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# HOTELS

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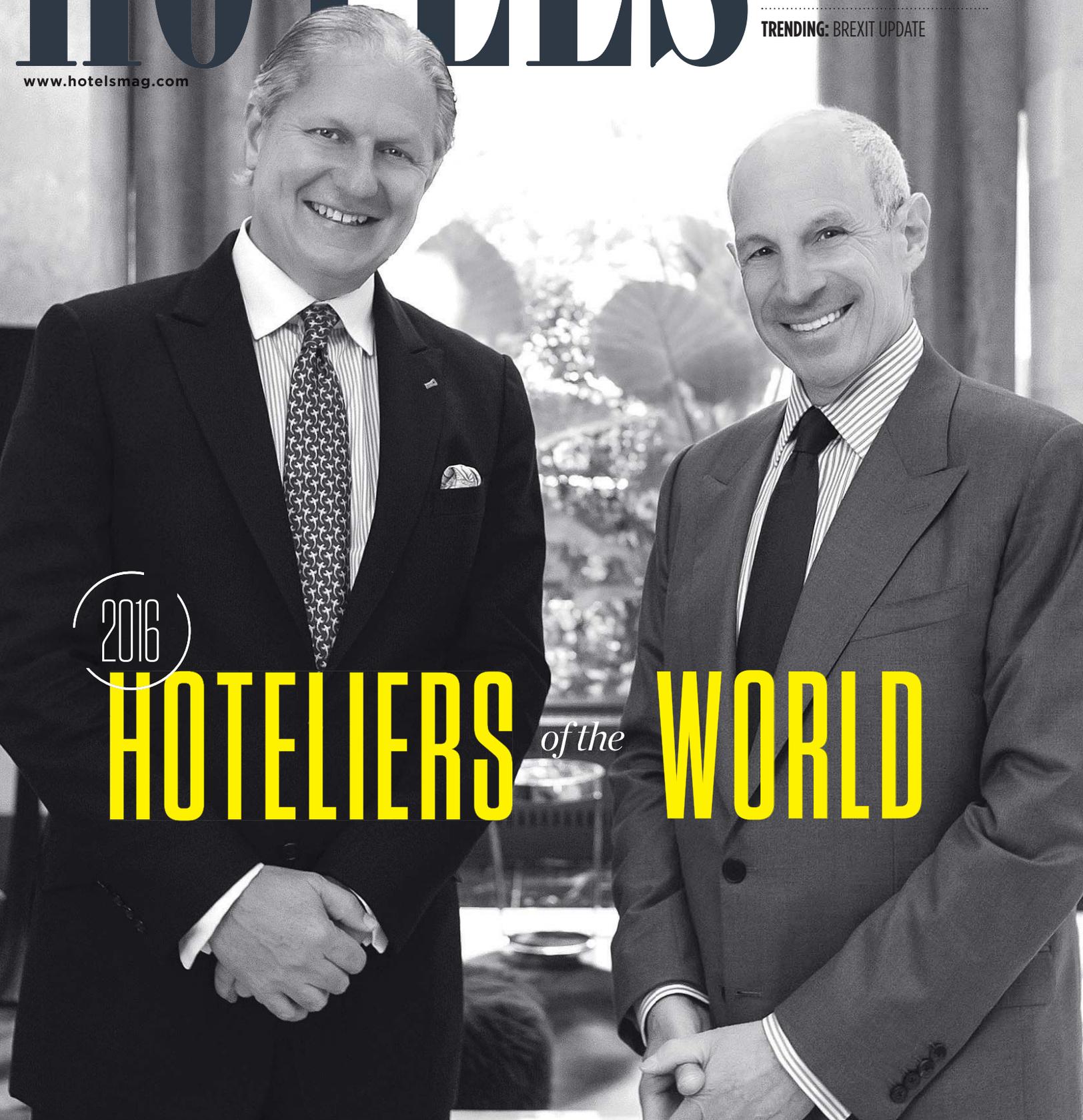
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2016

HOTELIERS *of the* WORLD





JAMES  
MCBRIDE

2016

# HOTELIERS *of the*

James McBride (l.) and Jonathan Tisch met in New York this summer to share stories and celebrate during the Hotelier of the World awards photo session.

## SPECIAL REPORT

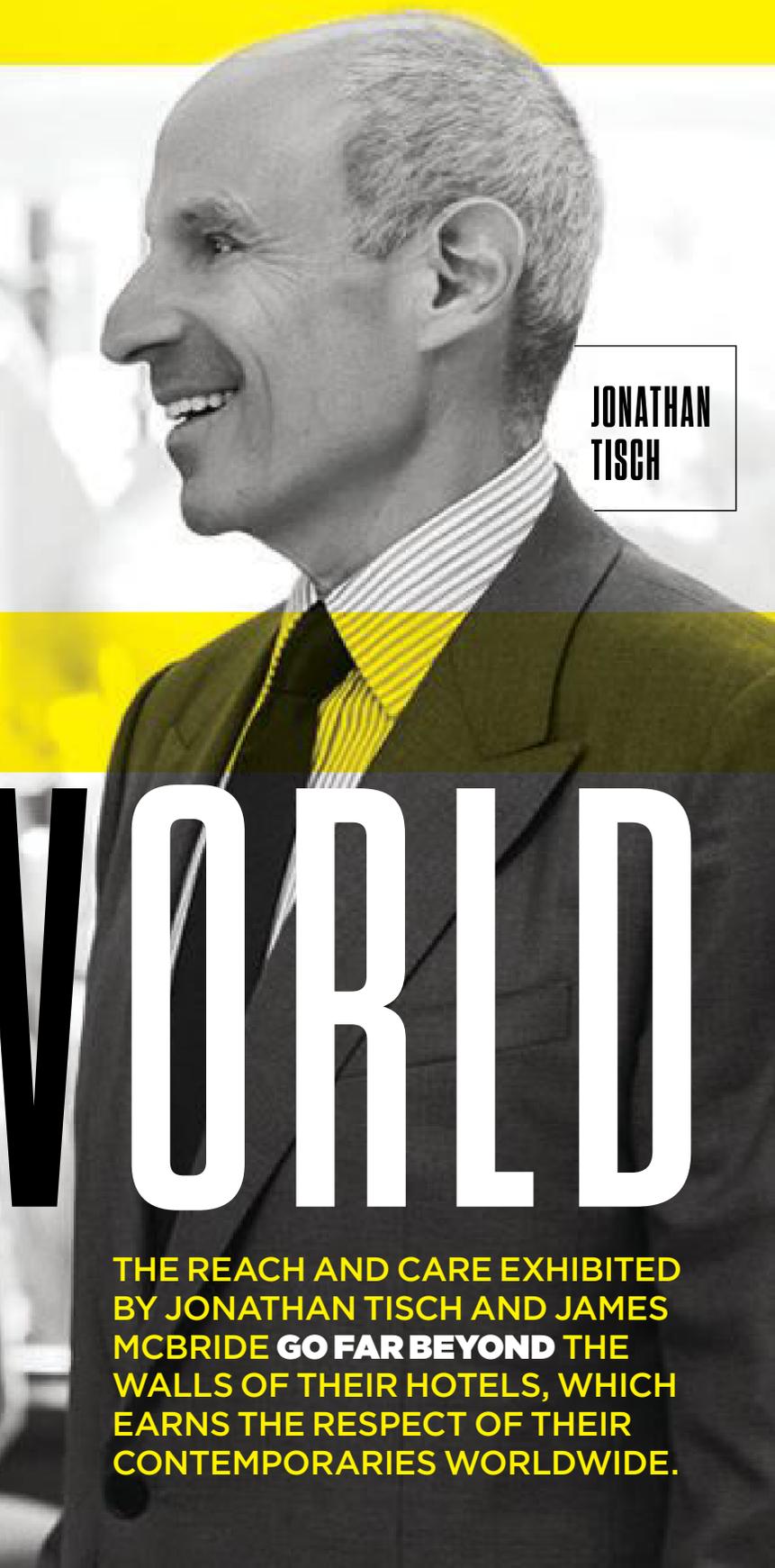
### HOTELIERS OF THE WORLD

**T**he reach of this year's Hotelier of the World award winners goes beyond the physical hotels they develop and the memories they help create for guests. Loews Hotels & Resorts Chairman Jonathan Tisch and Nihiwatu's Co-Founder and Managing Partner James McBride also put a lot of emphasis on growing their internal teams and do so much for the communities in which they operate.

Tisch was instrumental in helping New York City recover from 9/11 by playing a major role in the New York Rising campaign that focused on travel and tourism to revive the economy. Over the past 25 years he has also played a pivotal role explaining to legislators in Washington, D.C., how hospitality drives the national economy and what needs to be done to keep it vital.

The redevelopment work McBride has done on the island of Sumba in Indonesia has not only brought an award-winning resort to a new and growing hotel company, but it has helped support the local community and preserve its traditions, which are infused throughout Nihiwatu and which McBride considers a key part of its' identity. The luxury resort partners with a local foundation to build and staff health clinics, mitigate malaria and supply schools, and invites guests to tour its projects.

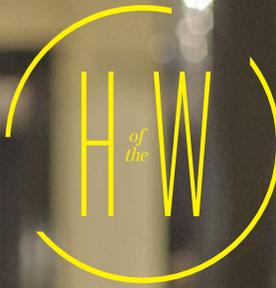
It is Tisch's and McBride's more holistic approaches to business that no doubt resonated with the readers of *HOTELS*, who voted these two industry legends *HOTELS*' 2016 Hotelier of the World award winners. On the pages ahead, read their stories, which have not only elevated their careers but have done so much for their teams and the greater hotel community.



**JONATHAN  
TISCH**

# WORLD

**THE REACH AND CARE EXHIBITED BY JONATHAN TISCH AND JAMES MCBRIDE GO FAR BEYOND THE WALLS OF THEIR HOTELS, WHICH EARNS THE RESPECT OF THEIR CONTEMPORARIES WORLDWIDE.**



## THE NIHIWATU PARTNER CHARTS A COURSE ON THE FRONTIERS OF LUXURY.

By **BARBARA BOHN**, MANAGING EDITOR

### JAMES MCBRIDE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A RISK TAKER.

“When we opened the Ritz-Carlton Kuala Lumpur, it was in the middle of the Asia crisis in ’97 and we had no business,” he remembers. Currencies were plummeting along with demand for hotel rooms.

“We were not in the best location, and I kept telling him, ‘be creative’ – the typical corporate office speech,” says Horst Schulze, then company president. “I came to Kuala Lumpur and was shocked.”

When Schulze stepped off the plane and into the airport terminal, he saw McBride’s handiwork: a full-sized model of a Ritz-Carlton guestroom. “The TV, everything was there to show customers the greatest room in Kuala Lumpur. It was first-class. It was an excellent, creative sales and marketing effort that people envied him for.”

“It was unbelievably successful,” McBride says. “All the other hoteliers were up in arms. They never thought of it. It was tasteful and it was elegant – and it drove business.”

Bold, elegant and successful: Strokes like that mark his career and are one of the reasons McBride was voted Independent Hotelier of the World in 2016 by readers of **HOTELS**.

*Independent Hotelier of the World:*

# MCBRIDE INNOVATES

McBride and his business partner, Chris Burch, transformed Nihiwatu from a sleepy surf resort to a top-rated luxury destination.



**ENTREPRENEURIAL INNOVATION**

McBride is a creative force, an innovator and relationship maker whose career is marked by risks as big and bigger than the guestroom in Malaysia. From his 14-year run at Ritz-Carlton, stints leading London’s Grosvenor House and New York’s The Carlyle, to running YTL Hotel Group, he has always been entrepreneurial.

Now he is truly an entrepreneur with business partner Chris Burch in Nihiwatu,

a lush resort on the Indonesian island of Sumba that is accumulating accolades not just for its lux, “edge of wildness” aesthetic but for supporting, via a foundation, education, health and malaria eradication for the local community, which makes up 90% of the resort’s employees. They are taught English and receive job training.

Making a difference matters to him. “Whenever you are in an exotic location, specifically where people are very poor

and you and your customers are living in the lap of luxury, if you don’t do something philanthropic, you have a problem. It’s the right thing to do.”

Burch describes his business partner as “extraordinarily creative and incredibly detailed. It’s not easy leading a bunch of people who have just learned their skill base.” The attention to detail is trained on guests as well. “I feel lucky that he can think through many layers of a customer’s



McBride met Burch (r.) at The Carlyle in New York City. “I realized he was probably one of the most extraordinary general managers in the world,” Burch says.



**HIS FORMULA:**

“Execution is the key to success. You can be at the right place at the right time but you have to do something about it. There’s a million ideas going around, but it’s who executes, who gets it done.”



McBride with Bill Marriott in Kuala Lumpur in the late 1990s. Marriott International had earlier purchased the Ritz-Carlton brand.

needs. He doesn't think about the mattress. He thinks about the heart."

Just as important, Schulze says, "he is willing to give other people credit. Not many people do that."

**THE RITZ-CARLTON PATH**

McBride's first job in the U.S., in the mid-'80s, was at a timeshare resort in southern California ("it had a ping pong table," he notes dryly). But he worked hard and soon joined a larger property in San Diego.

Then he saw an ad for a new hotel in Palm Springs, at about the time that his parents were visiting from his native South Africa. "Let's drive to San Francisco, and we'll go through the desert and stay at this beautiful hotel," he told them. "Once I checked in there, I said, this is the company I need to work for."

The hotel was the Ritz-Carlton Rancho Mirage, one of a handful belonging to a small, new company. McBride joined as a management trainee and moved up the ranks. "I must have opened about 20 hotels," he says. His path intersected with its purchase by Marriott International and growth under Schulze, whom he calls a visionary and a mentor.

McBride flexed his management muscles at the Ritz-Carlton Washington, D.C., a mixed-use development – this time, he employed a musician at a grand piano at Reagan National Airport to greet potential guests. "Everyone told me I was crazy, like most things I've done in life, and it actually works out," he says. "A lot of it is just because you have a vision, stick to it and go for it." His leadership of the process to transform employees into "ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen" became a Harvard Business School case study.

"The 14 years at the Ritz-Carlton was a great foundation of my life," he says. It sent him to places like Boston, St. Louis, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Hawaii, Hong Kong and Singapore, and made him a mentor, in turn. He demanded excellence from his reports, whom he says have told him that they appreciated the experience – mostly in hindsight, he says with a laugh. He's watched many of them move into leadership roles. "You see them five years or six years later and they're like, you know what, it was an amazing time," he says.

**THE CARLYLE JOURNEY**

Amid changes at Ritz-Carlton in 2002,

**HIS FAVORITE HOTELS:**

The Upper House in Hong Kong is "relevant, cool but just cool enough, designed, but designed just enough." African ecolodges remind him of his native South Africa. London's Dorchester: "You can close your eyes and know you are at the Dorchester. It makes you feel happy and warm." And the Beverly Hills Hotel. "I love the look, the smell, the feel." He adds: "I've got touchpoints in each of them that make them special."

**HIS PHILOSOPHY:**

"As Horst (Schulze) used to say, success is not somewhere in the future. If you're successful at everything that you do today, it naturally accumulates and you become successful. Those who are always questioning when it will be, that's when it never happens. Those that endeavor, work hard every day, focus on what's important, be disciplined, be energized, are successful. And you can give that message to anybody because it's pertinent regardless at what level or what job or what they doing."

McBride got an offer from hotelier Jürgen Bartels to move to a new luxury property in a new city: Grosvenor House, on London's Park Lane. "It was after September 11, and what we went there to do was to spend £100 million and redo it, but we went into receivership instead," says McBride, who calls Bartels an extraordinary leader.

In 2003, he got the call to lead New York's The Carlyle for Rosewood Hotels

& Resorts, where he remained for six years. He credits that offer with his ability to build and maintain relationships in a relationship-driven industry.

“Many of my journeys today actually started at The Carlyle,” McBride says. As well as running the company’s Caribbean resorts, new seeds were planted when investor and entrepreneur Chris Burch checked in. “I would watch him in the lobby and he would be the first to pick up the bags,” Burch recalls. “He was a doer.”

Burch himself was looking to move on and create what he called “disruptive hotels,” and he realized that he’d found the perfect partner in McBride. But it took a few years before the right project came up.

At that point McBride had joined Malaysia-based YTL as president, developing resorts in Hokkaido, San Tropez and elsewhere. Burch told McBride about a tiny surf resort on Sumba, where he felt like he had stepped 500 years back in time. McBride wound up assisting Burch on its purchase and left YTL in 2012 to focus on it full time. (In the meantime, he had joined the board of Zanadu, a Chinese travel website.) But something about Nihiwatu clicked.

**CREATING THE VISION**

“The vision (Burch) had for what it could be was correct, and his instincts were correct,” says McBride, who became a minority and managing partner, with Burch fronting much of the money. The result: a cluster of 28 villas, along with surfing, “spa safaris,” horseback riding and a chocolate



The Sumbanese have been expert horsemen for several hundred years. McBride (r.), an avid polo player, helped introduce the sport to the island.

factory that won Travel & Leisure’s 2016 award for best hotel on the planet.

McBride calls Singapore home base, but his breakneck travel schedule includes New York and scouting locations where the two can emulate the Nihi brand’s combination of luxury and local culture, in places like Sri Lanka, Mozambique and New Zealand. Plans include an all-inclusive, activity-oriented version that McBride describes as “bohemian, fun and energetic.”

The T&L award means they’re getting a lot of pitches, as well. But Nihiwatu was another great risk, perhaps the greatest of his career. “There were many times when I thought that I’d gone mad,” McBride says. “You kind of know what you’re doing, you know what the goal is, you know what

you’re trying to achieve. But your peer group think you’ve gone mad.”

It’s a kind of madness that he’s unwilling to pass along to his teenaged son, who spent summers at Sumba and has said he wants to follow his parents into the hotel business (McBride met his wife at Ritz-Carlton; they’re now divorced). “He knows more about it than a lot of people because he’s been around it so long.”

He credits his parents, with whom he traveled from an early age, and his mother particularly as a role model on details and high standards.

“I’ve been fortunate and successful in some things. I’ve always taken the road less traveled. I’m a risk taker. I’d rather ask for forgiveness than permission. And, you know, generally, it works.”

**ON CUSTOMERS:**

“I engage right away. For me the customer experience is paramount. I’ll do whatever it takes for an extraordinary experience. And through this, it’s either right or wrong. There’s no gray. I don’t work in gray.”

**HIS IDEA OF FUN:**

“Work extremely hard, have great discipline and focus, and have fun in what you’re doing. I always have fun. And if I’m not having fun, I’m not exhilarated by what I’m working on. It generally won’t be successful. If it becomes mundane, why do it?”

**HOW HE SCOUTS A LOCATION:**

“We go to the site, we may even sleep at the site in a tent for a few days and get the spiritual feeling of the area. We look at the topography, work with an architect, see where the sun sets, where the birds sing, where the whales can be seen.”