BIZCOMMUNITY

The President Hotel turns 21: A coming of age

By Juanita Pienaar

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The President Hotel in Bantry Bay, Cape Town celebrated 21 years of exceptional experiences and memories since the late Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela opened the newly rebuilt iconic President Hotel in 1998.

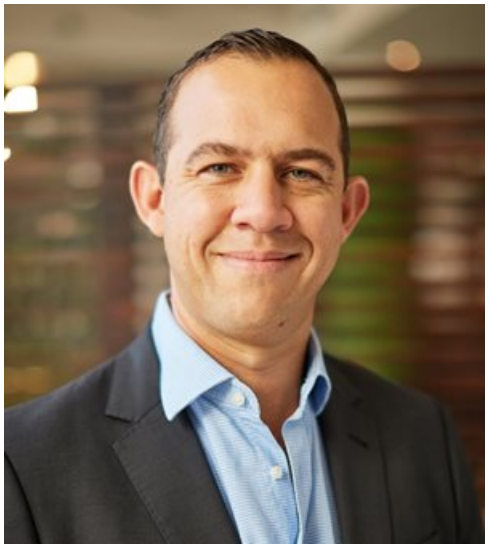
Images supplied.

Celebrating over two decades of authentic and bespoke experiences of the Mother City to business and leisure travellers, as well as 250 years of heritage, the brand established its iconic status for capturing the best of its home town through innovative luxury offerings.

From its unique positioning, nestled in-between the pristine beaches and vibrant city, to curated experiences to suit a wide range of needs and interests, The President has always shared its pride and passion for Cape Town.

To mark their special occasion the hotel pampered their guests with seven days of throwback experiences that gave back to the community in a meaningful way.

We caught up with Jeremy Clayton's, shareholder and manager of the President Hotel who spoke to us about their recent birthday and future plans and aspirations.



Jeremy Clayton's, shareholder and manager of the President Hotel. Image supplied.

- ***Please tell us more about the President Hotel celebrating 21 years of hospitality. Why is this such a significant milestone?***
  Every birthday is a milestone as it allows us to take stock of what we have achieved over the last year and simultaneously have a look at what our objectives are for the next 12 to 24 months.

The reason 21 is so important for us is that it is a coming of age, a big celebration. Our 20th birthday celebrations were small because we were in the middle of our renovations, so turning 21 gave us a great opportunity to celebrate in a big fashion and showcase the wonderful history of the property, the redevelopment of our reception area and fifth and sixth floors, and unveil the plans for this year's refurbishment of the ground, first, second, third and fourth

floors.

Share with us more about the pop-up history wall that was unveiled at the hotel in honour of this celebration.
This was the biggest and best surprise that I have had at the hotel. When we started the research a year ago we expected to find 60 or 70 years of history from when it was the old Queens Hotel to the Hotel President, but to have found this rich cultural history that dates back over 250 years to when Society House stood on this site and all the stories and tales that have happened on this spot over the centuries, was just fascinating. And as important as the stories that we have uncovered are, it is also exciting to think of all the stories that we still need to discover or that are waiting to be told.

The President Hotel's 21st birthday history wall. Image supplied.

One of the recent stories that I have heard is that during the Anglo Boer war (1899 – 1902), the wealthy miners in Johannesburg (JHB) built a railway track from JHB to the Cape and had the tracks extended straight to the President Hotel, so that when they came to the Cape they could come directly to the hotel. So there are many tales and stories of the President Hotel that are entwined in South African history and that's why it is so important.

Can you share any significant memories that stand out to you, looking back at the past 21 years?
The obvious one is when Madiba officially reopened the new President Hotel in 1998. I thought that it was fantastic that at the unveiling of the history wall last week, that there were two staff members present who had been at the official opening ceremony 21 years ago.

The second key memory for us is the transition of the brand to independence and becoming South Africa's largest independent hotel and hopefully one of the visionary hotels where we implement change, become sustainable and uplift and enable our staff as much as possible which is very much in line with the Madiba ethos that we live by.

At the event last week, you mentioned that you want to open the hotel up to the locals. Tell us more about the initiatives that you've put in place to attract more local visitors back to The President.
We always knew that we had this rich history in the Sea Point, Fresnaye and Bantry Bay areas, and through our historical discovery it was confirmed just how much of a history we do have, and because we have 200+ owners, many of whom live in the area, we felt the need to engage closely with the local community.

We have opened our doors to the community through our loyalty programme, The President's Club, and through our family-friendly offerings and we now have a wonderful interaction with our local community.

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The locals join us for our Family Friday nights, the kids use the pool and dedicated play area, happy hour and Sunday

lunch winter specials, etc. We want the locals to be proud of the President and enjoy the facilities along with our in-house guests.

- ***Looking ahead, are there any exciting plans in the pipeline for the hotel that you would like to share with us?***
  This is a really exciting time for the hotel as we have so many plans in the pipeline that will evolve The President above and beyond expectations; such as the redevelopment of our food and beverage floor whereby we want to put in four or five outlets and feature Italian cuisine, fine dining and a walk-in wine cellar where guests can have an amazing wine experience with some of our wine partners.

We want to further develop our Travel Desk and offer unique Capetonian experiences, such as cycling Chapman's Peak or trail running Table Mountain, and then one of the biggest and best initiatives we have in the pipeline is to utilise the roof in two ways: firstly by installing solar panels which will provide 1/3 of the hotel's power and also by using 1000m² of the eastern side for conference facilities, a restaurant and rooftop bar and bring the Raffles brand back to the President Hotel.

- ***Anything else you'd like to add?***
  What is important to us is that we see this as a multi-phased approach and that the President Hotel is going to take years in evolving to once again become Cape Town's best and most loved hotel.

It is important that this is a joint venture with community, staff and with our shareholders and partners, and that we all strive to provide world-class services and exceptional experiences as we believe that this is one of the best locations and one of the best hotels in South Africa.

I see this as a multi-pronged approach whereby everyone has a part to play in reviving this incredible Cape Town legacy.

More on the hotel's history can be viewed, here.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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