

## **Nobody Asked Me, But... No. 21**

### **The Drake Hotel in New York, Fair Franchising is Not an Oxymoron, By the Numbers, Another Secret Underground Shelter, Passing of Anthony G. Marshall**

**By Stanley Turkel, MHS, ISHC**

1. The Drake Hotel, Park Avenue at 56<sup>th</sup> Street, is being demolished. Built in 1927, on 21 floors when it opened its doors in the “Roaring Twenties,” it boasted innovations such as automatic refrigeration as well as spacious, luxurious rooms and suites. Bing and Bing, noted builders, owned and operated the hotel for more than 35 years. In the early 1960’s entrepreneur William Zeckendorf acquired the hotel, added guest rooms and opened New York’s first discotheque, Shepherd’s. In 1965, the Tisch brothers acquired the Drake and hired me to be Loews first General Manager. My memories are, therefore, based on the two and a half terrific years that I served as GM:

The hotel’s restaurant was the Drake Room which opened in December 21, 1945. It was the pet project of hotelman Walter Redell (Cornell graduate from Cleveland). The Drake Room was a success from the start with its unique ceramic tree, great food, and impeccable service under the direction of Nino Schiavone, Maitre de. Stars of the entertainment world, bankers and politicians made the Drake Room one of the most cosmopolitan rooms in New York. Redell hired the best salon piano player in town for the opening. Cy Walter remained the feature performer for six years. When I became GM, I brought Cy Walter back to the Drake Room and got MGM Records to produce a fabulous LP: “Cy Walter at The Drake,” (see the cover photograph of a Steinway grand piano on 56<sup>th</sup> St. under the Drake porte cochere).

One of the most famous dishes in the Drake Room was Steak Nino, a version of Steak Diane. Evidence suggests that Steak Diane was an American invention of the late 1950’s when French cooking was all the rage. Jane Nickerson’s article “Steak Worthy of the Name” ([New York Times](#), January 25, 1953) suggests three likely candidates in New York City as originators: The Drake Hotel, the Sherry- Netherland Hotel and the Colony Restaurant. Nino Schiavone of the Drake Room claimed that he was the first to introduce Steak Nino to New York and, in fact, to

the entire United States. Nino cooked the prime steak in sweet butter mixed with fresh chives and other seasonings flamed with cognac and sherry at the tableside. Nino dispatched nearly twenty-five thousand copies of his famous recipe all over the world.

The most famous and successful discothèque in Manhattan was Shepherd's at the Drake which was open seven days a week for cocktails, dinner and supper with continuous dancing from 7:30 PM to 3AM. Luncheon was served Monday through Friday and special brunch on Sunday from noon to 4PM. At lunch there were fashion shows and for some years, at noon time, a talk radio program featuring the Metropolitan Opera's Mimi Benzell as hostess with famous guests.

We printed and distributed a card entitled, "How to Do the Newest Discotheque Dances at Shepherd's in New York's Drake Hotel" with step-by-step instructions to dance the Jerk, Watusi, Frug and the Monkey. Killer Joe Piro's party was a regular feature at Shepherd's. The discotheque was so successful that patrons lined up on 56<sup>th</sup> Street and around the corner on Park Avenue to wait (even on the winter's coldest nights) to be admitted where they paid a hefty cover charge to dance to disco music.

The Drake's guest list included such famous classical musicians as Alicia del la Rocha, Dame Myra Hess and Glenn Gould. Also celebrities like Milton Berle, Leon Bibb, Paul Anka, Muhammed Ali (soft spoken and kind), Barry Goldwater and many more.

On my office wall, the following framed note on Drake Hotel letterhead with a signed photograph is hung in a prominent location:

Dear Mr. Turkel,

I was very touched by your remembering my birthday and sending me this lovely bottle of Moët et Chandon, which we drank with great pleasure. At the same time, I wanted to tell you that we find ourselves very comfortable in the Drake and are delighted with the service and attention we get.

Sincerely yours,

Artur Rubenstein

(world famous classical pianist)

2. Fair Franchising is not an oxymoron. While new franchisors recognize the importance of creating a genuine partnership with their franchisees, the largest hotel franchise companies get tougher and tougher. Hotel owners should take note that Hilton, Marriott, InterContinental, Wyndham and Choice usually do not negotiate franchise agreements except with the largest franchisee companies. Therefore, savvy hotel owners are signing agreements with a new breed of franchise companies who understand that fair franchising is not an oxymoron:

a. Lexington Collection: short-term contracts with no royalties; low fee structures with payment options; no liquidated damages; strong territorial protection, choose amenities based on market niche; maintain identity and independence.

b. Best Western International, “world’s largest hotel chain”; one-year renewable contract; most competitive fees, worldwide reservations; membership association.

### 3. By the Numbers

- Boiling water = 212 ° Fahrenheit = 100 ° Celsius
- Freezing water = 32 ° Fahrenheit = 0 ° Celsius
- To convert to ° F, multiply ° C by 9, divide by 5 and add 32.
- To convert to ° C, subtract ° F by 32, multiply by 5 and divide by 9.
- When traveling, take twice the money and half the clothes you think you will need
- The Survival Rule of Three- you can live three seconds without blood, three minutes without air, three days without water and three weeks without food.
- Eating Meals- most people eat their largest meal at dinner when their bodies need it the least. As a rule, you should eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a pauper.

4. After I wrote about the 172,000 square foot underground fallout shelter at the famous Greenbrier Resort Hotel, White Sulphur Springs, W. VA., (Nobody Asked Me, But... No. 20), a completely unexpected article appeared in the New York Times on November 27, 2006. It said, “At the end of a serpentine road here (Bad Nenenahr - Ahraveiler, Germany), flanked by pinot noir vineyards, an unmarked door is cut into a hillside. Behind it lies one of the most secret places in the former West Germany: a vast subterranean bunker to shelter the government in the

event of a nuclear war.” Started in 1960 (2 years after the U.S. shelter at Greenbrier), the German bunker cost \$2.5 billion to construct. By the time it was completed in 1972, there were nearly 12 miles of tunnels, 936 bedrooms, 897 offices and five small hospitals. It was designed to enable 3000 people to survive for 30 days after an attack. The tunnels apparently date to before World War I when they were part of a railroad network intended to connect the industrial Ruhr Valley with France. During World War II, the Nazis converted the tunnels to a weapons factory with slave laborers from the Buchenwald concentration camp. The current German government intends to turn the bunker into a museum with a visitors center featuring historical documents and photos.

5. I note with sadness the death of Anthony G. Marshall, JD, CHA, CHE (1939-2006) who was widely known as an educator, lawyer and columnist. Tony served as president of the Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Lodging Association after 27 years as dean of the School of Hospitality Management at Florida International University in Miami. Marshall’s semi-monthly column “At Your Risk” published in Hotel & Motel Management magazine was indispensable for its focus on accident prevention, guest security and safety, and owner’s exposures and liabilities. He will be missed for his good nature, trademark bowtie, broad knowledge, common sense and wit.

Stanley Turkel, MHS, ISHC operates his hotel consulting office as a sole practitioner specializing in franchising issues, asset management and litigation support services. Turkel’s clients are hotel owners and franchisees, investors and lending institutions. Turkel serves on the Board of Advisors at the NYU Tisch Center for Hospitality, Tourism and Sports Management. He is a member of the prestigious International Society of Hospitality Consultants. His provocative articles on various hotel subjects have been published in the Cornell Quarterly, Lodging Hospitality, Hotel Interactive, Hotel Online, AAHOA Lodging Business, Bottomline, New York Times, etc. If you need help with a hotel operations or franchising problem such as encroachment/impact, termination/liquidated damages or litigation support, don’t hesitate to call 917-628-8549 or email [stanturkel@aol.com](mailto:stanturkel@aol.com).