

CONCIERGE



Amber Smith

Concierge, Avalon Hotel Beverly Hills

CONCIERGE INSIDER (CI): What's it like working for a boutique property and serving its niche clientele?

Smith: It's a simple and elegant experience to be part of someone's visit and help shape their vacation. I love the dance of exploring how to serve them. We are happiest when we are helping or serving others. I thought I wanted to be a journalist early in my career, but all the skills that I learned intuitively informed my skill set for hospitality. I love the look in people's eyes when they ask about going to see the Hollywood sign or other landmarks. I love the innocence in their eyes. People count on us for an experience and have certain expectations about their time here. There's a spirit in what I get to do, I don't just go to work, I get to be part of their lives and provide satisfying memories.

(CI): How do you keep things fresh for your clientele?

Smith: I put myself in a mindset of understanding their needs. I do the legwork and preparation. I show up with an eagerness to be in this role. I focus on what's right in front of me and stay out of the way of the results. I check my ego at the door and remain teachable because our guests sometimes educate us.

(CI): How do you stay motivated?

Smith: My former General Manager, Marie Helene Morowati, (of the Maison 140 when it was a Viceroy property) was a great mentor and taught by example. She is a tour de force, such a powerhouse, and pushed us to be better. She strives for excellence, believes in you even when you aren't believing in yourself. So when you are inspired by the people you work with it makes your job that much more satisfying. And really, I get so much more out of the little moments with my guests, the intimate moments and warm exchanges, more than any news story I was ever chasing.

(CI): What is your definition of excellent service?

Smith: Honoring the other person and meeting them at their level of innocence and curiosity. But you've still got to knock it out of the park for them. You have to create the "wow factor."

(CI): How do you go about that?

Smith: The attitude you have is what your guests are going to adopt. I love what I do, I like the excitement, the bustle and interaction with my guests. I love that I get to introduce them for the first time to a city that I've been in love with for years. I get to send them on a first date with the city.

(CI): Are you ever stumped in your role?

Smith: In every hotel, there's unavoidable challenges. The goal is to turn challenges into opportunities.

(CI): What are some of your favorite locales?

Smith: I'm such an architecture junkie. I love the Bradbury Building in downtown L.A. The Getty is heaven on earth, LACMA, the Adamson House, and The Gamble House in Pasadena. I love all the little finds when I'm out exploring neighborhoods. The Ace Gallery on Wilshire with the sweetest elevator operator and this property, the Avalon, for its mid-century modern spirit that lives through Kelly Wearstler's design.

(CI): Favorite dining spots?

Smith: Our restaurant Oliverio for everything—I love its modern Italian cuisine. The tuna sandwich at The Apple Pan, The Con Todo Burrito at Plancha Tacos on West 3rd Street. I'm from the valley, so Studio Yogurt at the corner of Ventura

Blvd. and Laurel Canyon, I love the rainbow sprinkles. John's Garden at Cross Creek in Malibu. The Redwood in downtown L.A., La Dolce Vita and Bar Bouchon, both in Beverly Hills.

(CI): Who inspires you?

Smith: The people I work with every day, they inspire me. From our valets who come in with a high level of energy and enthusiasm to our managers. Our General Manager Diego Heredia and Executive Assistant Manager Tijs Klerx bring wisdom and expertise and an intuitive capacity to take any challenge head on. Chef Concierge Christine Grimm at L'Ermitage has such grace and elegance and inspires me to no end. Martha Rangel, Lead Concierge at Maison 140 and LACA President Fredo Vita at the SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills.

(CI): You've said hospitality is a beautiful dance. What do you love about it?

Smith: It's an inspiring environment—I'm lucky to work with people who's energy is palpable and contagious.