

MANSION

Spoiler Alert: Concierges Step Up

Service desks in luxury buildings are now asked to go far beyond the usual dinner and show bookings; mastering the Valentine's Day date, the offbeat marriage proposal and the wedding plan

BY SANETTE TANAKA

ISABELLE HOGAN knows how to help couples create some sparks on Valentine's Day. She places flowers around the home, sprinkles flower petals on the floor from the door to the bedroom, puts a bottle of champagne on ice, draws a bubble bath and plays a wedding song through the television, set to repeat. She'll also fill a room with candles, although regulations prohibit her from lighting them.

And she is quick, because she usually gets the request on the same day. "You know how men are," she says.

The cost for materials is roughly \$300 to \$400. Her services are free—just part of her duties as chef concierge at the Mark, a condo-hotel in Manhattan. For most in her line of work, Valentine's Day plans are a well-oiled machine.

Concierge services are no longer simply a means to book restaurant reservations and theater tickets. Residents in high-end buildings are turning to the concierge desk to organize trips, beef up business parties and even plan weddings—much of which requires dozens of phone calls and hours of work the residents aren't prepared to do.

The higher demand for such services is spurred by homeowners' increasing desire to feel like they are living in a hotel, says Jenene Ronick, CEO of Luxury Attaché, which has on-site services in 20 residential buildings in Miami and New York, including 100 Eleventh Ave. and New York by Gehry at 8 Spruce St. in Manhattan.

The more homeowners become familiar with the services, the more they rely on them for everyday needs, including pet-walking, carpet-cleaning, computer and television setups, coordinating moves and planning dinner with friends.

Kilee Hughes is hosting an intricate rotating dinner party next month for 30 people that will span three units—hers and those of two other hosting friends—in luxury Manhattan rentals at 25 Broad and 75 Wall streets. On the top of her to-do list is to contact her concierge at 75 Wall, where Ms. Hughes, a 30-something public-relations director for Net-A-Porter, rents a studio. The concierge, she says, will play a crucial role in "bringing the party to life."

Her concierge is part of an in-house concierge service, Abigail Michaels Concierge desk, but such service can vary considerably. Some concierge desks are virtual; others offer 24-hour in-building staff—and some developments outsource their concierge needs to service companies like Abigail.

The concierge service was a major part of Lenny Peters's decision to buy at condo-hotel Trump SoHo New York six years ago, two years before the building opened. "They are very good at spoiling people," Dr. Peters says of Trump's on-site Trump Attaché service.



PARTY? NO PROBLEM Dr. Lenny Peters, top, at his condo in Trump SoHo New York, where he says he is spoiled by the concierge service, headed by Harry Bueno, above right. At 75 Wall, above left, the concierge will help plan a dinner party.



Claudio Paganetto for The Wall Street Journal (2); Evan Joseph (75 Wall)

WILL BURY TREASURE At Jumby Bay, Antigua, left and above, a concierge once helped plan a marriage proposal.

Dr. Peters is a medical doctor and director of a commercial bank who also owns a unit at the Ritz-Carlton New York, Battery Park. When he is away from his Trump condo, the service stocks his refrigerator with some favorite foods: nuts, champagne and litchi. Last spring, it helped him organize a birthday party for 30 in the first-floor lounge. "They did 90% of the planning. I just told them the date," he says.

To accommodate international residents and travelers, "we make sure our staff is international and speaks more than 20 languages collectively. That plays a major role in giving our owners the feeling of a secondary home," says Harry Bueno, director of owner relations at Trump SoHo.

The service doesn't come cheap. It is typically billed as complimentary, but the costs are included in condominium or maintenance fees. Condo fees at Trump SoHo are \$2,278 to \$5,787 a month. Fees at 75 Wall range from about \$500 to \$4,000 a month. In the Mark, where Ms. Hogan works, residents pay \$9,280 to \$44,645 a month for maintenance and real-estate taxes.

The changing demand is, in turn, changing the makeup of concierge staff. Employers no longer primarily seek candidates with hospitality backgrounds. Michael Fazio, co-founder of Abigail Michaels Concierge, which services 300 buildings in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, among others, says he often hires fashion designers, chefs and actors who come with a creative mind-set and connections. Mr. Fazio says his company has acted as a wedding planner—connecting residents with wedding singers, venues, caterers, and bands.

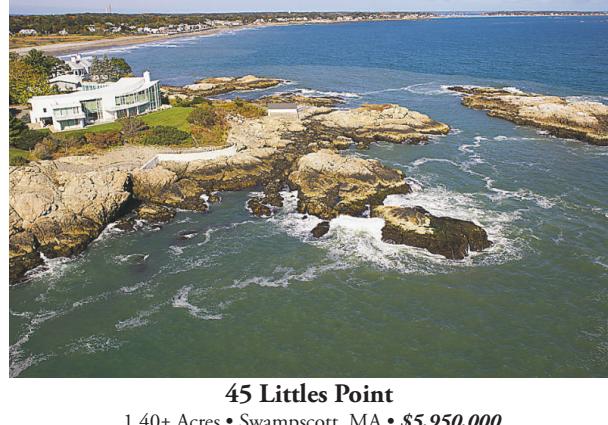
The services also are in high demand from people with multiple homes. Gary Wasserman, 64, CEO of Allied Metals Corporation, bought a 5,000-square-foot unit preconstruction at the Grove at Grand Bay in Miami. He also owns a 6,000-square-foot home in Naples and a condo in Miami Beach, which has a doorman. But he prefers the services at the Grove at Grand Bay, developed by Terra Group of Coconut Grove, Fla. He says he'll move in late 2015, and use the concierge to help brainstorm and execute events. "There's a peace of mind knowing the service is there," he says. His condo fees are planned at 86 cents per square foot, or about \$4,300 a month for his unit.

MaryAnne DeMatteo, director of sales and marketing at Rosewood Jumby Bay, a 400-acre island and resort with privately owned homes in St. John's, Antigua, has planned elaborate events, like a \$10,000 beach party. Last summer, one renter wanted to propose to his girlfriend on the beach. Ms. DeMatteo suggested a treasure hunt.

"We put the ring in the sand, which was quite risky," she says. "I had four guys from our landscape team available just in case she didn't find it." She did.

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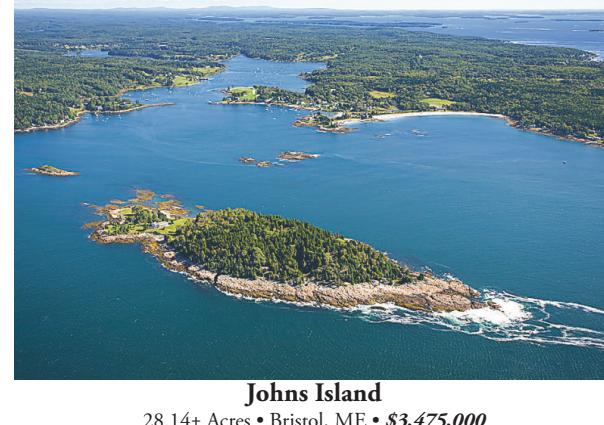
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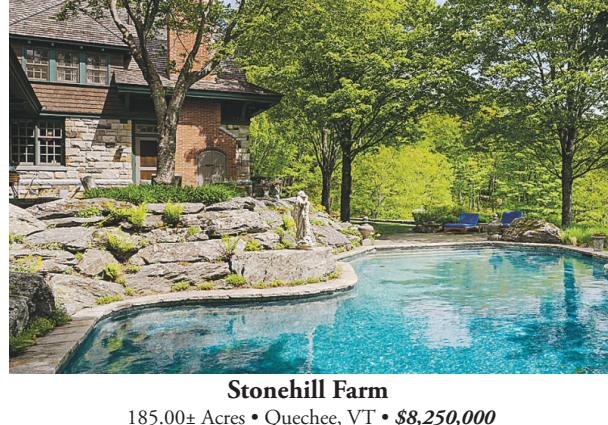
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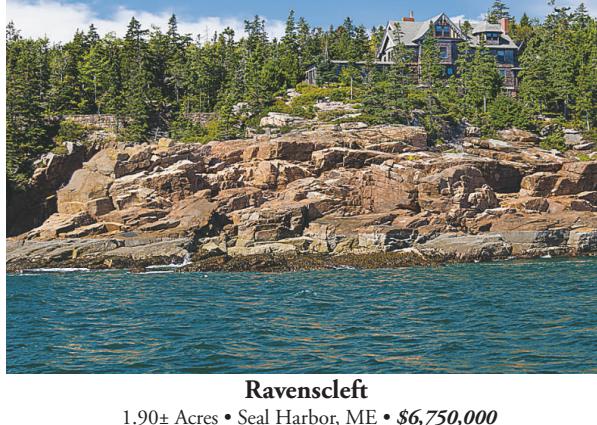
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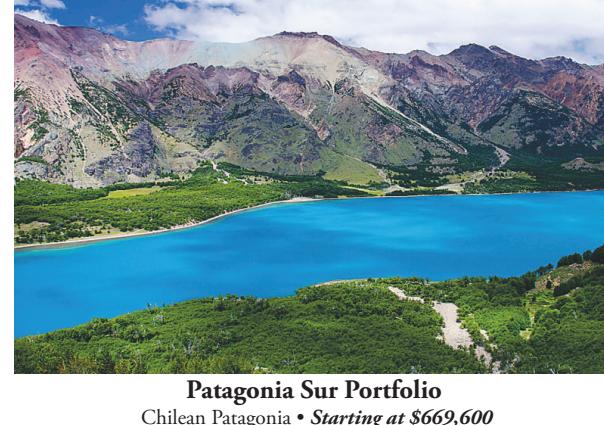
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