

People-in-Travel

Tracking Travel's Leaders



From Travel Business Analyst

Old hoteliers, 1

At the sharp end. Will Isadore Sharp leave control of Four Seasons, the group he founded, before he joins the great hotel in the sky? Last month Sharp gave up his 'CEO' title but kept the 'chairman' title; taking the CEO title was Kathleen Taylor (52, and 21 years with FS).

When Wolf Hengst retired end-2006, Taylor succeeded him to become president and COO. In her new role, she keeps the president title, and so on paper is higher than was Hengst, a trusted lieutenant; he was just president.



Kathleen Taylor

Although Sharp, 78, is old, he is younger than a peer, Bob Burns, 85, who has just been appointed honorary chairman of the hotel group he created – Regent, a one-time rival to FS. (Ironically, it was Sharp that asked Burns to leave Regent after FS bought that company, easing the task of what FS went on to do – strip Regent of many of its best hotels and projects.)

Back at FS, the company/Sharp marked down the importance of Taylor's half-a-rung climb, by noting that Sharp will "continue to be involved... retaining oversight and direction of the design and aesthetics of new and existing hotels...continue to represent [FS] as its goodwill ambassador, building and advancing relationships with partners, employees and customers around

the world."

Either that is the normal role for founding chairmen, and so not worthy of special comment, or Taylor is president & CEO in name only. There was not much in her initial announcement, of course:

"I'm greatly honoured to become the next CEO of Four Seasons and have the opportunity to continue building on the legacy of leadership and vision established by [Sharp]."

FS has 82 hotels and 50 planned. As many other companies, FS highlights the particular potential in China. Taylor notes "significant expansion plans" for China, but she appears to mean 'significant' in importance, not in volume.

Old hoteliers, 2

'Schulze struggles' was our story heading at the start of 2008 on progress for Horst Schulze, credited with taking Ritz-Carlton into the big time, and now developing another group.

After leaving RC, Schulze started two brands, Capella and Solis, in 2003. After five years – usually the hardest – he had opened two (higher category) Capella (plus seven projects) and two Solis. Today there are six Cs and three Ss (one gone, two added).

A key to the company's survival could be its deal for a Capella in New York, due to open this November. However, its name is Setai, used by a similar-brand-structured group, Singapore-based GHM. Surely the name must change to Capella?

Is Schulze's struggle to get restarted finished? We believe it should be for Solis – but 'finished' the bad way. After 8/9 years, with his reputation, three hotels are not enough, and particularly for a brandname that sounds more like a Greek aperitif.

Capella, however, is almost there. A problem is that of the six, only one is in what could be considered an 'an-

chor' location – Singapore. If Schulze would respond that, as with Aman Resorts, big-name-locations are not its style, then why does he say the New York deal is "a defining moment for our brand"? And he added that this will mean "in the next couple of years, Capella will become the top name in high-end hospitality."

We do not know what we should be watching for in those two years – more big-town locations, or just more locations? If big-town, we believe Schulze needs at least 3/4 from a list of Berlin, London, Paris, Shanghai (or perhaps Beijing), and 2/3 in the US. If more locations, he needs a portfolio of 15; that is not hard, because we count of moving the three Solis into Capella.



Horst Schulze

But is Schulze, aged 68 and born in Germany, too proud to accept defeat for Solis? He was, for instance, almost in denial of Marriott after it swallowed his beloved Ritz-Carlton.

Briefs

- **Tom Horton** has been promoted to president of American Airlines and its holding company, AMR.

The company says it is reorganising senior management "to capitalise on opportunities generated by the granting of antitrust immunity across the Atlantic, and anticipating similar immunity across the Pacific."

We cannot see why that change would warrant a new team, although if it did, we would expect a new president with sales & marketing experience. Horton, however, was previously EVP of finance & planning, which seems better suited to the previous restrictive-times period.

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