

Women Take Charge – Powerfully Accommodating –  
3<sup>rd</sup> in a profile series of Women Executives in the Hospitality Industry

Hotel Interactive's Bettina Marks speaks with Niki Leondakis of Kimpton Hotels

"I love creating new concepts," says Niki Leondakis, COO of Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, who is responsible for overseeing all operations, marketing and human resources for the company's 39 hotels and restaurants throughout the United States and Canada.

"On a typical day, although no two are alike," she says, "I'll head out to an airport at 6 a.m. to visit a city where we have hotels or go to look at a potential new hotel that we'll be acquiring. I'm on the road 40 – 50% of the time, traveling to unique and exotic locations."

While studying fine art at the University of Massachusetts and working in the restaurant business to finance her education, Niki was intrigued by the industry's high energy and its inherent social atmosphere. She came to realize that orchestrating the elements of food, wine, and design to create a unique dining experience was an appropriate career challenge and quickly changed her major to hotel and restaurant management.

Serving people and enjoying a good time around the table were synonymous for her and endemic to her cultural heritage. Both sides of her family are from Crete and several members owned restaurants.

"Niki has created an unparalleled culture that permeates throughout Kimpton," according to Tom Latour, Chief Operating Officer. "She has the gift to inspire other individuals in two remarkable ways; she inspires people to take responsibility for their actions, by getting to know themselves and becoming conscious of how their behavior affects others – which in turn inspires confidence, self-awareness and self-leadership and she inspires people to understand the importance of social responsibility and giving back through community involvement. "

Niki forged ahead in her early career in the food and beverage end of the hospitality industry spending time at the Marriott Hotel chain and at the Ritz Carlton in a variety of positions including Assistant Banquet Manager and Food and Restaurant Director, "loving every minute and learning every facet of daily operations."

She was recruited by Bill Kimpton, in 1993, to oversee and direct restaurant operations at the Monaco in San Francisco during its launch. The Monaco was the first three star boutique hotel of its kind to institute small, upscale, trendy hip/bar restaurants, which have now become a signature style for the company. Leondakis developed a set of procedures and guidelines to "make it happen," and by achieving positive results, gained autonomy and freedom within the company very quickly.

She was Director of Operations for a year, became VP of Operations and then SVP of Restaurant Division where she was responsible for overseeing existing operations until

2001 when she was asked to become the Executive VP of Hotel and Restaurant Operations. In 2003, she became Chief Operating Officer and has been responsible for guiding Kimpton's growth and expansion throughout the United States and Canada.

"You don't need to act like a man to be successful," says Niki Leondakis.

When Niki first entered the industry, there were few women. "We thought we had to act like a man in order to be treated as equals," she laughs (now) at remembering herself dressed in the quintessential 80's power suit, with its broad and padded shoulders.

"There were established "behavioral norms, actually, they were male behavioral patterns, of communication style and modes of interacting," she continues. The industry was more male driven and male attitudes prevailed. She believes that the industry has greatly benefited by establishing a more gender balanced approach to management and at every level.

Tom Latour agrees. "Niki provides a balance in the workplace, and often a fresh perspective on important business decisions," he says. "Niki is hands on and connects with her team on a professional and emotional level."

This, is what she must mean by, "being herself," something she learned to trust and enact in the early 90's, "a pivotal moment for me," she says. Her husband recommended that she just, "Be who she is," when a personnel issue troubled her. She was used to thinking that she had to be a tough disciplinarian, but, "When I just let my natural feminine qualities come through, showing compassion and emotion, it worked," and, "It was an epiphany," Niki says.

"The part of leadership," she says "that I find very satisfying, is in mentoring people, in developing and working with different types of personalities."

Leondakis created the company's "Mentor Program" which was set up to facilitate the growth and development of its own young men and women in the restaurant and hotel division. "Niki has provided guidance, mentoring and inspiration to me during my seven years at Kimpton, from when I started as a manager to my current role as director," according to Vanessa Bortnick, Director of Restaurant PR, who previously held a PR position in the technology industry.

"She has the ability to detect and address problems immediately, whether they are interpersonal or operational. Her direct communication style keeps everyone on the same page, pursuing the same vision," says Bortnick.

"She has greatly affected my career by helping me to identify and pursue important growth opportunities. She's given direction, but also fostered my independence, allowing me to run with a project and learn from the process. She inspires confidence by offering thoughtful feedback, which has helped me overcome challenges and what I perceived as limitations. "

According to Leondakis, "Women have a unique set of skills and characteristics that they bring to the table including their ability to "look out for" and care for people's needs. They have a sense of inclusion and collaboration - which - fosters excellent relationships between employees and managers, which are inherently, team efforts."

"Niki is a devoted advocate of women's growth in business, particularly in the hospitality industry," says Bortnick. Her enthusiasm is contagious; I now lead the Women InTouch Committee and have been actively involved in launching a Dress for Success chapter in San Francisco, due to open in late summer (Niki played a key role in Kimpton's partnership with this international not-for-profit organization that provides interview suits, confidence boosts and career development assistance to low-income women)

According to Tom Latour, "Kimpton is currently and will continue to aggressively target the female traveler. " Women like staying at Kimptons due to their highly designed properties, the feeling of safety and security that we provide with one point of entry, and the level of genuine comfort and care that our employees provide for our guests. Niki has spearheaded our Women InTouch initiative, which is specifically geared to ensure that this segment will have a memorable and comfortable stay at all of our properties."

"Eighty five percent of all consumers are women and seventy percent of all travel decisions are made by women," according to Leondakis. As part of her own traveling experience, she saw a need to provide certain necessary items in Kimptons guest rooms that cater to the female traveler like tweezers, hair dryers, curling and straightening hair irons, nail polish remover, phone chargers, etc.

"With 40 hotels and 40 restaurants, Niki's schedule is demanding," says Bortnick. She never once limited her time with me while discussing problems, issues or career path decisions."

"When I'm in town," says Niki, "I'll work out with my trainer first thing in the morning (running, yoga and weight training) leave the house at 7 a.m., get in to the office at 7:30-8, check emails, phone calls, and begin a day of meetings with construction companies, conducting chef auditions (which are always fun) and looking at model rooms for renovations," says Niki.

She and her husband, who designs many of the restaurants for Kimpton, try to schedule in "down-time" together, often taking ski trips and rendezvousing in exotic locales for vacation. Without children, they can more easily navigate their busy schedules, seamlessly merging business and pleasure while jet-setting.

When asked if there is a glass ceiling, Leondakis replies, "Yes, somewhat, but, it is situation specific and it depends on the company." Kimpton was always open-minded, non-traditional and progressive, but, both Bill Kimpton and Tom Latour are very "results driven."

Kimpton Hotels caters to the 25-60 year, "psychographic," Their customer has a particular lifestyle in that they appreciate art, culture, design, style, technology and are often highly educated.

Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants recently opened 70 Park Avenue Hotel in New York and the Hotel Solamar in San Diego. Kimpton just re-launched the Mayfair Hotel & Spa in Coconut Grove, Miami last fall and will debut Hotel Palomar in Washington D.C in 2006.

## LEONDAKIS BIO/Add One

Leondakis's endless commitment to social responsibility is reflected in Kimpton's constantly evolving culture aimed at improving the lives of their employees, the community and the world in which we live.

In addition to her many roles and responsibilities at Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, Leondakis still has the time to serve on the board of several organizations. She currently serves on the National Board of Directors for the Women's Foodservice Forum, the National Restaurant Association and the Worldwide Board for Dress for Success, and she heads the founding committee for Dress for Success San Francisco. As a member of the Advisory Board for the University of San Francisco Hospitality Program, Leondakis gives numerous speeches around the country on career development and marketing to women.

Niki began her career as a manager for Marriott Hotels, then joined the Ritz Carlton Hotel Company where she spent eight years working as a Food and Restaurant Director in Marina del Rey, California; Atlanta, Georgia; and San Francisco, California. Niki joined Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants in 1993 as Director of Restaurant Operations. In 2001, she was promoted from Senior Vice President, Restaurants, to Executive Vice President, Hotels and Restaurants. In 2003, she became Chief Operating Officer and has been instrumental in helping to guide Kimpton Hotels' growth and expansion throughout the United States and Canada.

## ABOUT KIMPTON

Founded by Bill Kimpton in 1981, San Francisco-based Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants is a unique collection of boutique hotels coupled with chef-driven, destination restaurants. While all Kimpton Hotels are thoughtfully appointed and managed to help guests maintain and enrich their lifestyles on the road, each is individually designed to reflect the energy, personality, and pulse of its distinct location, history, and architectural style. Featuring highly personalized guest services, comforting in-room amenities, and one-of-a-kind specialty rooms and suites, Kimpton Hotels provide travelers with welcoming atmospheres that embrace its signature elements of care, comfort, style, flavor, and fun. Kimpton takes pride in its social responsibility, supporting select like-minded partners and is a leader in ecological practices. Kimpton currently operates 39 boutique hotels with restaurants throughout the United States and Canada. This includes the recently opened 70 park avenue hotel in New York City and the Hotel Solamar in San Diego. Kimpton will re-launch the Mayfair Hotel & Spa in Coconut Grove, Miami in Fall 2005 and debut a Hotel Palomar in Washington D.C. in early 2006. Additional projects are currently underway in South Beach, Dallas and Virginia. For more information please visit [www.kimptonhotels.com](http://www.kimptonhotels.com) or call 1-800-KIMPTON

## LEONDAKIS BIO/Add One

Leondakis's endless commitment to social responsibility is reflected in Kimpton's constantly evolving culture aimed at improving the lives of their employees, the community and the world in which we live.

In addition to her many roles and responsibilities at Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants, Leondakis still has the time to serve on the board of several organizations. She currently serves on the National Board of Directors for the Women's Foodservice Forum, the National Restaurant Association and the Worldwide Board for Dress for Success, and she heads the founding committee for Dress for Success San Francisco. As a member of the Advisory Board for the University of San Francisco Hospitality Program, Leondakis gives numerous speeches around the country on career development and marketing to women.

Niki began her career as a manager for Marriott Hotels, then joined the Ritz Carlton Hotel Company where she spent eight years working as a Food and Restaurant Director in Marina del Rey, California; Atlanta, Georgia; and San Francisco, California. Niki joined Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants in 1993 as Director of Restaurant Operations. In 2001, she was promoted from Senior Vice President, Restaurants, to Executive Vice President, Hotels and Restaurants. In 2003, she became Chief Operating Officer and has been instrumental in helping to guide Kimpton Hotels' growth and expansion throughout the United States and Canada.

## ABOUT KIMPTON

Founded by Bill Kimpton in 1981, San Francisco-based Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants is a unique collection of boutique hotels coupled with chef-driven, destination restaurants. While all Kimpton Hotels are thoughtfully appointed and managed to help guests maintain and enrich their lifestyles on the road, each is individually designed to reflect the energy, personality, and pulse of its distinct location, history, and architectural style. Featuring highly personalized guest services, comforting in-room amenities, and one-of-a-kind specialty rooms and suites, Kimpton Hotels provide travelers with welcoming atmospheres that embrace its signature elements of care, comfort, style, flavor, and fun. Kimpton takes pride in its social responsibility, supporting select like-minded partners and is a leader in ecological practices. Kimpton currently operates 39 boutique hotels with restaurants throughout the United States and Canada. This includes the recently opened 70 park avenue hotel in New York City and the Hotel Solamar in San Diego. Kimpton will re-launch the Mayfair Hotel & Spa in Coconut Grove, Miami in Fall 2005 and debut a Hotel Palomar in Washington D.C. in early 2006. Additional projects are currently underway in South Beach, Dallas and Virginia. For more information, please visit [www.kimptonhotels.com](http://www.kimptonhotels.com) or call 1-800-KIMPTON.

*- Thank You -*

Kimpton Hotels & Restaurants  
222 Kearny Street, Suite 200  
San Francisco, CA 94108  
Allison Goldstein, Director of Hotel Public Relations  
(415) 955-5407; [Allison.Goldstein@kimptongroup.com](mailto:Allison.Goldstein@kimptongroup.com)  
Vanessa Bortnick, Director of Restaurant Public Relations  
(415) 955-5486; [Vanessa.Bortnick@kimptongroup.com](mailto:Vanessa.Bortnick@kimptongroup.com)

Wagstaff Worldwide, Inc.  
6725 W. Sunset Blvd., Ste. 590  
Los Angeles, CA 90028  
Trisha Cole  
(323) 871-1151; [trisha@wagstaffworldwide.com](mailto:trisha@wagstaffworldwide.com)

Maki Bara – Partner and President of Oxford Lodging Investments and Advisory Group, LLC, an advisory and investment firm focused on the investment, asset management, property management and renovation of high-quality lodging assets, spends most of her time during the week on countless teleconferences with employees, management team members and investments partners and on traveling to one or more of Oxford's properties for meetings, to visit with prospective partners and/or review acquisitions opportunities.

The business day is followed by "team-bonding time," which usually consists of dinner and relaxing with team members while on the road. "I usually reserve the weekends for "family time," but sometimes that doesn't work out – like this weekend, (a Holiday weekend) when I will be traveling to Dubai for a meeting," she says.

This five foot one, Japanese American young woman, who has "given birth," not only to Oxford Lodging Investments and Advisory Group, LLC, just three years ago, with her partner, Rob Kline, but also to a daughter with her supportive husband, just 21 months ago, is meeting the challenge of the company's rapid growth head on while balancing the many roles of mother, wife, friend, partner, only child, and woman, that she juggles according to Kline, "With seeming effortlessness."

In just a short time Oxford has grown from its two employees to seventeen and from four assets to twenty and is keeping one step ahead of the market.

"Perhaps one of the biggest challenges and yet the most gratifying in forming this partnership," Bara says, "has been in launching a "start-up," without the institutional investment structure already in place, which I've been used to. The management of people has become our biggest asset. In addition, there's been a need to be "hands on," to keep overhead in check and to devise our own structure within which to work. "

In just three years, Oxford Lodging has built solid institutional backing and experienced tremendous entrepreneurial success with its portfolio of \$2.4 billion in assets comprised of upscale hotels, conference centers and resorts located throughout the U.S. and Japan.

Ms. Bara has been one of the first U.S. investors to have successfully moved into the Japanese real estate market, getting in at the ground level, beginning in 2003 and teaming with Goldman Sachs, who recognized the benefits of their symbiotic relationship. Oxford built an office which they have staffed with Japanese nationals, who best serve its business community.

Under her tutelage they have acquired 6 hotels <sup>in Japan</sup> there. "In order to be successful as a foreign investor, it is important to be sensitive to the Japanese business style. Japan does not operate under Western traditions and philosophies," according to Bara.

"If there's a glass ceiling in the United States, it's a cement ceiling in Japan," she says. It has been her choice and an asset, to present herself as a Japanese American, not a national, while doing business in an almost exclusively male dominated business world. "They're ten years behind," she says.

She has grown accustomed to being one of the few women in the United States on the real estate investment side of the hotel industry where more often than not she's the only woman in boardroom meetings. She understands why there are more men than women on this end of the industry. "You have to hone your hunting skills and go in for the kill. Women have to be more aggressive to compensate for being a woman," she says. "However, it's a matter of style and adapting one that works best for you. "

"Maki is like no other I've come across, "according to Rob Kline, Partner. "She is direct and decisive when the situation calls for it, but is a fantastic listener, too. She has made countless contributions the success of our business, but I feel that she is best at touching her basic instincts, from which I attain tremendous comfort and value. She observes incredibly well, and with a natural honesty she issues suggestions to those around her that literally help them to become better people."

She perfected her skills and gained valuable experience over the last eleven years while participating in the formation and growth of the lodging activities of Lend Lease Real Estate and Strategic Hotel Capital that included the redevelopment and repositioning of the Regent Beverly Wilshire, the Pan Pacific San Francisco and the National Conference Center before partnering to form Oxford Lodging with the idea of creating a platform for highly qualified lodging specialists to invest directly in large hotel investments – a novel idea in the industry.

Oxford Lodging Advisory & Investment Group was recently honored during the Americas Lodging Investment Summit (ALIS) in Los Angeles for its role as lead investment advisor during Dubai Investment Groups September 2005 purchase of New York's famed Essex House from Strategic Hotel Capital LLC. Oxford and Dubai jointly received the ALIS'S "Single Asset Transaction" award for 2005, regarded as the hotel investment "deal of the year."

In June of 2005 they purchased the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, in San Francisco, a joint venture between Oxford Lodging and Longwing Real Estate Ventures, LLC, a member of the Dubai Investment Group.

"We buy properties that have potential, that are broken – in some respect," says Bara. They need a physical repositioning, operational overhaul or need to be re-branded. "We look for the "sweet spot," being cautious to wait for the "right moment."

Oxford recently launched Kokua Hospitality (with 100 employees representing all aspects of hotel staffing), an operating company to co-manage three large hotels with 3,000 rooms.

"There are three ways we operate; either we own and operate independently, own and operate and brand, or own and hire Hilton to manage and brand, it depends on the assets, case by case," she says. They've recently acquired a 1,000 room hotel in Jacksonville, Florida, in the secondary market, a large property that they have hired Hyatt to renovate and take up a notch. Additionally, they acquired the Inn of Chicago in February of this year which they will renovate and launch as an independent.

Having been a pioneer in the Japanese real estate market, which Bara says, is "booming in sections," specifically the residential market launched with Goldman Sachs,

the next frontier of international interest for Oxford may be India, which has the fastest growth rates in U.S. travel.