

MEET FAIRLAWNS' MANAGING DIRECTOR

Michael Kewley



Michael is the MD of Fairlawns Boutique Hotel in Johannesburg but he has worked in some of South Africa's top hotels around the country. We decided it was time to get to know him a bit better with a quick Q & A session.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself?

I never studied hospitality nor went to hotel school. My background was restaurateur, but I joined the hospitality business 22 years ago with my first break being with the Hilton Hotel group. I am also Proudly South African!

What made you want to work in the hospitality industry?

All that is associated with the glamour and luxury of 5-star hospitality and be given the chance to create special moments or experiences for people every day.

How long have you been at Fairlawns and briefly describe your career path?

8 years – 4 years as GM and to date my fourth year as Managing director and shareholder.

Can you tell us a bit about the history of Fairlawns?

The founding owners retired and I took over the reins in 2015, the Fairlawns will celebrate 21 years of hospitality this year. FBH started as a 12 bedroomed hotel and in 2010 during my first projects we embarked on the expansion to the 40 suites and Villa Moji that we are today. Now a 6 acre property in the heart of Sandton yet when you arrive you could be anywhere in the world but definitely not a city as FBH will surprise most guests after entering the gates, we are a true urban oasis.

What have you done so far/plan to do to make your mark on the property/experience?

Alert tentative service yet living the brand ethos of 5 star fun, we are no longer a “stiff upper lip” destination. FBH has opened its doors 3 years go to multi generational family travel which we never allowed in the past. I have further decorated and created spaces in the property that further feed to the fact that we have been voted the most romantic hotel in Jozi.

My biggest mark is the people I have attracted to be part of my team, the refurbishment of an aging property and taking on the task to be the sole decorator and run the hotel myself over the past years. With a skilled team and a fresh product, I pride myself in the achievements we have had while rebranding, “re imagining” and creating a lifestyle boutique hotel with a 5-star fun outlook. During this process embracing the art and artifacts throughout Africa to decorate our space with interesting stories and historical facts for our international guests to enjoy as part of the adventure into Africa and Southern Africa.

I’m proud to have achieved an amazing 98% scorecard by the South African Tourism Grading Council in our latest full property inspection. We also managed to achieve a position in the top 25 hotels in South Africa list, from the traveler’s choice Trip advisor survey

Are there any exciting things going on at Fairlawns in 2018?

Spa increasing in size and creating new complimentary wet areas in the new spa pool house that in-house guests will get to use, the space incorporates ½ an acre of additional spa space. Indoor heated swimming pool, rim flow jacuzzi, relaxation space around the indoor pool, dinning Sala, Japanese sento mineral bath, Zen garden, a couple’s treatment suite including a double jet bath and rain showers. An outdoor swiss shower and a refreshment bar serving champagne, loose leaf teas, smoothies and fresh fruit juice cocktails...

What three words would your friends use to describe you?

Caring, creative and approachable.

What is your favourite thing about your job?

The uniqueness of the property that I am custodian of, the people that are the ‘modern day’ family that help me do what we do in the house that became a hotel, the true attributes of a fine boutique hotel property.

Who is your longest serving staff member?

We have about 15 long standing staff members but barman Rodgers Baloyi holds the record of being with FBH for 18 years of the 21 years of hospitality. So, he is definitely one to chat to about how we have grown and changed. When I first joined FBH we were a team of 62 people in total which was clearly not enough to carry the load as we grew, proudly now a team of 135 fantastic people.

Do you have a favourite dish at the hotel?

As an avid foodie, one single dish is not possible, but if I could give one per meal time, the Eggs Milanese for breakfast, the strawberry and halloumi salad as a summer lunch on the terrace , and then a good classic South African oxtail and mash with a good South African merlot.

An interesting fact about the hotel/area that is not very well known?

Our driveway was actually once a Lane, called Jersey lane, so as the property grew we absorbed the lane as part of the property. Suites 1 -4 were the original horse stables on the property....and

the beautiful Perrier Jouet Muse Champagne room was originally the coal shed for the homestead.

When is your favourite time of the year in Jozi?

It's said there is great weather 9 months of the year in Johannesburg, we very lucky for the number of days we have with sunshine. As a garden hotel the most spectacular time is seeing everything bounce back after winter, an absolute urban oasis....once you enter our gatesthe world can wait.

Which is your favourite room at the hotel and why?

Suite 4 called savanna, it was the first project I was allowed by my co shareholders to re design and reimagine as the decorator.....and clearly it was a winner as I have now decorated and renovated the property as MD, project manger and decorator.

Who has been the biggest inspiration/influence in your career?

Patsy Esposito who sadly passed away a few years back for my guidance in décor and choices while working at the Beverley Hills hotel in Umhlanga, Durban while we refurbished a great classic. A super stylish lady.

Norman Wallace the 'ex operations' director for Tsogo Sun for being brave and taking calculated chances.

Gerhard Patzer as my General Manager of the Hilton hotel Durban for giving me the break and believing in me that I could become a hotelier.

What's your favourite town/part of Africa and why?

Wow Africa is a very big place and there are still destinations I need to visit, but Kenya holds a special space for me. Back home, Franschoek is probably my latest good memory and foodie space in South Africa. Wine country.

What is your motto in life?

Anything is possible!

What item do you always take with you when travelling?

My trusty traveling suit steamer.....

What are your hobbies?

Bonsai, Boston terriers, art and decorating and creating special spaces

How do you cope with the advances in technology? Do you tweet?

I don't tweet, but I have someone who tweets for us at FBH, I am an avid 'Instagrammer', Face Booker and 'Pinterester' that helps me with inspiration. Instagram and FB have become sources of direct bookings in our local market and a great tool to create awareness of FBH in international markets. We also host and entertain numerous bloggers to further spread the word of our special space in Johannesburg, South Africa.