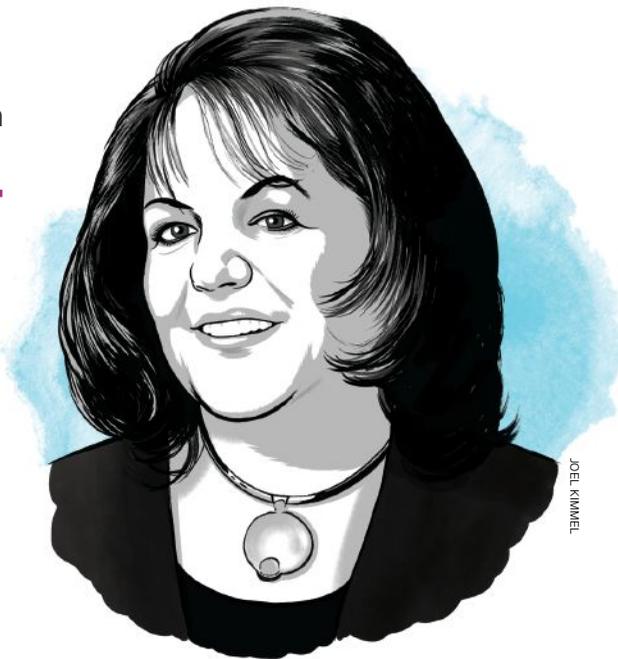


Checking in Frances Kiradjian



JOEL KIMMEL

FAST FACTS

Title:

Founder and CEO, BLLA

Time with company:

Founded BLLA in 2009

First hotel industry job:

Carlson Companies

Hometown:

Cleveland, Ohio

Hotel must-have:

Great bathroom amenities. "Cheap soap is like serving stale bread."

Best advice she ever got:

"Go with your gut feeling; intuition is your best friend."

WHEN FRANCES KIRADJIAN FOUNDED THE BOUTIQUE & LIFESTYLE LODGING ASSOCIATION (BLLA) in 2009, she was looking to create a "family" for boutique properties. At the time, booking a boutique hotel could be confusing, and even, in some cases, misleading. However, joining an association lends a boutique property credibility, and offers the consumer validation when booking direct. And, not only is the Boutique & Lifestyle Lodging Association beneficial to guests, it also provides a forum for individual boutique and lifestyle brands, which can turn to BLLA for consultation on any matters as well as advice. Now, as BLLA's CEO, Kiradjian is constantly researching trends inside and out of the hospitality industry to stay ahead of the curve and help boutique and lifestyle hotels globally. She spoke to *LODGING* about what she sees in the association's—and boutique hotels'—future.

What prompted the creation of BLLA? | I wanted to create a sense of place for boutique hoteliers around the world. A space where they can connect with other boutique-minded thinkers, to provide resources that closely fit their needs, to find relevant education for these owners, and—most importantly—help them find ways to compete against the big legacy chains. My goal is to reduce their dependence on online travel agencies and increase their direct bookings through specific methodology and focus. We're here to assist them with whatever they need. Additionally, there are many independent hotels that have no place to turn for unbiased and relevant advice. We've created a home for these hoteliers, which has never happened in the industry before. It's about sticking together, not viewing each other as competition.

How does BLLA help smaller brands compete with larger hotel companies? | BLLA has several programs that help with competition in the marketplace. We have a new booking platform that redirects consumers to the hotel's own booking engine, which is part of our Book Direct initiative. Business travellers have called BLLA since its inception and suggested that they book from an association-run site because of the trust factor we provide. Also, through our alliance with UCLA Extension, we're using our education program to create the first industry curriculum focused specifically on upscale, luxury, boutique, and lifestyle hotels. Hotel owners,

general managers, and staff members benefit from new programs like this. Millennials and Gen Zs prefer to stay in properties that pay attention to their interests and passions, so that's also important in our programs.

What topics do you cover in your conferences, and how do they help the hotel industry as a whole? | We currently have three conferences, each with a distinct purpose. The first is the Boutique Hotel Investment Conference, which is focused mainly on development, financial resources, and investment in boutique and lifestyle hotels, restaurants, spas, and nightlife. The second is the Stay Boutique Leadership Conference, which is more focused on education and leadership; it's particularly geared towards bringing in fashion, art, entertainment, music, and wellness, and showing the huge role they play in influencing the people who are creating the boutique hotels of tomorrow. Our third is the Executive Women's Conference, where more than 10,000 members from around the world—including travel and tourism professionals—come together to discuss issues surrounding diversity, education, and how to advance more women to top positions, which the hospitality industry in general needs. The association also held an international conference in Paris last year and is planning programs in Europe as well. Later this year, we are launching Boutique Leaders Who Lunch, bringing together boutique thinkers in key cities, by invitation only.

What helps you stay ahead of trends in the industry? | I spend a lot of my free time researching industry topics and organizations within the broader hospitality sector. I read magazines and other publications that are influential to the industry, too. I attend conferences, both inside and outside of hospitality, to make sure I know what's going to affect the lodging sector. Taking in a diverse range of information has always given me an edge and springboards a lot of new ideas for BLLA.

BOTTOM LINE

10,000

BLLA's Executive Women's Network has 10,000 global members.