

Dale Simpson on the journey to create/curate the guest experience

The Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group [recently rebranded](#) to Radisson Hotel Group. Dale Simpson, curator (general manager), who launched the Radisson Red in Cape Town last year, explains the thinking behind the evolving brand and the changing role of the GM.

Simpson has been in the hospitality industry for 15 years and nine of those with the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, now Radisson. “I was involved in opening the first Hotel Missoni in 2009 before moving to their Radisson Blu brand in 2013 as an operations manager,” he says. He landed his first GM role was at the five-star G&V Royal Mile Hotel in Edinburgh, Scotland, and then in 2016 he moved to the group’s head office in Brussels, Belgium, corporate director of food and drink – and it was there that he supported the opening the world’s first Radisson Red.



Dale Simpson, curator, Radisson Red Cape Town

The launch of Red brought to eight the number of hotel brands under the Carlson Rezidor umbrella, with more than 1,400 hotels in operation and under development.

Radisson Red has a vision for its guests identified as “united by an appreciation for unique but intelligent design, energetic social spaces, technology that makes their lives easier, and a customisable, personal experience,” says Simpson. The success of the new brand in Brussels was followed by launches in Minneapolis, USA, and Campinas, Brazil. Then Dale was offered the opportunity to move from Brussels to Cape Town in January 2017 to open the first Radisson RED in Africa.

“Hotels have to be experience orientated, whether that be visually, through our senses, through interactions, through IT or through our team members. They have to appeal and have an attraction that is beyond the bricks and mortar and repeat feel...”

Curating the guest experience

A decade ago Simpson would have probably been called a general manager, but at Radisson Red all staff job definitions are wider, and his job title is curator.



Dale Simpson, Radisson RED Cape Town's fearless curator
Cari Coetzee 8 May 2017

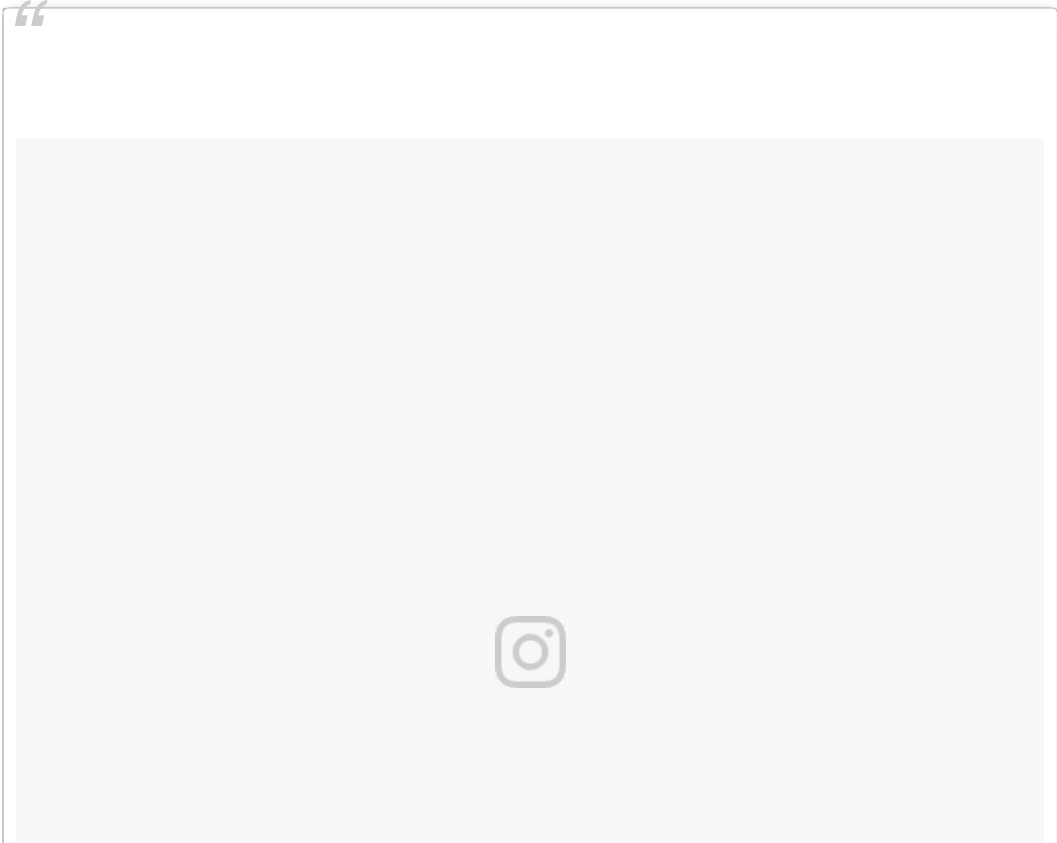


He says: “When you consider what we are really trying to do in our hotels, it is essentially to curate the guest experience, create it thoughtfully, a unique experience that celebrates our location and comes to life through our inspirations.”

“Life at Radisson Red should never be dull and as a brand, our inspiration is derived from three pillars, music, art and fashion.”

You know its special when you enter the Radisson Red on the redeveloped V&A Waterfront. There’s no lobby, you arrive in an art gallery, with a huge mural by artist Cameron Platter on one wall, and on the other are Coca-Cola crates stacked from floor to ceiling – a reference to the Porky Hefer artwork in the Waterfront.

“It’s an energetic landscape and requires attention every day,” says Simpson. “It removes the traditional silos that exist in hotels which tend to over departmentalise everything by having departments for an overabundance of tasks. At Red, we simplify it, we are all on the journey to create the guest experience, especially the curator.”



Weekend Vibes at RED Cape Town 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷

A post shared by [Radisson RED Cape Town \(@radissonredcpt\)](#) on Feb 17, 2018 at 8:36am PST

”

Hotels have to be experience orientated

In the world of hospitality, even the most traditional brand knows it must adapt but Radisson really does offer a unique take on the guest experience. “It’s an ever-changing landscape, which means we have to keep our own landscapes interesting and enticing,” says Dale. “As hotels, we compete on so many levels, now more than ever and with so many accommodation offerings.

“Hotels have to be experience orientated, whether that be visually, through our senses, through interactions, through IT or through our team members. They have to appeal and have an attraction that is beyond the bricks and mortar and repeat feel. Delivery and consistency are important but arguably an ever-changing landscape eventually can be defined as being consistent.”

Millennial is simply a mindset

It would be easy to slip into the current fashionable hospitality narrative, saying that Radisson Red is all about appealing to millennials - the generation that was born between the early eighties and the early 2000s. Of course, it does appeal to that generation but Simpson refuses to accept any age barrier, it’s the mindset he explains. “A lot is made of millennials and what it means, who they are, etc. However, it is important for us that we don’t age define, but rather in our world, millennial is simply a mindset and they are wonderful travellers.

“They are experience-focused. We know that they will take 30% of their trips alone, they are content-enthusiasts, image-conscious, more health aware and embrace a localised mindset with an attraction to shared spaces or even experiences. Naturally, they live most of their lives via mobile and instant communications.”



Why the hospitality industry needs to adapt to millennial travellers

29 Jun 2017



But this experience-focused guest has other expectations with regard to the effect that their travel has on the places they visit, says Simpson. “Like us, they think and act responsibly, therefore, we do not serve buffets - which reduces our food waste dramatically - and we have paperless rooms. In addition, millennials are content seekers, so we ensure that we provide them with lots of creative content.”

The changing role of the hotel general manager

Simpson is one of the panellists at this year’s Leadership Forum, the three-day conference at The Hotel Show Africa 2018, at a headline session which will examine the changing role of the hotel general manager.

“...spending 50% of your week in meeting rooms away from guests and away from the guest experience isn't always helpful and creates a cycle whereby we are completely removed from and out of touch with our guests.”

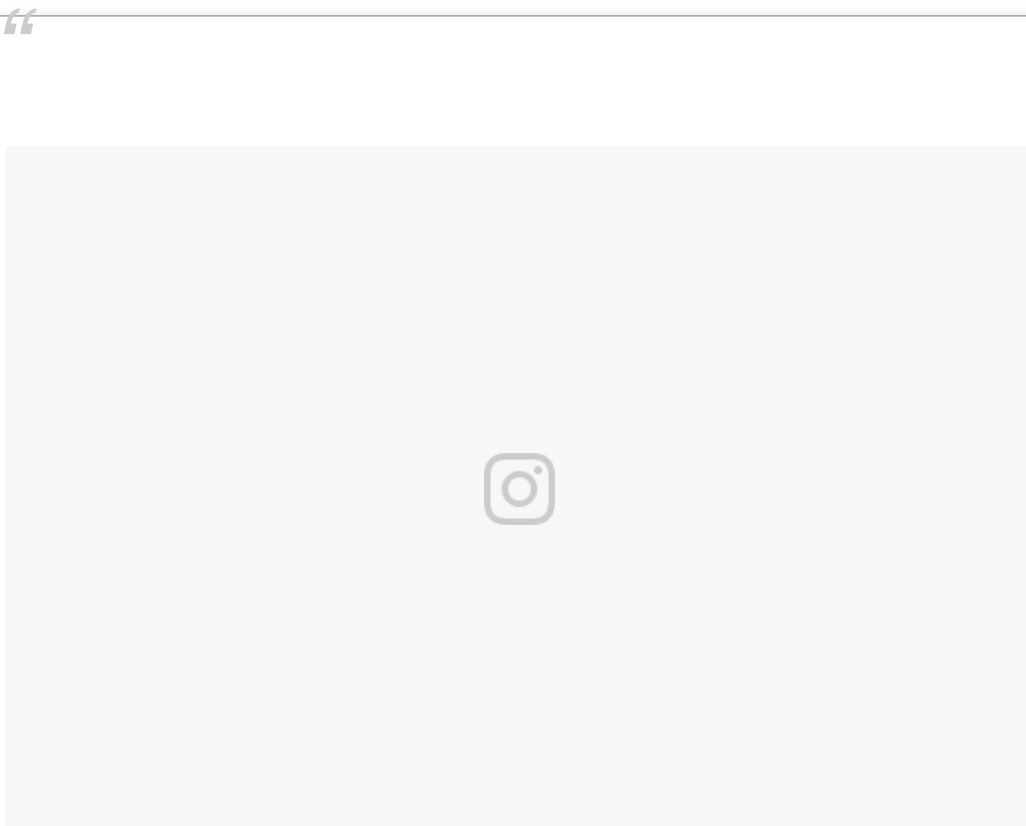
He believes in 2018 there are key priorities: “Be with your guests. Be out front, be visible and most importantly always be approachable. Focus always on the guest experience and avoid creating silos in your business. Too many silos lead to guests being passed around... and in a service industry, this always creates huge frustration.”

Some GMs may laugh at such a suggestion and point to their workload as one reason they have slipped into back rooms. But Simpson believes the benefits ultimately will be reflected in customer loyalty and return visits. “Simply put, in businesses we tend to use profit and loss accounts to measure certain efficiencies within our business,” he says. “Payroll is usually one. Operationally, we'll measure against business performance indicators/benchmarks.

“But what we don't do is consider always how we spend our payroll and time when it comes to GM positions and those akin. For example, spending 50% of your week in meeting rooms away from guests and away from the guest experience isn't always helpful and creates a cycle whereby we are completely removed from and out of touch with our guests.”

Africa provides diversity, experiences and opportunity

And now he has brought his vision of management to Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group's first Radisson Red in Africa. This huge continent has seen the big hotel brands lining up to invest and grow over the past five years. Africa provides unique challenges, but Simpson has embraced them completely. “It's a wonderful continent, full of diversity, different experiences and naturally with that, lots of opportunities,” he says. “For big brands, it's a developing market and provides opportunities to find great locations which can be more difficult in the more mature markets.



Rooftop Bliss. Our RED roof is becoming one of the most popular chilling spots in #CapeTown
#RadissonREDcpt Images Credit: Jono Ferreira

A post shared by [Radisson RED Cape Town](#) (@radissonredcpt) on Nov 30, 2017 at 11:56pm PST

“The African market is beautiful and unique, but it must be remembered: one size does not necessarily fit all. So, adapting to all the different locations and respecting them is absolutely key.

“In fact, you really want to embrace the location and develop with them. Brands need to be ready to do that and I think at Carlson Rezidor, this has been a critical component of our success.”

So, what is Simpson's top three tips for success in the hotel sector for the coming five years?

1. Create environments that inspire from design, feel, delivery, whatever. People want to photograph it, share it, they are content-enthusiasts
2. Focus on the guest experience, this is not about design, it's about feel, it's vibe, it's sensual
3. Collaborate, don't try and be a master of all things, work with great partners and talented people

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>