegates check in for the 8th Edition of Forum HOTEL & Spa in Paris



European Spa's Sarah Camilleri with organiser Vladi Kovanic and Guerlain's Louis de Vilmorin



Mandrin Oriental Hotel Group's Jeremy McCarthy explores the psychology of spa

▷ “In this business, at this time, we are very focused on the physical aspects of the spa, rather than mind and spirit,” he noted. “What we do each day is really about how we make people feel – creating spaces and places for our guests to go to get away from technology and work, to rest their minds.”

Perfecting performance

Other highlights of this year's event included an international perspective on customer expectations from Heimo Leitgeb of Romania's Teleferic Grand Hotel, as well as a look at the art of delivering a medically-focused experience in a spa setting, offered by Rochele Silveira, the charismatic director of Brazil's Kurotel Longevity Medical Center and Spa.

Elsewhere, the event's expert panels heard more pearls of wisdom from spa suppliers, notably Kathryn Pye of Bamford Spa, Tracey Chapell of ESPA and Sammy Gharieni, CEO of The Gharieni Group.

'Show me the Money' was a fitting final presentation from guest speaker Roger Allen, CEO of the newly launched Resources for Leisure Assets, a specialist consultancy in leisure and wellbeing hospitality, recreation and health tourism. Certainly a wake-up call for delegates after a busy day, Allen pulled the theme of 'perfection' back to the bottom line with his view on business performance.

Fast-paced and straight-talking, he said many spa teams were isolated from the reality of finance and lack the capabilities for robust, strategic planning. “The margins are tough, so you have to be tough to drive the bottom line and maximise every opportunity to drive profitability,” Allen warned, highlighting the benefits of ongoing evaluation of performance goals and new, more effective ways to incentivise teams and drive potential commercial performance.

Diamonds are a spa's best friend

Marking a fitting climax to proceedings, the Black Diamond Awards were bestowed upon those who have delivered excellence in spa service this year.

“Once again, the international jury had a difficult choice to make,” said Vladi Kovanic, “with more than 15 candidates from all over Europe. Because of so many exceptional qualities of the nominees, the jury decided to award, for the first time, four prizes.”

Two White Diamond awards were presented to spa managers Susan Gierten, of Sporthotel Alpenrose Residenz Spa in Austria, and Maud Helene, of Domaine de Verchant Spa, France. The Blue Diamond award was presented to Angela Brunetto, of The Falconara Charming House & Resort Sabai Dee Spa in Sicily. Finally, the coveted Black Diamond for 2015 was taken by Aurélie Savasta from Château de Bagnols Spa & Les Suites de la Potinière Spa, in France.

Time to talk

The awards evening concluded with canapés, cocktails and more networking time for delegates in the elegant Salon Vendôme, which also showcased the latest innovations and launches from spa suppliers including: Intracuticals, Gharieni, Mary H SA, Bamford, ESPA, Goldbad, Thermarium, Iyashi Dome, RKF, Biologique Recherche, Fashionizer, Pure Informatique, Star Wellness, Anne Semonin and Kurotel.

Summing up the event, Kovanic said: “Our 2015 edition focused on the theme of perfection to give global industry leaders a chance to debate on different topics and present their views. We are very proud of this extremely successful day and look forward to hosting another event next year.” ●●●●

Interested in attending Forum HOTEL&SPA 2016?

The dates for next year's event will be published soon in *European Spa*, but if you would like to register your interest in attending as a delegate or partner, contact Vladi Kovanic at the VK Organisation.

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