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150  
YEARS OF

# EXPERTISE

Legendary loyalty

**E**ver since its founding in 1866, The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels has held fast to one of its key core philosophies, that of underscoring the importance of family values, especially as far as its employees are concerned. This is undoubtedly borne out of the fact that the Kadoorie Family itself has always been extremely close-knit, as was the Jewish community in Hong Kong when it began to expand in the latter half of the 1900s.

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## *James Harper Taggart*

Going back in time, one of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels' early and historically one of its most significant employees, was James Harper Taggart, who arrived in Hong Kong in 1907 at the age of 22, securing a position as Manager of The Hongkong Hotel, which had first opened in 1868.

Recognised for his successful management of the Territory's first luxury hotel, which was commended as the "greatest enterprise of its kind in China and Japan", Taggart was subsequently pinpointed by The Hongkong Hotel Company to commence plans for an entirely new hotel, as rooms in Hong Kong at the time were becoming scarce due to a substantial increase in the influx of international travellers. As a result, The Repulse Bay Hotel opened on New Year's Day 1920.

Then in October 1923, Taggart helped to engineer the merger of The Shanghai Hotels Limited and The Hongkong Hotel Company, thus creating The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited, whilst remaining in his position as Managing Director.

Taggart presided as Managing Director during what was possibly the most eventful period in the Company's history. Known as being a visionary who could appreciate the Board's plans to expand and a tough operator, he played a leading role in revolutionising the hotel business in Shanghai by introducing such novel concepts as dinner dances and European-style grill rooms.

All told, aside from a brief period during the time of the capitulation of Hong Kong by the Japanese which, ironically, was carried out at The Repulse Bay Hotel, when Taggart was compelled to return to the United States, he served the Company for a commendable 61 years.



## *Leo Gaddi*

Having served as a chef at The Hong Kong Hotel prior to the war, later being sent to Shanghai to manage The Palace Hotel and then to supervise its sale and transfer, Leo Gaddi was welcomed into the fold of The Peninsula Hong Kong in 1948 as General Manager. Gaddi dove straight into putting his stamp on the hotel, and under his leadership, new discipline was instilled and standards of service were raised to the impeccable.

But perhaps the single most defining facet immortalising the hotelier was a Peninsula signature restaurant named after him - 'Gaddi's'. The Peninsula, ever unrelenting in its quest for the finer things in life, was forging a new chapter in hospitality history. In a move that is now enshrined in tradition, Sir Horace Kadoorie named the hotel's fine dining restaurant after Gaddi, in order to ensure that every single enticement was on the table to keep his General Manager motivated and the dining stakes sufficiently high. Testament to Leo Gaddi's own leadership and his embracing of family values, another of The Peninsula's longest-serving members of staff and the first Head Waiter at the restaurant, Chan Pak, stayed with the restaurant for 32 years. Gaddi himself remained in his position for 12 years, becoming the longest serving General Manager in the history of The Peninsula Hong Kong.



## *Felix Bieger*

Felix Bieger embarked on his extensive hotelier career as an apprentice cook at a restaurant in Zurich - which he promptly walked out on after just seven weeks. Fast forward to 1954, when Bieger left Switzerland working as a sous-chef on board a cruise liner bound for Asia.

Shortly after docking in Hong Kong, he landed a five-year contract at The Repulse Bay Hotel.

Upon the completion of that contract, Bieger headed back to Switzerland to complete his Accounting diploma at the Ecole Hôtelière de Lausanne. By November 1959, he was back in Hong Kong and in charge of the Front Desk at The Peninsula Court (now the Kowloon Hotel).

In 1967, The Peninsula teamed up with Cathay Pacific in a joint-venture, and Swire Air Caterers was born, with Bieger becoming its first General Manager in 1968, whilst maintaining his role at The Peninsula Court by choice. He juggled being at the hotel from 6 to 8am every morning, before rushing off to the airport to oversee the catering activities during the day, and then returning to his Front Desk by early evening.

Returning to The Peninsula full-time in 1969, Bieger was promoted to General Manager in 1970. Whenever someone new came from abroad to work at the hotel, he would always invite them for a drink at The Long Bar at Gaddi's, taking time get to know them and put them at ease as part of the hotel family.

Having made his way through the ranks to hold the title General Manager of Hong Kong's Grand Dame of Hospitality no less than three times, Felix Bieger has devoted himself to a career spanning more than 62 years at The Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited.



## *Peter C. Borer*

The defining moment in Peter Borer's career came early - even before his career began. He convinced the Dean at the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne to admit him to the programme, even though he feared he wouldn't pass his final prep exam. "I promised Mr. Gerber I would become a good hotelier," Borer recalls. "When I was named GM of The Peninsula in Hong Kong I wrote him a note and said, 'I kept my promise.'"

Likely, what Borer was able to show Mr. Gerber on that fateful day in 1972 was his sincerity, humility and his love and respect for the business - qualities that remain these 43 years later, and traits that named him as '2013 Corporate Hotelier of the World' by the readers of Hotel magazine.

"It is said that an excellent hotelier requires the ability to work in different environments, cultures and cities," says Sir Michael Kadoorie, Chairman of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Borer's employer for the past 35 years. "Peter has not only successfully navigated these environments but has forged the strong brand profile and quality services we see today."

When an eager Borer decided it was time to head east to Asia, he fortuitously landed in 1981 as the F&B manager at The Peninsula Manila.

After at times challenging - but always inspiring - stints with The Peninsula in Hong Kong and Bangkok, in 1985 Borer was promoted to Director of Sales and Marketing at the Company's Head Office. By 1990, after several more promotions, he was named Senior Vice President, responsible for planning the renovation of The Peninsula Hong Kong and the construction of its new tower.

In 1994, he returned to operations as General Manager of The Peninsula Hong Kong, charged with opening the hotel extension, and by 1999 Borer had assumed wider responsibility for The Peninsula Hotels' portfolio of Asian properties. Fast forward to April 2004, and he was appointed Chief Operating Officer and an Executive Director of The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, Limited.

All along the way, Borer had one eye on the company flagship - The Peninsula Hong Kong - and after a series of events caused the company to make plans to better utilise its hometown hotel, he decided that his time had come to make his play to run the flagship and be an integral part of developing the hotel's new 30-storey tower.



"The most fun was changing the way we ran that hotel," says Borer of the hotel that in the late 1980s was still predominantly managed and run by men. "I found wonderful people like Rainy Chan, who now runs the hotel. We brought in a different culture."

Having spent the past 35 years with The Hongkong and Shanghai Hotels, why so long with one company? "Because the values of this family are what inspires me and what I respect; so why change a good thing?"

The sense of heritage and loyalty reflected by these legendary hoteliers is something that clearly holds dear to Sir Michael's heart. A sign that reads 'Sir Elly Kadoorie and Sons Ltd' is placed prominently at his office in St. George's Building in Hong Kong and is a reminder of the pioneering role that his family ancestors have played in the company. "The family environment within the Company encourages employees to put their thoughts forward and motivates them to play a part, no matter what their designation may be," says Sir Michael. "Everyone is valued as a contributor, and as a result of that, we have been extremely fortunate to have had the loyalty of people for unprecedented long periods of time."