

# Business Traveler



TRAVEL  
A new golden age for the Caribbean



CUISINE  
The delicious world of chef Massimo Bottura



AVIATION  
Are low-cost carriers facing a new challenge?

## Vision Quest

Why award-winning filmmaker, musician, author, publisher and entrepreneur Questlove is ready to focus on his legacy



WHEN JASON POMERANC was 17, a guidance counselor at his private high school told him his chances of attending an Ivy League university were nil because of mediocre grades. “I said, ‘I’m going to show him,’ ” Pomeranc recalls. He landed an interview with Cornell University’s School of Hotel Administration. The dean asked him what he would do differently as a hotelier. Pomeranc gave an answer he had never even contemplated. “I said, ‘We’ve been doing things the same in hotels for the last 50 years and there is a thirst for a different perspective on

## Character Study

Sixty Hotels founder Jason Pomeranc threw aside standardization to create a hospitality portfolio based on uniqueness and individuality. He’s continuing that plan with his latest boutique brand, Civilian

design, food and beverage, the way people socialize. Tech is changing the way people book hotels.’ He looked at me and said, ‘Where did that come from?’ ”

Pomeranc was the first person admitted to Cornell University that year. It turned out that he prophesied his career during that interview. (Pomeranc ultimately declined the placement to attend law school and learn skills such as negotiation and analytical thinking that would benefit him in hospitality.) The son of a real-estate developer, Pomeranc, together with his two older brothers, went on to

build a boutique-hotel empire. They launched in 2001 with 60 Thompson in New York’s SoHo. Pomeranc was 30.

Their concept was based on independent hotels in Europe that “bordered on traditional and unconventional luxury at the same time,” Pomeranc says. These hotels lacked the structure of corporate and luxury chain hotels and as a result had difficulty growing in the United States prior to the early 2000s, when independents like Ace Hotels came on the scene. “The idea that standardization became so important post-WWII was what we wanted to fight against.” That meant using a residential designer, marketing the restaurant to locals to entice hotel guests, and adding a nightlife component—which in the case of 60 Thompson included Downtown’s first rooftop bar—to create a hyperlocal experience.

The opening party for 60 Thompson was on September 10. The terrorist attacks occurred the next day, and guests were stuck. Pomeranc, the general manager and a few other team members prepared meals and handled all logistics. “That was a trial by fire as hoteliers, for sure,” he says.

Once the city bounced back, the hotel was met with glowing press and guest reviews. To capitalize on that success, the brothers founded Thompson Hotels. Did starting a brand negate their stance against standardization? “No, because none of the hotels were standard,” he says. Each looked completely different and nixed what the brothers called “the tyranny of beige at other luxury hotels.”

Within a few years, Thompson Hotels added a dozen properties to its portfolio, including



The Belgrave London and The Hollywood Roosevelt in Los Angeles. Their boutique hospitality concept was a proven success and other hotel brands wanted in. To ward off the competition and to access more capital, the brothers merged Thompson Hotels with a larger hospitality group and formed Commune Hotels + Resorts in 2011. Pomeranc served as cochair and helped grow the portfolio to more than 55 hotels.

But by 2013, Pomeranc felt the need for a change. “We had

a small-company mentality that was starting to become a really big company,” he says. “I found myself not being able to mold projects anymore.” They sold Thompson Hotels to Commune and launched Sixty Hotels, which went back to 60 Thompson’s conceptual roots.

Pomeranc’s newest venture is Civilian, a brand that falls under the brothers’ parent company, Sixty Collective. The first Civilian hotel is in the Theater District in New York. What sets the brand apart is its focus on the “millennial and

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Gen Z mentality,” Pomeranc says. While Civilian embraces a design-led aesthetic and exciting food and beverage components, its rooms are smaller and it has eliminated “old-school checkpoints” such as minibars and turndown service. For guests wishing to experience these and other amenities, à la carte options are controlled from their phones. “They may move on to luxury travel in a couple of years but this is a great conduit.”

After more than two decades in the business, Pomeranc says its challenges remain steadfast, including opinionated stakeholders whose egos are amplified because of the business’ public-facing nature. “You don’t tend to get into ego fights about a sewage-fulfillment center, but if you have a shiny hotel with a sexy bar everybody gets a little aggressive,” he says. Ultimately, it’s a conflict that’s bred from a passion for the business, which Pomeranc has in spades. “I didn’t compromise on the things that were important to me,” he says. “I helped move the needle and the industry is different today than it was when I started.”

**CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** Spacious room at the Civilian hotel, New York City; cabana at Sixty Beverly Hills, California; Butterfly lounge at Sixty SoHo, New York City; Sixty Hotels cofounder Jason Pomeranc

