

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## Luxury hospitality leaders start culinary-based hotel brand to foster connection

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*The Appellation location in Healdsburg, California. Image courtesy of Appellation*

By KATIE TAMOLA

As the hospitality industry evolves and innovates, Four Seasons alumnus Christopher Hunsberger is helping usher the sector into a delectable direction.

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Mr. Hunsberger has teamed up with acclaimed chef Charlie Palmer to launch a new line of hotels revolving around one of life's greatest delights: food. With **Appellation**, the pair is taking thoughtful culinary creation within luxury spaces to new levels, as guests will have access to a host of ingredients, cookbooks and learning opportunities, with properties slated to open in late 2023 or early 2024.

In this Q&A, Mr. Hunsberger discusses trends permeating throughout hospitality, inspirations for the venture, how to set one's business apart in the industry and other topics. Here is the dialogue:

What are some skills and/or lessons you have obtained during your career, including your time at Four Seasons, that you will be bringing to your new culinary-focused hotel brand?

My first job in hospitality was working as a cheesemonger so I got to experience very early in my career what important role food plays in connecting people. Everyone has special memories of sharing stories over a glass of wine or a great meal and my business partner, Charlie Palmer, and I wanted to make that an integral part of the guest experience at Appellation.

Helping to create those connections is one of the lessons I learned most from my past experiences. From the staff we hire to how we design our buildings to the local makers and artisans we bring inside our hotels to interact with our guests, it's all about the magic that happens when people connect, learn, and grow together.

When did you realize this was a venture you wanted to pursue? What motivated you to do so?

Charlie and I worked on our first hotel project together more than 20 years ago and have built not just a strong working relationship but an even stronger friendship. Along the way, we have talked about how to re-envision hotels through the lens of food.



*Mr. Hunsberger's time in the hospitality industry informed his desire to help travelers connect through his own brand. Image courtesy of Appellation*

About five years ago we sold our interest in another hotel partnership we had to start funding this venture. Appellation is the culmination of more than 60 years of hospitality and culinary experience between us.

We're very proud and excited to see it come to life.

What is the number one lesson or experience you are looking to provide affluents with this new brand?

We've positioned Appellation as "approachable luxury" which means impressive but not pretentious. Our guests want to see and experience the destination at a different level and we provide that ability in a couple of ways.

First, we make the invisible visible.

For example, we moved our culinary prep stations out into the lobbies of our hotels rather than being buried in the back of the house. Guests can interact with our culinary staff, ask questions, learn about techniques or even enjoy a sample as they pass by.

Second, we have experts on our team that specialize in experiential learning. Through them, we are engaging dozens of local makers and artisans to lead classes inside our hotels for both locals and guests.

These classes can be as informal as a morning coffee cupping exercise with a local roaster to a more involved workshop on jewelry making with a local maker. Our culinary team will also lead demonstrations and classes about a variety of food and beverage topics as well.

Establishing a culinary-focused hotel brand is inherently unique and exciting. What are some other ways you plan to set your brand apart and make it attractive to affluents?

In addition to what we've already discussed, we are keenly focused on how guests can experience culinary delight even when they're not in one of our restaurants or bars. We have pour-over coffee equipment in our guest rooms, for instance, because who doesn't want that perfect cup of coffee first thing in the morning?

We also have The Pantry on every guest room floor stocked with still and sparkling water stations, additional coffee and beverage options, creative noshes and cocktail kits prepared by our mixologists each day. There's also a curated cookbook library for guests to peruse and enjoy.

What are some prominent goals or future visions you have for your brand?

We're just getting started, though we're already thinking about growth opportunities and future destinations to house the Appellation experience. We begin every project with a process we call "soul searching" to really understand what makes a destination so special, whether that be a burgeoning culinary scene, rich local history and culture or a strong community of purveyors.

Forthcoming and future destinations are deliberately chosen to be a gathering ground and community builder for today's makers, growers and artisans. Look for us to continue growing throughout the western United States for the next several years.

Do you see any trends permeating the luxury hospitality industry that have stuck out to you or influenced your own hopes and goals?

The demand for immersive travel is definitely growing and is a cornerstone of the Appellation brand. We are

focused on fostering strong connections between our guests and the ingredients, recipes and lifestyles that shape each Appellation destination in Healdsburg, California; Sun Valley, Idaho and Pacific Grove, California.

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