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## Industry Insiders: Seth Greenberg, Mogul Multitasker

By

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**Capitale's Seth Greenberg on the origins of bottle service, taking over Boston, why Parisians bite New York style, and who really invented bottle service.**

**Point of Origin:** The Paradise Club and Stitches [were my first properties, both in Boston]. Both needed pre-function, so we moved Stitches to an independent location. Then we expanded Paradise by opening M-80 in the old Stitches site. So we moved Stitches to a new location, about a mile away, so now Stitches had a big space. A comedy club in the back, and a little restaurant bar/lounge up front. And now M-80 was connected to the Paradise Club. After about a year, we expanded, then eventually gutted the entire facility so M-80 had both buildings. Then we expanded M-80 to New York, opened Conscience Point in Southampton, and created M-80 in the summer.

When I graduated from college, I was 21; by the time I was 30, I owned 10 nightclubs in Boston, and from there I decided that I really needed a restaurant in Boston, a Euro-themed restaurant; so 12 and a half years ago, I opened a restaurant called Mistral, which is probably still one of the highest grossing restaurants in the city. And about 9 years ago, I assisted my partner in Mistral with the development of XV Beacon. I came to New York about six years ago looking for a project, and I was presented with the [Capitale space] through a friend. The gentleman who had optioned this building was planning to turn it into a nightclub, and I said, before you do that, why don't you consider doing something a little more high-end than a nightclub. So he came up to Boston with me, stayed at the hotel, had dinner at Mistral, went to one of my clubs, and we made a deal.

We realized that the best business model for this property [Capitale] is to just operate strictly as catering and events. I sold my last club in 2005 in Boston, and have since been focused on high-end hospitality. We opened another event space in New York on 42nd between 11th and 12th avenues in the beginning of this year called Espace. And about a year and a half ago, I bought a building in Boston called the Ames with my friend Richard Killstock, and we did a deal where Normandy Realty and the Morgans Group, where Morgans is going to manage the hotel, and I'm going to still operate the food and beverage myself. And that's slated to open next summer.

**Occupations:** I consider myself more of a hospitality executive now, focused on food and beverage. Currently my venues are Espace, Mistral, the Ames, and Capitale.

**Side Hustle:** I advised Jason Binn [of Niche Media] on the launch of *Boston Common*.

**What got you interested in magazines?** I was a promoter in college, and I had approached Jason and said it would be a great idea to launch an *Ocean Drive* in Boston. But first he became a part of *Hamptons*, then he did a deal with *Gotham*, and over the years he always said, "One day when I come to Boston, we'll do it together." At this point he has such an enormous infrastructure, he just needed someone local to help facilitate the magazine. He opened *Boston Common* and *Capitol File* at the same time. We set up Mistral and XV Beacon as a kind of ground zero for the magazine, hosting lunches and dinners with clients, and then we did a pre-opening party. We host five cover launch parties a year.

**It seems like you've been involved in pretty much every facet of the nightlife industry. Which is your favorite?** When I was younger, I was out so much. I just loved it. I just wanted to be out all the time. I always said I was good at what I did because I was out. My clients were my guests and my friends. But now, my lifestyle has changed; I don't want to be out every night, I don't drink. I just want to stay healthy, I want to stay fit, stay focused. I want to focus on developing more real estate, and hopefully putting my own hospitality projects in that real estate. And that's my focus for the next ten years. I don't want to go backwards.

I still love the marketing side, I still love hosting parties, but now it's just different. A *Boston Common* party starts at 8 p.m., and it's over at 11.

**Favorite Hangs:** In New York I love going to Rose Bar, I love going to dinner. I've been going to Gemma a bit in the Bowery, I love Craftsteak in the Meatpacking. I like Tao, Nobu. And if I go clubbing, I go to Marquee. Noah Tepperberg is one of my best friends, I have to support Noah. In the Hamptons, I love going to Sunset Beach. Saturday nights I never go to restaurants; five or six friends will invite each other over for different brunches or dinners. On a Friday I like Savanna's every once and a while. I try to go to different spots.

**Industry Icons:** Andre Balazs and Ian Schrager. Ian came from the nightlife side, but really the operations side, and he really created some amazing spaces. Ian's hotel company is now owned by Morgans Hotel Group; I think their projects are timely and beautiful. Same with Andre, he's done some great work. I think the Mercer is beautiful, I think the Gramercy Park Hotel is beautiful. They've both had some projects I've been really impressed with.

**Known Associates:** Noah [Tepperberg] and Jason [Strauss of Strategic Group] are two of my dear friends. I'm good friends with Jeffrey Jah, I like Jeffrey a lot. I'm friends with Danny A, Richie Akiva and Scottie [Sartiano of 1Oak], and Mike Satsky [of Stereo].

**Jeffrey Jah claims to have invented bottle service. What do you think of that?** That's really ridiculous. I was doing bottle service way before anyone knew what it was.

**So you invented bottle service?** I didn't invent bottle service; it was being done in Europe for years. When I was 29 years old, I was in the south of France, and you'd go to a table at Saint-Tropez and Cannes, that was the European way. You get a table with a group of friends, you get a bottle, and they bring you mixers, and a bucket of ice, and that was normal for twenty years. So maybe [Jeffrey] was one of the first people to bring it to New York, but we were doing it in the Hamptons, certainly, 13 years ago. At M-80 in Boston, we had bottle service, back around 1990. I grew up in Miami Beach, and when I was high school and used to go to the Cricket Club, which had bottle service.

**Do you think New York nightlife is dead?** I think there's a symbiotic relationship between nightlife and fashion and celebrity. And it's shifted over the years from bars to dance clubs to restaurants to lounges. It's continually cyclical. And what's predominant in New York right now is hip-hop, which is affecting the way people dance and what's more comfortable for nightlife. Certainly lounges are more appealing than big nightclubs today, and maybe a lot of it has to do with the music. There's a fashion that goes with it [hip-hop culture] too. New York was the first city where you started playing hip-hop and people started wearing sneakers. The look of New York sort of changed. The New Yorkers would show up at Fashion Week in Paris wearing jeans and sneakers and everyone would look at them saying how déclassé they were, that they didn't know how to dress properly. And now you see that as a fashion trend in Europe as well. So I think New York has always been ahead of the curve.

**Projections:** Right now the hotel in Boston, The Ames by Morgans, is slated to open next summer. I'm co-developing a property in Chelsea, yet to be named, similar to the deal I have in Boston where I'll end up operating the food and beverage, and we'll have a big management company involved. XV Beacon is 61 rooms, and I learned how to develop a hotel properly by observing and assisting my partner in Mistral. The Ames is 115 rooms; the hotel in Chelsea is closer to 500 rooms. So I'm moving up in the world.

**Do you have any overseas expansions/projects lined up?** I've been approached by some different groups to get involved in some projects in the Middle East, but until things are signed, there's really not much to talk about. But I'm looking pretty closely at Dubai. But we want to grow our infrastructure first. In Europe, nothing in the immediate future.

**What are you doing tonight?** Tonight I am training Muay Thai, and then I am going to a friend's rehearsal dinner. And then I'm meeting Michael Bolton. I've been training martial arts for at least twenty years.

**Sounds like you're pretty good at scouting trends before anyone else.** I guess so.

*Photo: Gerry Lerner*