

# #Entreprise - Embassies

## Résumé

The Embassies of Good Living a été fondée à Zurich en 2019. La marque permettra à une clientèle sophistiquée de vivre un style de vie urbain pendant la vieillesse, avec une inclusion sociale et un large choix de services optionnels.

Les premières Embassies sont prévues pour ouvrir en 2022. L'équipe fondatrice combine des compétences en développement de marque, marketing, design d'expérience utilisateur, le commerce de l'hôtel et la numérisation.

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### L'impact du confinement :

- Le confinement a mis en évidence les conséquences de l'isolement social et de la solitude
- Il y a une prise de conscience croissante de ne pas vouloir vivre dans une isolation totale, sans personne à qui parler en face à face
- La conception de notre espace de vie est devenue un domaine important
- La pandémie a eu un impact économique sur le secteur de l'hôtellerie et de la gastronomie, avec un quart des hôtels ne s'attendant pas à survivre en 2021
- La pandémie a créé de nombreuses opportunités, notamment l'accès à un grand nombre de biens immobiliers de qualité. Les prix de l'immobilier ont baissé et les propriétaires sont devenus plus exigeants en matière de risque, permettant ainsi à des sociétés comme celle-ci d'acquérir des propriétés à des prix avantageux.

# Article

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## Golden silver years

### Trust in Transformation

**Jan Garde founded The Embassies of Good Living in 2019. The concept offers worldly clients a high-calibre urban lifestyle during old age. In an interview with PwC, he explains how he has developed his offering through the eyes of the target group, packaged it up into a new story, and harnessed the unexpected dynamic of COVID-19.**

**Mr Garde, when did you first come up with the idea for The Embassies of Good Living?**

Jan Garde: When I was a child. As a young boy, I was close to my grandparents. It was a dramatic change for me when they moved into a retirement home. I found it upsetting to visit them – everything about it bothered me, both mentally and physically. The retirement home was a scary place and the atmosphere was like that of a hospital. As I matured so did the idea that growing old should be a journey that people look forward to. The concept for The Embassies of Good Living was developed almost four years ago.

**What does it entail?**

We're carrying out a transformation similar to the one that the hotel industry underwent 25 years ago. At that time, hotels went from providing a bed for the night to hosting their guests, and overnight stays became an experience. We're doing the same thing in the senior citizen segment. With The Embassies of Good Living, not only are we offering people a beautiful location but also a good life during old age. We don't see ourselves

as competing with traditional retirement homes. Instead, we're creating a whole new segment. We want our customers to enjoy living in our high-class Embassies and become ambassadors for good living in old age.

### **When did you decide to turn your idea into reality? What triggered the decision?**

Two pivotal experiences triggered the decision. One occasion was when I visited a senior citizens' home and one of the residents, whom I had never seen before, came over to me and said: "You coming here is the most wonderful thing that's happened all month." These words were spoken from the heart and I was extremely moved. The second occasion was a discussion with a lovely 94-year-old lady who seemingly could have bought herself whatever she wanted in the world. She spoke to me very honestly about her loneliness and told me how solitary her everyday life had become: eating alone, walking to the lake alone, sitting on the bench alone, reading the newspaper alone, going to bed alone, putting out the light alone, then getting up again the next morning alone. The only social highlights on her calendar were friends' funerals. These two stories motivated me to turn my idea into reality.

«The people who come to us are looking for a lifestyle guarantee – carte blanche – that spares them from having to endure the 'Tuesday evening is bingo evening' scenario.» **Jan Garde Founder of The Embassies of Good Living**

### **And what motivates customers to take you up on your promise?**

The people who come to us are looking for a lifestyle guarantee – carte blanche – that spares them from having to endure the 'Tuesday evening is bingo evening' scenario. Our customers are worldly people, mostly baby boomers, who've already lived life to the full and want to continue that outgoing lifestyle into old age, too. Except that, in old age, they're somewhat restricted physically or are no longer very mobile. Many of them are successful business people who've experienced and achieved a lot in life. The provision of all-round care at home is not a solution for them. That's because they're looking for social interaction, a positive outlook on life, everything that inspires them and happens outside of their own four walls.

### **Can you describe what it will be like?**

Each Embassy consists of three components and is essentially a meeting place.

On the ground floor is the first component of the concept, where we create a meeting area and provide catering services. Every Embassy has a bakery, because it's a very open and democratic place. People of all ages and walks of life can call in here, from

construction workers to billionaires. The second component is the Ambassador's Club with rooms from the first floor upwards. This is a special place centred around social interaction, enjoyment, relaxation and learning. This club acts as a bridge, bringing people together who have similar standards and values. Their 'cool' days are behind them and they're looking for quality, inspiration, autonomy and sense of purpose. The dignified atmosphere at the club promotes intergenerational encounters and good conversations. The third component is dedicated to living itself. This is where we combine the luxury of autonomous living with a safety net and a great community. This is what our customers can look forward to once their application has been successful. If we were to compare it to the hotel industry, we would be talking four or five stars. There are rooms and apartments for up to two people, which are equipped with all the comforts our target group is looking for. What's more, there are lots of services that the customers can take advantage of, from laundry or room service to a mobile care service.

**This all sounds very service-oriented. Why is that?**

We all came from the hotel and hospitality industry. I myself have quite a flair for design, and for many years my work was centred around customer experience design. The service package that we design for our Embassies is very customer-focused. We make sure that we talk to our target groups, so we can understand them and incorporate their input. This discussion has been a common theme throughout my life. I've always been very at ease talking with older people and engaging with them in healthy debate. It's never been an effort for me. Within the team of founders we have a clear understanding of service. Just like our customers.

**Is that so?**

Yes. We carried out intensive market research and held endless discussions with female and male representatives from our target group. We want to understand their wishes, their fears and what drives their decisions. We need to understand what's important to them, what they like to look back on and what they fear most. The greatest fear among old people is being surrounded by only old people.

**So, has your concept taken shape?**

In order for our concept to work, we have to position it in a completely new segment. One that's a million miles from that of a retirement home and doesn't have the stigma associated with the words 'old' or 'a home'. We haven't reinvented the wheel, as all the services we provide already exist. However, we're reconfiguring how these components

fit together and packaging them up into a positive and exciting story. This is why we also draw an analogy with embassies. Our establishments should radiate the grandeur of an embassy, just like our customers embody a life that is experienced, open-minded and optimistic. 'Globally at home' – this is an attitude to life and not a question of money, age or social status.

### **How do you find members for the Ambassador's Club?**

The Ambassador's Club is aimed at people of all ages who want to interact. You can compare it to a classic family business: the younger members benefit from the experience of the older members, who in turn are challenged by the younger ones because they interpret things in the spirit of the time and mirror the knowledge of their elders. Customer acquisition is currently driven by price: people under 50 years of age only pay 50% of the membership fee. The multigenerational aspect quickly catches on and works to keep members in the club.

### **What else goes on?**

We've set up an Ambassador's Fund which is managed by our ambassadors. This fund is intended to support sustainable, innovative projects. The fund has a bridging function: it unites older people who live at the Embassy – mostly former business people who still like to make things happen – with younger people who are innovative and are looking for financial support for their ideas. Why shouldn't a 28-year old software engineer talk to a 92-year old ex-entrepreneur about setting up a suitable organisation for their latest application and about keeping the costs down?

### **What are your requirements when it comes to choosing properties?**

We don't buy or convert any retirement homes. We'd never be able to shake off the stigma. We even received an acquisition proposal from one of the largest retirement home chains in the world. As a small Zurich-based start-up we were delighted of course, but we declined the offer. We come from a world that has nothing to do with old people's homes and we want to create a world that's as far removed from them as possible. Ours is a hybrid approach that combines commercial offers with residential living. All in an atmosphere that doesn't smell in the slightest of disinfectant. This means we look for city buildings which are considered high-class due to their location, appearance and standard. This may include old hotels, businesses or office buildings.

«In this sense, COVID-19 has sped up our project and taken away the problem of acquiring real estate.» **Jan Garde Founder of The Embassies of Good Living**

## **How has COVID-19 impacted your service portfolio?**

The lockdown made us all aware of what it means to be socially isolated and feel lonely. Among the population there's a growing conviction that we don't want to live in total isolation with nobody to talk to face to face. What's more, designing our living space has become a major focus area and living on demand is becoming more and more important: during the lockdown we booked services online, ordered food deliveries and had flowers delivered to our homes to cheer us up. Pretty much 'living as a service'. From an economic perspective, the pandemic and the efforts to fight it are killing off a large part of the hotel and gastronomy sector. One in four hotels is not expected to survive 2021. All of these impacts of COVID-19 have opened up many opportunities for us. All of a sudden, we had access to a huge pool of real estate of Embassy quality. At the moment there's an excess supply of prestigious premises, office buildings and properties with excellent access to public transport. The inner cities have to build completely new retail structures. In this sense, COVID-19 has sped up our project and taken away the problem of acquiring real estate. Before COVID-19, we had to explain many things: small start-up, European-wide rollout, novel concept, no experience values. The real estate providers believed themselves to be in a prime position and were able to demand high prices. With the outbreak of COVID-19, the prices plummeted and landlords developed a higher risk requirement for their properties. Suddenly, big banks and insurance companies were coming to us because they want to re-value their real estate or find new, long-term tenants.

## **What's the situation like regarding staffing?**

It's very similar. The effects of COVID-19 have been tragic for many employees in the hotel and tourism industry. They were put on short-time work and are worried that they'll soon be out of a job. COVID-19 has transformed the situation from being a demand market to a supply market. This means we have no problems finding employees with service expertise. So, there are two sides to the crisis: for many it's a total disaster and for others a unique opportunity.

## **You're a private-sector organisation. Caring for old people is usually organised by the state. What's the dialogue like on this front?**

We don't have the requirements of a retirement home, so we don't have to discuss permits with the authorities. But we're noticing a great deal of interest in our approach from political representatives. After all, the demographic development with an increasingly ageing population is presenting our society with a problem that remains

unresolved in many areas. Only a few cities have answers to the upcoming issues. Zurich, for example, is very forward-looking with its concepts for multigenerational living. Society must encourage dialogue and understanding between younger and older people. This is what we're doing with our Embassies. We're not claiming that we'll solve the demographic problem. But we could be a lighthouse project.

**When will the lighthouse switch on its lights?**

The first Embassies in the German-speaking region are scheduled to open their doors at the end of 2022. Our plan is to run 30 international establishments by 2030.

**Mr Garde, thank you for talking to us.**

The Embassies of Good Living was founded in Zurich in 2019. The brand will enable a sophisticated clientele to live an urban lifestyle during old age, with social inclusion and a wide choice of optional services. The first Embassies are scheduled to open in 2022. The founder team combines skills from brand development, marketing, user experience design, the hotel trade and digitalisation.