

Western hotelier

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YOUR HOTEL MANAGEMENT MAGAZINE

A Cautious Optimism
*B.C. is working hard to manage
a number of challenges.*

Beds & Bedding

A Point of Distinction
Victoria's Inn at Laurel Point

Prairie Promise
The Russell Inn

*Salim Sayani, CEO,
Executive Hotels and Resorts.*

Executive Hotels and Resorts

Carves Out Niche Market

EXECUTIVE HOTELS & RESORTS

**Appealing
to the Business**



As a young child, Salim Sayani worked in the laundry room of the family hotel after school and on weekends. In the years following, he built upon this experience by taking on various jobs within the hotel industry, working in almost every position imaginable. It was with no surprise, therefore, that Sayani started his own hotel management and franchise company in 1998 with the intent of building a corporate team that would develop the operation into a leading North American brand name. Today, Executive Hotels and Resorts operates and/or franchises 18 hotels along the western coast of Canada and the United States. A third of these properties involve corporate investment.

Building On Experience

"I've been in the hotel business for a long time," says Sayani, who recently re-privatized the company after a stint on the Toronto Stock Exchange. "I privatized Executive about one and a half years ago. At the time I was an 80 per cent shareholder of the company and wanted to have more flexibility over how I operated the company. But the business model hasn't changed."

What also hasn't changed is Executive's highly respected corporate team.

"The corporate team has been together for a long time," he explains, adding that there are 14 seasoned professionals who staff the corporate office. "They include the human resources director, the food and beverage director, hotel operations, sales and marketing people, loyalty program and finance personnel - all of these people bring depth of experience to the table. Most of them have been here since day one. Together, they offer many years of hospitality experience in both Canada and the United States. This team has garnered a lot of respect in the industry for our growth and branding expertise."

This growth has been impressive - building from four properties in 1998 to 18 today. Plus, there is the diversity in geography. They cover large urban centres in western Canada (Alberta and British Columbia), as well as the western coast of the United States (California and Washington).

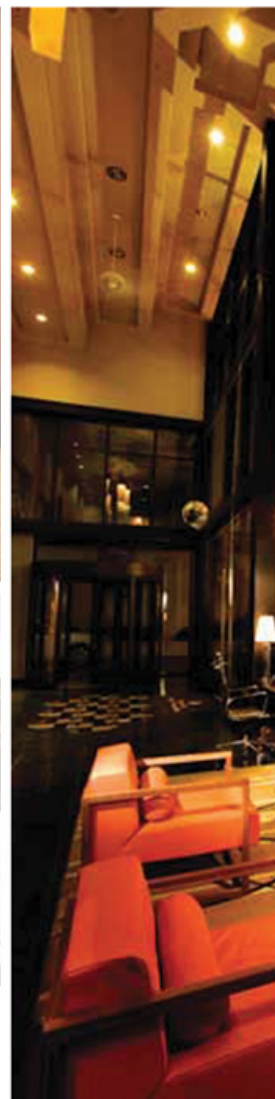
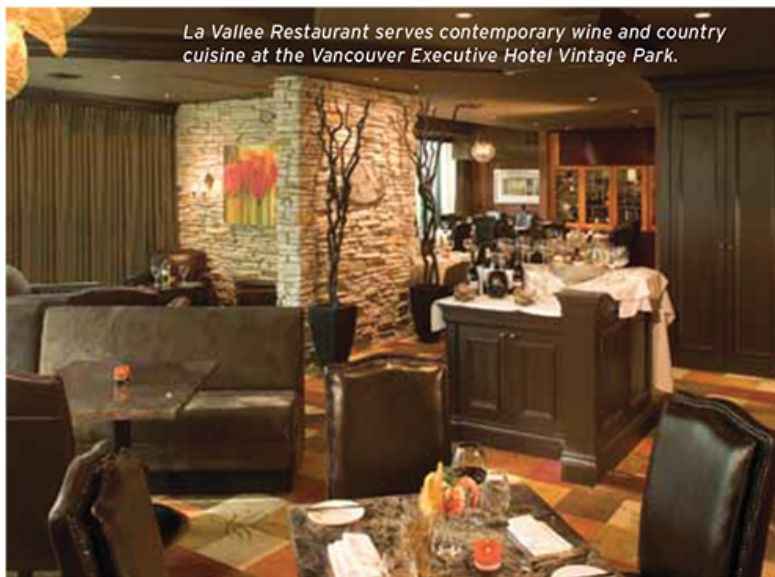
New builds/acquisitions are expected to come from more city centres, such as Los Angeles, San Diego and Kelowna, as well as another property in Seattle. Toronto is also on the list of potential sites. Sayani anticipates that its current Toronto sales office will be complemented with an Executive Hotels and Resorts property sometime soon. After that will come properties in cities like Ottawa and Montreal.

"Toronto will most likely be our first east coast property," he says. "I'd say that it will happen in the next couple of years."

Of course, none of these new properties would be realized if it weren't for the hard-working efforts of the corporate team.

"One of the strengths of this company and team is the property-specific focus that they bring to the table," says Sayani. "Our strategic business plans are

La Vallee Restaurant serves contemporary wine and country cuisine at the Vancouver Executive Hotel Vintage Park.



catered specifically to the areas the properties are located in. We give every property a specific focus so that each hotel can operate in a local environment."

An example of this local colour can be found in the hotels' restaurants, many of which have been recognized by culinary greats as highly rated establishments. In the San Francisco Executive Hotel Vintage Court, for example, Masa's restaurant is celebrating its 25th anniversary as a culinary icon. "Masa's has consistently been ranked in the top five restaurants in San Francisco and last year became a Michelin star rated restaurant," says Sayani.

In the wine-themed Vancouver Executive Hotel Vintage Park, the Restaurant La



(Above) The hotels offer a great set up for that special day.

(Centre) The company adds one or two new locations annually.

(Right) The lobby of the Vancouver Downtown Hotel.

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Vallee restaurant revolves around contemporary wine and country cuisine. It is inspired by some of North America's greatest wine regions, including the Napa, Columbia and Okanogan Valleys.

"We dedicate our restaurant concepts to fit the specific property," adds Sayani.

Points to Ponder

Another interesting way in which Executive Hotels and Resorts differentiates itself in the market is through the innovative Executive Rewards Club loyalty program that goes beyond offering members the traditional points for travel and merchandise.

"Travel and merchandise are relatively common in large loyalty programs," explains Sayani. "In addition to travel and airline points we offer a unique customer recogni-

tion aspect by recognizing loyal customers with soft rewards. For example, we may have a bottle of the customer's preferred wine sitting in the room. Our program aiming to be more personal in nature."

The Executive Rewards Club program has been operating for the last 10 years, but it has been in only the last 18 to 24 months that it has been developed to include the customer recognition aspect which is called the Inner Circle Program. Since then, the rewards program has met with additional success.



The hotels gear themselves to the business executive.

"In our Calgary hotel, for example, the manager has created a special lounge in the lobby for Executive Hotels and Resorts club members to meet while waiting to check in or check out," says Sayani. "Our program goes beyond just giving members points."

Executive also believes that loyalty programs will become increasingly more impor-

tant in the current economic environment.

"As we enter a phase where the economy is a little bit slower and it's a bit tougher business cycle, my opinion is that strong loyalty programs will play a larger role in customer retention," he says. "It's very important."

Generating Brand Equity

Although Executive Hotels and Resorts offers full-service hotels that operate within the 3 1/2 to 4 star range, the properties are anything but average. Amenities include the standard wireless Internet, pay per view, room service, extended stay units in many hotels, in-room safes, premium coffee and tea, fitness rooms, etc. But everything is geared to the business executive at work and at play.

"We offer corporate level hotels with both a business and leisure focus," says Sayani. "Our focus is on the corporate customer and we want their business when they travel for business and pleasure."

The average size of an Executive Hotels and Resorts property is between 150 and 160 rooms. The company currently has about 2,500 rooms under its wing.

The customer package being offered by Executive Hotels and Resorts seems to be hitting home with the professional world.

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The company won a Canadian award for the fastest growing hotel chain in Canada in 2000. It was only two years after this that Sayani had started the franchise and management company. Albeit, the growth rate in the first four or five years was the highest, but Sayani has been intentionally growing by one or two properties per year thereafter.

"We're more focused today on core urban locations," says Sayani. "City centre locations like Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. We're flexible in our growth method. We can build properties or we can grow through acquisition or by entering into franchise or management agreements. There are many ways in which we have expanded."

Two of the most recent properties to join the Executive Hotels and Resorts chain include the Executive Suites Hotel at Garibaldi Springs Golf Resort in Squamish, B.C. and the Executive Eurostar Hotel & Conference Centre in Victoria, B.C. Both hotels opened as Executive properties this year.

The former is a newly developed 110-suite, full-service resort situated between the 9th and 18th holes of the Les Furber-designed Garibaldi Springs Golf Resort. It offers a choice of spacious suites, one bedroom and two-bedroom suites with fully equipped kitchens, dining areas, in-suite washers and dryers, and high-speed Internet. The



Locations such as the Executive Eurostar in Victoria offer an adult fitness centre and pool.

hotel amenities include a heated outdoor pool and hot tub, fitness centre, Rockwell's Bar & Grill, business centre, and adventure desk.

The Executive Eurostar Hotel Victoria offers 152 rooms and one-bedroom suites equipped with luxury beddings, ergonomic leather chairs and work desks, free high-speed wireless Internet access and other amenities. It also offers an adult fitness centre, hot tub, sauna, Redd's Roadhouse Restaurant, Redd's Bar, guest laundry facilities, business centre, and an on-site salon and spa.

Looking Forward

With a group of dedicated and experienced executives carefully directing the future path of Executive Hotels and Resorts, coupled with Sayani's own wealth of experience in the real estate and hospitality industries, Executive Hotels and Resorts is well situated for both consistent and steady growth in the years ahead.

Sayani forecasts that these next few years will result in many hotels changing hands in Canada.

"I think we're entering into a phase in both Canada and the U.S. where there are many hotel transactions that will take place," he says. But he also sees these turbulent times as offering potential opportunities for those companies, like Executive Hotels and Resorts, that are well capitalized with economies of scale, as opposed to those that are overly reliant on debt markets for high-leverage transactions.

"I think that we'll see many opportunities in the near future," says Sayani. "We're trying to keep our eye on the pulse of the market and on those properties we're interested in."

While the industry itself may undergo a lot of changes in the next three years, Sayani will be sticking to a game plan that has already been proven to be very successful.

"We have a lot of brand presence out there with the number of properties in the chain," he concludes. "There is a fair amount of interest from hotel owners to join the brand although we are very selective in our decisions for growth. We've consistently grown by one or two properties per year. This has been intentional. And we want to stay on this growth plan."

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