

# THE GARDEN CITY HOTEL

By Barry Kay

**N**assau County is blessed with gorgeous homes, parks, sports arenas, resort-type beaches, and the Garden City Hotel. The hotel is situated in the heart of one of Long Island's most prestigious communities and offers visitors a unique view of the gilded and fabulous history of the Gold Coast.

Alexander Turney Stewart, a multi-millionaire builder, purchased 7,000 acres of land situated 20 miles from Manhattan, which would later be called Garden City. The focal point of this very upscale community would be a magnificent hotel that reflected the elegance and history of its community. The original hotel opened to rave reviews in 1874 and then was rebuilt in 1901 with a cupola similar to the one that sits atop Philadelphia's Independence Hall. The hotel attracted the very cream of society and was a favorite of the Vanderbilts, Astors and Belmonts, who stayed there to visit polo matches, and horse and auto races. Society parties were held in the hotel's main ballroom. The hotel also achieved worldwide publicity when Charles Lindbergh spent the night before his historic flight to Europe and back, dining with friends and family.

The Great Depression brought a stop to the excesses of the Gatsby era at the hotel, as it did to the nation. The hotel began its renaissance after World War II as the Garden City community flourished and grew. It served as a landmark on Long Island and attracted a new group of businessmen, vacationers, celebrities and world leaders.

In the 1980s, Myron Nelkin and his family built the existing structure, which continues to provide the finest in luxury hotel services and amenities.

As our review team pulled up to the entrance to this magnificent old-world style hotel, we were immediately greeted by an impeccably dressed doorman. We then entered the golden revolving doors and were transported into an era of

gilded and ornate luxury. Exquisite marble floors, a glorious winding staircase leading to the second floor and plush carpeting highlighted by desks and chairs of burnished dark wood made for a visual treat. The Garden City Hotel has always been noted for its attentive staff and management, and today would prove no different. I had come to the hotel to meet Nasser Samman, the general manager, who would take me and our review team on a tour and discuss the hotel. Nasser

has been with the hotel for more than ten years and oversees daily operations of all departments of the hotel, including sales, guest services, human resources, housekeeping, maintenance, accounting and food and beverage. Nasser's personality, charm and expertise make visiting the hotel a wonderful experience for first-time travelers as well as frequent visitors.

Our tour began with a visit to the upscale and chic Rein Bar & Bistro, which offers gourmet food for business people and guests on the go. It was then onto the Grand Ballroom

adjacent to the lobby. The ballroom features seating for 400-500 people and is lit by spectacular oversized crystal chandeliers. The room is decorated in the finest floral wallpaper and luxury carpeting. Directly off the main ballroom are a series of intimate, beautifully designed reception rooms.

Nasser then took us on a tour of the dining rooms on the second floor, which are used for more intimate affairs. Each room replicated the elegance and design of the larger main ballroom.

We also enjoyed viewing some of the hotel's special celebrity suites. Each spacious suite featured exquisite paintings and fine furniture complete with king-sized bed. Each bed featured the finest Egyptian cotton sheets and pillowcases and was covered by a beautiful duvet and comforter. Marble bathrooms and oversized showers are all part of the décor. All suites come with sitting rooms, couches and flat screen TVs.



## The Polo Restaurant

After our hotel tour, my review team and I enjoyed an extraordinary dining experience at the Garden City Hotel's Polo Restaurant. Executive chef/wine director Steven De Bruyn prepared a special dinner tasting menu. Our meal began with mini-lobster/crab cakes with mango and avocado served on a bed of fresh Hawaiian hearts of palm and sea bean. This was accompanied by a delightful Torrontes wine from Argentina. The Polo maitre'd and staff were immaculately attired and knowledgeable about the cuisine and wines. Our appetizer was followed with an exquisitely flavored and aromatic warm foie gras crumble with apples, pears and celery root. For this course, Chef De Bruyn recommended a Riesling 2003 wine.

For our main course, we chose pine nut and preserved lemon-crust lamb chops with endive marmalade, winter root vegetable puree and purple mustard sauce. This was followed with a delightful Cabernet Franc 2002. No gourmet meal would be complete without a plate of exotic imported cheeses, and these were brought to our table on a fine china plate, each cheese fragrant, colorful and a perfect complement to our meal.

For dessert, we were served a sampling of Garden City signature sweets. Our plates consisted of coconut sorbet, clementine cheese cake with plum salsa and an unforgettable chocolate cake that disappeared almost as fast as it appeared.

The Polo Restaurant is also noted for its famous Sunday brunch menu which is considered by many reviewers (including our team) to be one of the finest offered anywhere in New York. A typical Sunday brunch consists of a plethora of hot and cold food stations offering meat, pasta, sushi, lobster, shrimp, omelets, fresh fruit and salmon as well as delectable cookies and cakes.

The Garden City Hotel and its fabulous Polo Restaurant offer old-world elegance, service, and a return to a gilded and glorious era in American history. The Garden City Hotel and the Polo Restaurant are certainly deserving of all the honors they have received during their 133-year history. I concluded my visit by presenting Seven Stars and Stripes' globally renowned Award Plaque to Nasser.

Our review team walked out into the wintry night having thoroughly enjoyed our visit to this impressive, old-world link to the beauty of another era on the Gold Coast. Some of the finest jewels in hospitality and cuisine are often in our own backyard!

