Gerber Group's
SCOTT GERBER

A surprise request from hotel developer Ian Schrager 27 years ago leads to a refocused career merging food and drink with smart design

Rande visited the Gerber Group to concentrate on the liquor business, due to federal laws that prohibit from owning a bar and a liquor company, Scott continues as principal and CEO of Gerber Group.

Born and raised on Long Island, N.Y., Scott Gerber has witnessed the Manhattan market's shift toward on-trend bars, lounges, restaurants and hotels, each with vivid identities; “Everybody’s a boutique hotel, even if you’re really not,” Gerber said. What he likes best, however, are the social trends residing in each, whether it’s a ground-floor coffee or lounge, or a rooftop bar.

With each new deal he brokers for Gerber Group, Gerber enjoys working alongside architects and interior designers to bring a concept to life, merging food and drink with smart design. In fact, he said, Rande was the face of the company while he worked behind the scenes—and loved it. “I was really just the business guy. In the beginning, nobody really knew I was involved in the business and I was happy about that,” he said. What’s it like working with a sibling? “It was nice to have somebody to bounce stuff off of,” said Gerber, also pointing out another benefit: “When you have a difference of opinion, you get over it and move on.”

Today, Gerber Group owns and manages 16 venues in Atlanta, New York and Santiago, Chile. From Whiskey Blue’s glass elevator whisking guests up to cabanas overlooking Atlanta’s Buckhead neighborhood to the rooftop on top of Viceroy Central Park New York, the group’s brands exemplify cool and hip. “We’re doing a lot of rooftops lately, which I love,” Gerber said.

One of the latest projects involved removing the Campbell Apartments in New York City’s Grand Central Terminal, maintaining its historical grandeur while also updating its look. It opened in May of last year.

Gerber is most proud of the company he founded being around for 27 years—and counting. He’s also thrilled to add that the brands are still relevant, which is not always the case in hospitality. “We’re aware of trends, but we don’t want to be trendy,” he said.

The Gerber brothers co-developed many of W Hotels’ rooftops, opening in the early 90’s, at a time when boutique hotels “were a little off the grid” for business travelers, Gerber said. But even then, the brand’s Whatever/Whenever mantra was in rotation. “This included delivering faxes to guest rooms,” he said. “We basically created the beverage program,” Gerber said, “and helped the former Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide create the brand.”

Despite all the growth, one of Gerber’s challenges has been to balance a life of leisure with a day job creating new concepts. At first, going on vacation was a challenge because surrounding him were ideas for new nightclubs, from the drinks list on down to the fabrics used for seating. “You really can’t escape that,” he said, joking that his wife would chide him for traveling too hard and fast to a venue’s lighting and branding.

Over time, he has learned to separate the two parts of his identity. “I do book time off of the office to go out on vacation,” he said. “It doesn’t mean I’m checking out, however.” Gerber still likes to check in with the office even while away. To further strike a balance, Gerber works out daily “for my head,” he said, and relaxes at home with his wife and three children most nights. “I’m not in the house. I try to limit it to one or two nights [out] a week, maximum.” He looks for inspiration by flipping through magazines and also hitting the road with his family. “I find inspiration when I travel to places... but it could be anywhere,” he said. Gerber’s philosophy when designing a concept is to “take a piece of this and a piece of that,” rarely relying upon one source of inspiration.

Expansion is continually on Gerber’s mind—both geographically and into various different concepts. “Right now, we’re exploring opportunities in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C. and New York City,” Gerber said, hinting at two or five deals that are in the works.