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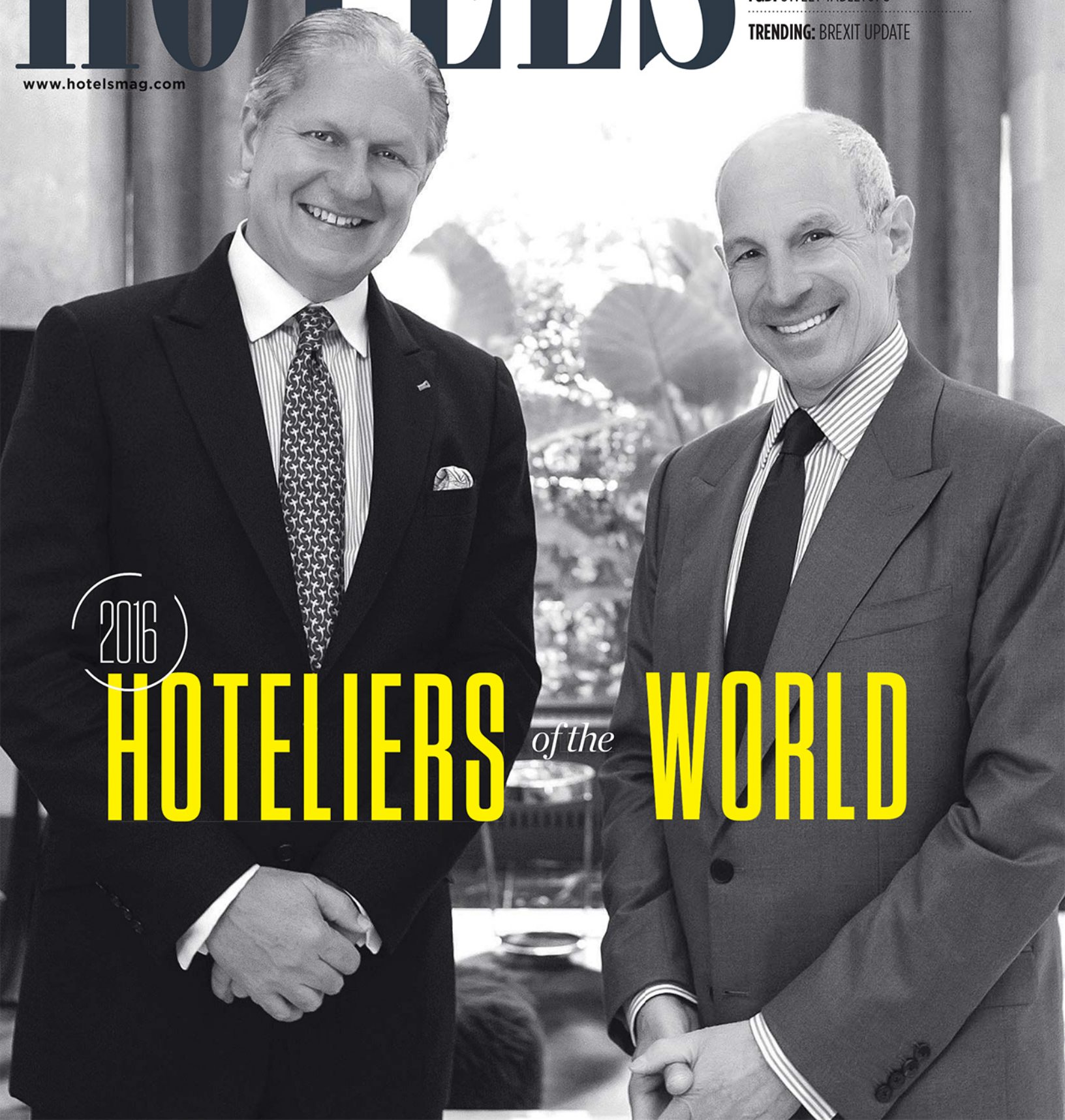
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Unimposing, UNTYPICAL

By JEFF WEINSTEIN, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Samy Ghachem is the first to agree that he is not cut from typical hotelier cloth. In fact, his limited hotel experience, three years at Le Sere-no in St. Barts, is part of what motivates him – along with the new

challenge of actually opening his first hotel for Sereno Hotels owner Luis Contreras, the ultra-luxury, 30-suite Il Sereno Lago di Como on Lake Como in Italy.

The Lake Como hotel opened in

August, and Ghachem says Contreras again has given him a lot of room to operate – not necessarily to reinvent the wheel but to follow his instincts and to capitalize on everything he has learned over his years inside

and alongside the industry. “Sometimes I just do it another way, so to speak,” says the GM, who spent the past three years getting indoctrinated as an operator in St. Barts after spending the majority of his career in luxury

In August, Samy Ghachem opened Il Sereno Lago di Como (above) on Italy’s Lake Como.

travel sales.

“I’m not your typical GM in any environment, be it in Lake Como or in St. Barts,”

“

You can't define what somebody's interpretation of luxury is, but the better connected we are to each guest, the better we understand their **perception of luxury.**

”

—SAMY GHACHEM



Ghachem says with seeming pride and certainly with confidence as he runs big-ticket, ultra-luxury hotels where the ultimate in service is a given. “I’m not just trying to be different, but I do operate based on what I’ve done and seen,” he says.

Ghachem adds that it is not for him to impose or define what is proper for guests in his surroundings. “It’s not for me to say luxury is having a wake-up call at

a fixed time with coffee at the bedside table,” he says. “You can’t define what somebody’s interpretation of luxury is, but the better connected we are to each guest, the better we understand their perception of luxury.”

Ghachem makes sure he and his teams are very connected in Lake Como and St. Barts, the two hotels where he now splits his time. To that end, he recently set up WhatsApp chats for his

teams to track all communication surrounding guest service.

Ghachem also likes to hire out-of-the-box and has found key staff from outside the hotel business, including his director of sales and marketing. “And that’s OK, because they’re all believers and they’ve got incredible character, personalities and drive, and they believe in where we’re going and what I’m doing.”

And just where is Sereno Hotels going

next as it makes its way toward an unstated goal of six to eight hotels owned and operated? Ghachem hints Contreras was recently contacting him often from Venice, and that the group was exploring other destinations in the Mediterranean – be it the south of France or other destinations he was not yet at liberty to mention.

“We tend to go after destinations where are clientele are likely to

go, and we likely will not go somewhere remote in Thailand, for example, where our guests are likely to go just once,” he says, adding that the East Coast of the U.S. could also be on Sereno’s list, including urban centers like New York.

For now, however, Ghachem is focused on getting Como off to a good start and then heading back to St. Barts for the winter as Sereno regulars chase the seasons.