

CEO
TODAY

BUSINESS WOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2020

A portrait of Marloes Knippenberg, a woman with light brown hair pulled back, wearing a dark blue turtleneck and a dark blazer. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a dark, textured grey.

Marloes
Knippenberg

CEO of Kerten Hospitality

The hospitality industry winner

MARLOES KNIPPENBERG

CEO of Kerten Hospitality

An award-winning CEO Marloes Knippenberg shares the story of a mixed-use operator that has become a standout in a competitive global marketplace.

Q Can you tell us a bit about your career and Kerten Hospitality?

I've been a hotelier from a very young age. When I was a teenager I aspired to become a chef and at the age of 14, I convinced my parents to allow me to work in the kitchen of a local restaurant in the south of Holland during the summer holiday. I loved it so much that I went back every summer until I finished high school. It was then a natural choice to study Hotel Management. After graduating in The Hague, my journey started with Hilton where I spent a decade in management roles across Europe and the Middle East to then move to the entrepreneurial side of the business developing Lifestyle Hospitality and F&B brands.

The Kerten Hospitality story started with the House Hotels brand - four years later, we have a portfolio of seven brands and our footprint spans across three continents with a constantly evolving pipeline of 4000+ keys in over 35 projects under development, building a community of owners and investors who share our vision and believe in what we do.

In the Kerten Hospitality family, we focus on the need to build multi-faceted spaces for hospitality, co-living, co-working, entertainment and tailored F&B concepts. Our team are all talented hoteliers with a global mindset and cultural fluency who are skilled at creating community hubs and spaces for the next generation of traveller.

Our team has crafted a 360-degree approach to manage assets efficiently and has devised strategies to work collaboratively with owners to maximise

return per square meter through the plug-in of our aspirational brands designed for mixed-use developments under one holistic "smart hospitality infrastructure".

Q What has been your vision for Kerten Hospitality since becoming the CEO and how have things evolved since?

Today, we are known for challenging the status quo in the market with new innovative concepts and brands. When we started, there was only The House Hotel: A Luxury Lifestyle Hotel brand. We then developed a platform of innovative brands that span from midmarket lifestyle hotels with our Cloud 7 brand to branded residences under The House Hotel brand, to our coworking concept OUSPACE. All this is integrated by a number of F&B brands to deliver a full range of solutions to our real estate partners and investors. We like to see ourselves as an industry disruptor, a forward-thinking company that builds long-term value by creating what tomorrow's customers will want. We create spaces that, when combined, promote collaboration, edutainment and socialising.

We want to establish something meaningful and tangible that can contribute to creating superior owners' returns by entering into untapped market spaces to build projects which bring to life our idea of personalised experiences which connect residents, guests, tourists and digital nomads.

Thanks to this philosophy, we are becoming more and more the partner of choice for those investors who seek a fresh and creative approach that can

ABOUT KERTEN HOSPITALITY

Kerten Hospitality, a specialist mixed-use operator, is dedicated to the operation of mixed-use projects that transform developments into lifestyle destinations by combining branded residences, serviced apartments, luxury and mid-market hotels, collaborative fully-serviced workspaces, gourmet burgers and F&B concepts.

A division of Kerten, an Ireland-based investment vehicle, Kerten Hospitality manages a portfolio of owned brands including Cloud7 Hotel and Residence, The House Hotel and Residence, The House Residence, Ouspace - a co-working and business club concept, Frikadell - a tech-driven gourmet burger with more F&B brands coming down the pipe.

Kerten Hospitality's dynamic team comprises a select group of highly-connected international experts who share a common desire to deliver change in communities around the world. The team are corporate disruptors, rebel hoteliers and food enthusiasts with hospitality pedigrees from well-known brands.

The international hospitality group's pipeline currently includes 4,050+ keys, and some 20,000 sqm of co-working serviced offices, over 300 Frikadell stores, a variety of F&B concepts in projects across the Middle East and North Africa, Europe and CIS.

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KERTEN
 HOSPITALITY

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

35

PROJECT
FOOTPRINT4050+
ROOM KEYS

5

2020
OPENINGS

7

BRANDS

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provide solutions not only for hospitality but also for the residential and office segment. This is one of the reasons why we have recently been selected by a large Saudi group to partner in the building of communities and amenity-rich environments and the creation of entire lifestyle destinations. The other reason why investors love working with us is our flexible approach to building projects that can match their vision and expectations and focus on what today's traveller really wants.

Q What would you say are some of the challenges that women in business face? What have been some of the specific challenges you've faced and how did you overcome them?

Indeed, the hospitality industry, as well as real estate, are still male-dominated sectors, but I don't have an issue with that. What defines your success as a woman is what you stand for, what you deliver and how reliable you are. This is how you earn respect within the business community. I work hard every day to build up the success of our company and of our investors, who I think like my unorthodox approach to the business. They share my vision and respect me as a peer.

I also firmly believe that strong women support other strong women. We have an uptake in female representation at the top level of our business which has

proven to yield positive results. Our team is steered by many inspirational women, who are all well-respected leaders in their field of work. But I wouldn't say that we are a female-centric company - we have many outstanding male executives who contribute to our success too. I think for a company it is ultimately healthy to keep a good balance between genders.

Q What lies ahead of Kerten Hospitality in 2020 and what are some new upcoming projects you have in the pipeline?

We have five exciting projects opening in 2020. Our Cloud 7 Residences are making their Middle East debut in Aqaba, Jordan, set to open in June. We are launching our first mixed-use lifestyle destination in Jeddah, featuring our award-winning brand, The House Hotel, our co-working business club Ouspace, and a plaza with a number of F&B concepts. We have two hotels from The House Hotel brand opening in Georgia and Kuwait too.

Undisputedly, mix-use projects are the future and we are becoming the leader in this segment in the Middle East market, transforming the hospitality landscape with forward-thinking ideas that combine innovative spaces for working, living and socialising. Additionally, a growing number of retail owners are reaching out to hospitality operators like us, wishing to connect their business to the hospitality playground.

Q

Who has had a big impact on your career and your life?

Throughout my career, I have always been very passionate and dedicated. Much of what defines me today has been shaped by the inspiring lessons that the game-changers I've had the pleasure to work with over the last two decades have taught me. Oliver Harnisch, Chris Nassetta and Mario Ferraro are the people who have influenced my career the most.

In whatever I do, I try to understand consumer trends and generational behaviour and then structure our brand DNA in a way that reflects them, providing products, services and experiences that are relevant to the market. I am myself a millennial and I think that often, brands in our industry have a lack of understanding of what my generation really expects from a hotel.

What I see as the biggest challenge of being successful going forward, is creating products that match the Gen-Z taste and lifestyle. It is an extremely difficult generation to interpret. They change as fast as the world around us is changing. They are focused on tech and instant experiences - things they grew up with. They genuinely care and hold the future of the world in their hands. When they refer to sustainability and innovation, they take off to a whole new level and have completely different values. They want to know where the food they eat comes from and what the chickens they eat have been fed with. They care about the planet much more than millennials do. It is not anymore about saving on plastic and straws or opening a bio restaurant or a pop-up smoothie place. They are the true game-changers of our time and the real question is: What's next? At Kerten, we try to answer that question.

Q

So if we are a developer or an investor in a mixed-use project seeking a hospitality partner, how would you pitch us?

We want investors to understand what

we, as a company, and our brands stand for and how we can create value for our partners and investors. We establish a connection and create common ground to work on jointly with them. Our portfolio of brands also allows us to propose tailor-made solutions for entire real estate projects, providing our investors with a variety of choices to create superior investment return performances.

Q

What sets apart your company's portfolio and offerings from other hospitality groups that operate properties?

As a solutions provider, we like to be in the know and we never apply the shotgun approach. Jointly with investors and owners, we help utilise empty and unused spaces and manage to transform them into profit-generating spaces. Our mix-use approach enables owners and developers to partner with a single operator who is accountable for the overall concept within the project. Our long-term marriage with owners helps deliver versatile, functional and sociable spaces. We create an ecosystem that allows forward-thinking owners and developers to leverage on the whole value chain.

Q

Have you always wanted to be a CEO?

I never thought about what I wanted to become. It was always more about doing the things I enjoy and while doing that, I became a CEO. My job comes with a lot of responsibilities. I have to fulfil the expectations of many stakeholders: our shareholder, our investors, our team and sometimes I can feel the pressure. But I really enjoy it all!

I love building things and when you are surrounded by an amazing, hard-working team which is determined to make our company successful, then you know why and what you are working so hard for. I love building things and when you are surrounded by an amazing, hard-working team which is determined to make our company successful and by enthusiastic owners who believe in what you do, then you know why and what you are working so hard for.

MARLOES KNIPPENBERG

Marloes Knippenberg has an innovative mindset that has established the organisation as a disruptive, dynamic international hospitality group dedicated to the management of mixed-use lifestyle developments in key global destinations.

Her journey in the hospitality field started with Hilton where Marloes held senior operational and commercial management positions for over a decade. At the helm of Kerten Hospitality, which she developed and launched with the backing of the Ireland-based investment vehicle Kerten, Marloes demonstrates the added value that mixed-use, tailored hospitality solutions and personalised approaches deliver.

Under her leadership, Kerten Hospitality has developed a portfolio of aspirational and lifestyle-driven concepts which includes The House Hotel and Cloud7 hotel brands, the modern serviced office, coworking and business club model, Ouspace, and tech-and design-driven gourmet burger concept, Frikadell - with more brands in the pipeline.

In just a few years, the organisation's operational and pipeline portfolio has grown significantly - from one brand in one country to over 10 aspirational lifestyle-driven concepts in more than 35 development projects across three continents.

Marloes continuously pioneers the role of innovation across the larger ecosystem with the aim to establish an industry platform where technology, hospitality and sustainability coexist and evolve for the benefit of consumers, investors and businesses.

She is on the Advisory Board of flagship events including IHIDC- Vienna, AHIC - UAE, HITEC - Dubai, IHIF- Berlin, has been on the jury panel of the Genio Worldwide Innovation Summit by Hotelschool The Hague, and is frequently invited to contribute to industry forums such as ITHIC - Italy, SHIC- Saudi Arabia, HOST - London and The Retail Summit - Dubai.

Marloes has been listed in the Hotelier Middle East Power List 2019 ranking the region's most influential industry professionals. Most recently, she has been ranked in the Hotelier's Middle East's Most Powerful Women in Hospitality list for 2020.

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