

Hotel Artisans

Yann Gillet

General Manager | Hôtel Martinez

Hospitality Insights Series
GM Interviews

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Introduction

Yann Gillet shares the key ingredient of hospitality, the heart and soul of Hôtel Martinez, and how he re-ignites wanderlust in today's travellers.

Hôtel Martinez

Hôtel Martinez is recognisable all around the world for its enduring Provençal flair. Standing out in a ring of trees for its glossy white colour it gracefully and effortlessly strays from the beige hues and black marbles that define the classic templates of modern hotel architecture.

Interview

The interview was conducted on December 2020 by Kostas Panagakis & Katerina Fotopoulou | Words by resident editor Emma Hensley | 1st publication date 16.01.2021.

Yann Gillet, General Manager of Hôtel Martinez, shares the most unforgettable stories of this great, historic and everlasting hotel, synonymous to the Festival de Cannes, the emblematic shoreside town where it is held, even the Côte d'Azur itself.

Timeless Grandeur

Hôtel Martinez, part of the Unbound Collection by Hyatt, is recognisable all around the world for its enduring Mediterranean flair. Standing out in a ring of trees for its glossy white colour it gracefully and effortlessly strays from the pale blue and beige hues, and black marbles, that define the classic templates of modern hotel architecture.

For Yann, Hôtel Martinez sets the benchmark for hospitality, and has ever since its earliest beginnings in 1929, when it acted as a winter escape for kings, princesses and maharajahs; the celebrities of their time, in search of glamorous diversions under the French Riviera sun that shines 300 days a year. A love for this timeless grandeur led renowned designer Pierre-Yves Rochon to refurbish the hotel interior and restore its façade with total respect for this art deco lustre; complete with balconies adorned in blue, gold finishes and vintage motifs. “It’s incredible how you can make something that’s extremely fashionable from the past; this clear, feminine hotel blends well with today’s DNA”, Yann muses.

An eternal summer home, its visitors are all fated to come back someday as its rate of repeaters is high indeed. This is no accident, since this hospitality aficionado has sparked many a smile here; the hotel’s festive nature makes it ideal for parties and events, whilst most of its VIP guests can report that they have experienced something they could never have expected.

An expression of true hospitality

This was more than true on a warm summer’s eve when Yann welcomed a famous CEO and his wife who came for a secret escape, on their very first outing together.

“They were in search of something different, something special.”

The surprise: a moonlit journey by riverboat to Ile Sainte-Marguerite - located in front of Cannes - not normally accessible by night, for a picnic under the stars with Taittinger champagne and delicacies provided by the hotel’s 2-Michelin-Starred La Palme d’Or. Behind the scenes, of course, this required special permissions and coordination with the monks of the island; but the looks in the guests’ eyes, the smiles and laughter, made it truly priceless.

“We've got one of the highest rate of returns of guests. We have got guests who are repeatedly coming to the Martinez every summer for the last 25 years. This place is like a residence for them, it's their summer house. It's a place that makes you smile! ”



Yann Gillet
General Manager | Hôtel Martinez
Portrait photos by JD Lorieux

Interview

Kostas Panagakis
Katerina Fotopoulou

Words

Emma Hensley



Hotel Martinez Front | Photo by Jerome Kelagopian

Though personalized service is a hospitality benchmark, Yann likes to take this one step further by truly understanding his guests and their habits. Do they sleep on the right side of the bed or the left? What kind of music do they enjoy? How do they take their omelette? Do they wear glasses? If a housekeeper can answer all of these questions, then the next step is to transform their suite into a place that feels familiar and warm, going beyond ‘attention to detail’ to access the true core of hospitality. “We want to feel you, know what you like, and surprise you.”

During one of many visits to international luxury destinations, Yann found himself on the receiving end of such truly attuned service. It all began with a common mishap: forgetting his sunglasses by the pool during his stay at the Oberoi Udaivilas in Udaipur. Upon returning to his suite he discovered that they hadn’t been lost; there they were, in a special box on his bedside table, along with a note expressing the gratitude of the waiter who retrieved them, that they had been cleaned and also that he had been gifted the ornate case that they were in, as a token of thanks. What truly touched this storied hotelier was that the letter was handwritten in French, his native language; an expression of true hospitality that can never be taught, but has to come from within.

Re-kindling the ‘Art de Vivre’ in guests

These offerings are one thing that will never change for Hôtel Martinez, no matter which new technologies it adopts so as to appeal to the modern traveller. “We need

to offer the choice. Technology will come, but it will not be unique.” Hotels now have a new calling: a challenge to reignite the desire to travel in their guests. Nothing will ever beat a smile upon arrival, in-room dining with a private butler, or the luxury of having an ambassador for the entire stay who takes care of everything from check-in to check-out and a world of personalised delights in between.

In his quest to inspire the ‘Art de Vivre,’ Yann has a loyal and worthy ally in Chef Christian Sinicropi, who’s been drawing guests to Hôtel Martinez with his incredible gastronomy for 20 years. Many visitors come purely for the culinary masterpieces offered here, whilst others are simply drawn to the intoxicating essence of the destination.

“Here at the Martinez we try to offer you the experience that you would live if you were the King of Cannes or the Queen of Cannes and that is what we have been doing over the past 90 years”.

The most unforgettable destinations, through iconic hotels

As a true hotelier, Yann also heeds the call of a multitude of exotic and unique locales, his favourites being Brasil and Peru, as well as Asia, Africa, Johannesburg and Cape Town. All the while, he feels blessed to be in Europe, near iconic places like Capri, Portofino, Mykonos and Florence which he believes ‘set the benchmark for Cannes.’



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Top to bottom:
(1) La Plage du Martinez | Studio Kalice & Vlaemynck
(2) Hotel Martinez Front | Jerome Kelagopian
(3) Suites Penthouse | O2C-Michel Figuet

“I’ve been very touched and blessed from what I’ve seen in Europe. Mykonos, Capri, Portofino and Florence really impressed me”

For a hospitality expert, it’s best to explore these destinations through their most memorable hotels; Belmond Copacabana Palace in Rio de Janeiro and the historic Four Seasons Hotel Firenze are just a few of the places which have stood out for Yann.

Like yin and yang, he strikes the perfect balance between carefully curated ultra-luxury stays and a range of demanding athletic hobbies. Though this world traveller has embarked on his share of triathlons, Iron Mans, and Marathon de Sables, he always reserves the luxury hospitality experiences for his wife - who was born and raised in Cannes - as he believes that these are only the best when they are shared.

“I never go back to the same place. We always travel to new places, different places.” This is one of the mottos Yann lives by, but Cannes is a truly special place for him, as it was his lifelong dream to live and work here; where everything is in walking distance, both land and sea.

“It’s a paradise on Earth, like a smaller Greece.”

Hôtel Martinez is the only hotel to which he chooses to return, again and again.