

FRIENDLY DOORMEN AND REGAL BLACK CATS

These hotel characters keep you coming back for more

BY BECCA HENSLEY

ON A VACATION, IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT THE SUITE, THE resort's proximity to the beach, that long-awaited rendezvous with your favorite travel companion, the lavish amenities, the splendid sheets, or the first-in-class activities. Sometimes what actually compels you to return to a certain hotel is simply the existence of one extraordinary person.

Legendary characters have been a standout resource at the world's best hotels for eons. Doormen, concierges, activity managers, bartenders, elevator operators, waiters and more, they are people who have worked so long in their jobs and so joyfully that they define the destination. They welcome back adult guests they first met as children—and so it goes for generations. As time passes, resorts evolve. And the standout characters retire or, sadly, pass away. But they've left their legacy. Whether it's legendary characters such as Andrew Lounsbury who operated the gilded cage-style elevator at Hotel Del Coronado for four decades; Pierre Grueneberg who taught celebrities to swim at Four Seasons Cap du Ferrat's cliffhanging pool during a nearly 70-year career; Jessie Davis a charismatic, four-decades-long restaurant server at Wigwam Resort in Scottsdale; Ritz Paris' Hemingway Bar head bartender since 1994, Colin Peter Field; or Freddy, whose margaritas were so famous the Maroma a Belmond Hotel on the Riviera Maya named an iconic beachside bar for him, we raise our glasses to you. This story is my ode to them—and to the new generation of hotel personalities who forever draw us back to a place. Here are a few to meet on your next trip.



DWAYNE HAMILTON, DOORMAN AT THE LANGHAM NEW YORK, FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

At the hotel since its inception more than a decade ago, beloved doorman Dwayne Hamilton reigns as the star of the Langham New York's social media content, thanks to his beaming smile and big personality. A natural ham whom one guest described as "the sunshine of the hotel," Hamilton once tried his hand at the front desk, but returned to the door as he missed his daily interactions with arriving guests. He also stands in as the hotel's resident photographer. langhamhotels.com



"POPS" (TOM VINCENT DAVIS), CONCIERGE AT PERRY LANE HOTEL, A LUXURY COLLECTION HOTEL, SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Evoking Southern amiability with his welcoming parance and dapper seersucker suit, Pops gets rave reviews on TripAdvisor for his personal touches and sincere hospitality from his outpost at this luxury hotel sited in a historic district. Greeting guests with complimentary champagne or cocktails, he shares insider tips that can't be found elsewhere, sometimes even taking guests on mini-tours of the city as he directs them to nearby restaurants or monuments. One guest wrote: "Running into Pops is like coming home." Where did he learn his consummate customer service? "It's something that cannot be taught, something you're born with," he says. marriott.com



EDDIE MAHONEY, DIRECTOR OF ASTRONOMY AT HYATT REGENCY MAUI RESORT AND SPA, HAWAII

Stargazing with guests for more than 22 years from this island resort's rooftop observatory (rated number one in the world), Eddie Mahoney is a NASA ambassador who offers guests a Tour of the Stars experience several nights per week, where attendees can see 80 of the 88 constellations. Enamored by the stars since watching Sputnik, the world's first satellite to orbit earth in 1957, Mahoney lovingly remembers helping a young boy with the Make A Wish Foundation see his dream of a shooting star. www.hyatt.com

BOB TAGATZ, RESIDENT HISTORIAN, GRAND HOTEL, MACKINAC ISLAND, MINNESOTA

An historic hotel needs a storyteller. Enter Bob Tagatz, a passionate historian who has been named a Historic Hotels of America Historian of the Year. Obsessed with the bygone glamor of sumptuous heyday hotels and fervent about telling their stories, he came to Mackinac Island 27 years ago to work at the Grand Hotel, begging them to christen him the in-house historian. Instead, they started him as a bellman. But, Tagatz persisted, studying the hotel's history at night and impressing guests with fun facts. Respecting his knowledge and commitment, the hotel created the position at last, a job Tagatz does with gusto. Today, he leads acclaimed daily tours and gives myriad lectures at the hotel, relating both the Grand Hotel's and the island's history. grandhotel.com



RON PORTER, MAINTENANCE WORKER, TWIN FARMS, A RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX HOTEL, VERMONT

Having worked at Twin Farms for 30 years (and on the farm property for two decades longer), beloved jack-of-all-trades Ron Porter loves his job mostly for the people he meets. "Everybody has a story, and I so enjoy hearing bits and pieces of peoples' lives, the places they have been, and their experiences," he says. He notes that he particularly likes helping to create successful guest experiences, such as a 3-day birthday party the resort once organized for a guest in the middle of winter. Revered by guests who run straight to see Porter on return trips, he has mascot status at Twin Farms. twinfarms.com

SYLVIE GONIN, HEAD CONCIERGE AT THE BEAU-RIVAGE PALACE, LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

Breaking all stereotypes suggesting only men could lord over the concierge desk in stately European palace hotels, Sylvie Gonin took over the role as head concierge in 1995 at this noble hotel on the Lake Geneva. Her stories of achieving the impossible for guests are legion, though favorite memories include the time she was given *carte blanche* to find a small dog for a gift (she selected a Bijon Frisé) and a Middle Eastern guest's request for estrogen to treat his 500 camels. brp.ch

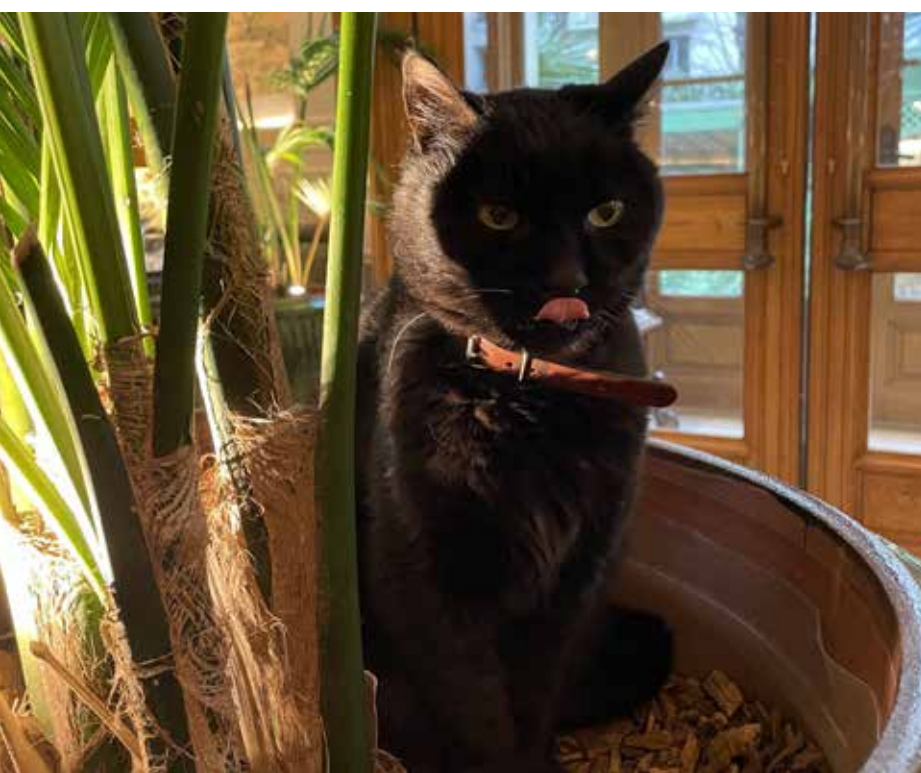


DONALD CRAWLEY, DIRECTOR OF GOLF INSTRUCTION AT THE BOULDERS RESORT & SPA SCOTTSDALE, CURIO COLLECTION BY HILTON, CAREFREE, ARIZONA

Originally from the UK, Donald Crawley has been teeing off in the otherworldly Sonoran Desert for more than 20 years, starting the Boulders Golf Academy two decades ago. Guests repeatedly return to take their annual lesson from Crawley, who has been named in *Golf Magazine's* "Top 100 Teachers in America" for 20 consecutive years—a recognition considered to be the industry standard for teaching excellence. hilton.com

ROBERTO WIRTH, JR., EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN AND VERUSCHKA WIRTH CEO, HOTEL HASSLER, ROME, ITALY

The magniloquent Hassler, the only "grand hotel" in Europe that remains privately owned and managed on a full-time basis by its owners, stands proudly above the Spanish Steps. The hotel, founded in the 19th century, has been led by six generations of the Wirth family. With the recent, sudden death of their father, legendary hotelier Roberto Wirth, his children, twins Roberto Wirth, Jr. and Versuschka Wirth, sixth generation hoteliers, took the reins. Known for his warm, elegant, and effusive welcome to guests as well as his generous charitable works, particularly with the deaf community, Wirth will be honored by his children as they embrace his ethos and memory, even as they look to the future. "The Hassler is in our DNA," say the twins, who plan to increase the hotel's sustainability and green footprint, institute a spa, and continue to bring the restaurant and wine cellar of the Hassler's ancient grotto to life.



PILOU, RESIDENT CAT, ST JAMES HOTEL, A RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX HOTEL, PARIS

In Paris' only chateau hotel, neatly secluded in gardens in a residential pocket on the Rive Droite, a beautiful black cat stands at attention, watching as each guest enters the feline's personal haven, sometimes deigning to greet them with a purr and playful meow. Pilou, 14 years old, has long held court at Saint James Paris, its walled garden of topiary and flowers his playground. Happily napping on a sofa in the restaurant or by the palm plant, this truly French chat knows where to sit and how to act to be perceived as the consummate prince. saint-james-paris.com