

# LODGING

## Upward *and* Outward

Despite the economy,  
**Omni Hotels & Resorts**  
is growing its brand.

**Mike Deitemeyer**  
President  
Omni Hotels & Resorts

## 60-SECOND PROFILE

## GLOBETROTTER

Philippe Kjellgren's Kiwi Collection guides consumers with reviews of the best luxury hotels worldwide.

Philippe Kjellgren counted his passport stamps as a child, and pledged an ambitious goal to visit at least 100 countries in his life. Born in Stockholm, Sweden, Kjellgren attended at least eight different schools growing up. His mother worked for the Swedish Embassy and his father for a Swedish construction company, so the family never settled in one place for long. In his early teenage years, Kjellgren lived in Africa, spending time in Congo and Madagascar before returning to Sweden at age 15.

Having parents who worked abroad exposed Kjellgren to many different countries and cultures around the world, and brought him to unique vacation destinations and hotels. It was inevitable that he would catch the travel bug, and he has never let it go.

The first big luxury hotel Kjellgren recalls staying in was The Waldorf=Astoria in New York City when he was about 8 years old. "I remember walking into the lobby of the Waldorf=Astoria and being quite blown away as a child," he says.

By age 25, Kjellgren had surpassed his 100-country goal. Among his friends, he became the go-to guy for travel advice—where to stay, eat, drink, and have a good time. In 2003, he turned his adventures and wealth of hotel knowledge into a viable business, the Kiwi Collection.

An online hotel booking site, Kiwi Collection guides consumers on the best luxury hotels around the world for a range of tastes and budgets. A team of travel experts selects properties that meet the highest standards, and reviews and rates each of the hotels on a regular basis, without regard for brand, size or affiliation. Properties that fall below the company's standards are removed from the collection.

The Kiwi team looks at 10 categories: service, rooms, food and beverage, attention to detail, spa and fitness, architecture and design, location, wow/hip factor, generosity and value, and fit to promise.

Kiwi Collection isn't Kjellgren's first entrepreneurial endeavor. He started out as a waiter in the 1980s, and often used his earnings to buy nice clothing. He also enjoyed traveling to different cities with friends to eat at Michelin-rated restaurants. "When I traveled to Milan,

Paris, and London, I saw [clothing] brands that I was more interested in but couldn't find in Sweden," he says. This led him to create a private showroom in Sweden for men's personal shopping when he was 21. He landed exclusive distribution rights in Sweden for top Italian brands, such as Versace, Ferre, Iceberg, and Bagutta.

The business brought him frequently to Italy, and he attended many parties and gatherings in designers' homes. He was exposed to a whole world based around design, architecture and history, as well as illustration. His next enterprise was a software company, also centered on the fashion industry,

**{CLOSE UP}** **POSITION:** President and CEO, Kiwi Collection **RESIDENCE:** Vancouver and New York **FAMILY:** Wife, Vi; and dog, Ransom **ACTIVITIES:** Tennis, dining out, exploring new destinations **LAST BOOK READ:** *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Millenium Trilogy)* by Stieg Larsson **WHAT TO WATCH:** Danish TV series *The Killing (Forbrydelsen)*  
**HOTEL MUST-HAVES:** Attention to detail; comfortable bed; great in-room amenities, including Internet



which further explored image-representation through graphical user interfaces.

Because the software was sold across Europe and in Japan, he traveled even more frequently and developed a stronger interest in travel, hotels, and cultures.

Kjellgren eventually moved to Canada, for a relationship that didn't work out, and he decided to start a new business in order to continue living in the country. He parlayed the skills and experiences he cultivated with past projects and his passion for travel into a new vocation as president and CEO of Kiwi Collection. "One of the things I'm frustrated with still in the hotel industry is that there is so much information online, it's hard to know what you can trust," he says.

The company launched with 468 hotels in the Americas, and Asia Pacific and Europe followed soon after. The collection now has more than 2,300 hotels in 132 countries, and the company has offices in Vancouver, London, Sydney, and New York.

Kjellgren travels about 200 days out of the year, and is based in Vancouver and New York. One of the most important elements he looks for in a hotel is attention to detail. "Taking the extra step and putting personality into it is something I really care about," he says. ■