

How the Boutique Hotel Industry Views Its Future, According to Hotelier Charlton Claxton

A conversation with Hotelier Charlton Claxton, the developer/operator of full-service and luxury boutique hotels & Vacation Rental Operator

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Charlton Claxton

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- When Charlton Claxton stays at a hotel or resort, he is no average guest. All aspects of the property get his attention. Charlton notices the finishes on the furniture and scrutinizes the room's layout. “If I'm having a meal, I'm watching how the wait staff interacts with guests and the presentation of the food upon arrival,” Claxton says. From an investment stand point this makes sense as Charlton is on the forefront of creating sale/leaseback transactions within the boutique hotel and short-term rental world(s)- So operational detail is key to profitability.

Charlton Claxton is the only son of storied real estate developer G.S. Sheppard (developed huge areas of South Florida during the latter half of the last century), So real estate is in his blood, and Charlton is cued into such minutiae because it is his job to be. Charlton Claxton is the 33-year-old developer/operator of full-service and luxury boutique hotels & Vacation Rental Operations —His is the first operation to combine boutique hotels and short term rentals within the same Company.

The industry is a mix of large, big-name companies (like Hilton, Marriott, and Four Seasons) and smaller boutique brands. The former is dominant, but, Claxton says, there is room for upstarts; for instance, his company is preparing to launch its brand of Condo-hotels centered around water based attractions and southern hospitality, and the gym operator Equinox has announced a fitness-themed hotel brand.

In the past decade, the industry has thrived, as both leisure and business travel have ascended alongside GDP. Upscale hotels, being as they are at the high end of the market, are one of several industries that do very well as the number of very rich people (and the size of their

collective wealth) grows. At the same time, a little lower down the market, hotels' revenues have also been buoyed by the expansion of a global middle class that draws especially from China, India, and Brazil. Claxton sees these middle market global travelers as an excellent clientele to accent the customers already present in the second-tier southern tourism markets that the company already has projects under different stages of development.

Despite several years of steady growth in the industry, many within it are nevertheless wary of rental platforms like Airbnb (which might steal away customers) and online-booking sites like Expedia and Priceline (which take commissions that eat into hotels' revenues). Several large chains have begun to figure out how to effectively straddle the vacation rental market (short term rental) and traditional hotel operations. And Charlton Claxton is one of the first boutique hoteliers to really understand what it takes to straddle both markets- "I have found that it truly is about have a nice place to lay your head, and excellent shower in the morning, and maybe some warming food that reminds you of home. People want to be pampered. It's an awakening in people whom now want their entire body cared for- a complete move toward wellness. People are putting more effort into looking good, and feeling good. And even outside the rooms we are seeing major changes- like in the lobby. Lobbies used to service one purpose- to get your key or wait for someone to come downstairs. Now they're social experiences—no one wants to feel alone, we focus on making our lobbies places that show case the energy of the local community, a living room of sorts! Maybe the restaurant used to be around the corner, and walled off from the main lobby—now the lobby and the restaurant are truly becoming one space, and food is truly becoming a driving force to welcome guests. We see food, fitness, and fun as the three main driving forces for change. We believe in the trend of hyper socialization that everybody's looking for, getting out of their rooms. You can go to a lot of hotels, even during the day, where they're known for their coffee, and they've got good wifi. And it's great for the hotel, because they can monetize that space better. But it is also better for the guest- they are getting a taste for the local community, meeting other people, having authentic experience in a curated space. We truly are preparing to target our hospitality properties, rather vacation rentals or hotels, as lifestyle properties with true personality, because that's what tends to build loyalty. People want to feel that they've been somewhere special, that they've learned something new, that they've had some exposure to music or art. It's experiential in the design of the space and in the amenities being localized quite a bit—anything from locally sourced food for the restaurants to locally sourced soap for the baths. And hotels are offering information to their guests—ideas about where to go, the insider point of view on how to experience the city they're in. Those suggestions might come from local influencers, insiders—not just a traditional concierge."



Hotelier, Eric Charlton Claxton (2020)

When asked about how short-term rental platforms like Airbnb is affecting hotels, Claxton responds "I don't think Airbnb is really hurting the industry too much, because the industry has been performing so well. I honestly think we are seeing an alternative emerging in the market place. Personally we have worked very hard to make sure our short term rental operation is a compliment to traditional hotels within the markets that we operate. We try to work with Airbnb on smaller boutique assets, and on some of the luxury homes we are simply seeing a bigger product begin embraced by the market than that which a hotel can offer affordably. Hotels are trying to figure out how to offer the same local experience that one would have in a home, And that goes back to the local experiences I was describing earlier."

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