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# Hans Wiedemann: trust and responsibility



*Hans and Martha  
Wiedemann.*

In 2003, when Hansjürg Badrutt faced the most important decision of his life – regarding the future of Badrutt’s Palace – the fact that the Swiss hotelier Hans Wiedemann came to his attention turned out to be a stroke of luck.

## **Basel cosmopolitan**

Hans Wiedemann was born in 1953 in Basel, the son of two physicians. After his obligatory schooling, he initially completed an apprenticeship at the Restaurant Schloss Binningen before attending «Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne». He then went abroad for many years, working in Australia, China and Japan, where he occupied positions in the hotel trade that involved ever greater responsibility. Finally, he managed five Australian hotels with a total of 2,000 employees.

In Australia he also met his wife Martha, an Indian who was born in Singapore and had grown up in Australia. Her professional speciality is

wellness – beauty care, massage and nutritional consulting based on the principles of Indian Ayurveda. The couple have two children; their son is now 25 years old, the daughter 20.

## **Back to Switzerland**

In 1994, Nestlé und Swissair, owners of the traditional «Montreux Palace», brought Hans Wiedemann back to Switzerland as director of this first-class hotel. He managed the Montreux Palace for nine years until Swissair went bankrupt and sold its Swissôtel chain, which also included the Montreux Palace. Today it belongs to the American hotel chain Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. «That’s the reason why I no longer wanted to manage that hotel, because I hadn’t come back to Switzerland from abroad to work for a foreign corporation,» Hans Wiedemann explains.

He also uttered these emphatic words in public – and thus attracted the attention of Hansjürg Badrutt. Hans Wiedemann expressed his interest in running Badrutt’s Palace Hotel, but at the same time made it clear that he would not come as long as the hotel was operated by a management group. Shortly afterwards, Hansjürg Badrutt terminated the contract with the Rosewood Group and appointed Hans Wiedemann director of the Palace in 2004.

## **Sympathy at first sight**

At the very first meeting at the Kronenhalle restaurant in Zurich, Hans-

jürg Badrutt sensed that he had at last found the right successor for the Palace. It soon became clear that Hans Wiedemann was prepared to rise to this challenge and rouse the sleeping beauty – one of Europe’s most traditional hotels – from its slumber. There was perfect chemistry between owner and director from the very beginning: «We have three things in common: mutual trust, the same wavelength and the same sense of humour», is how Hans Wiedemann puts it. Relations between the two men are warm and relaxed. Hans Wiedemann appreciates the discreet presence of Hansjürg Badrutt and the entrepreneurial freedoms he already enjoys today. At the same time, both of them love to eat «Bratwurst» regularly. Perhaps part of the reason they like each other is the fact that Wiedemann bears a striking resemblance to Hansjürg Badrutt’s father Hans – hotel guests regularly think that the portrait at the Palace shows the current director. Hansjürg Badrutt jokes about it – «I had to search for a long time before I found a successor who looks just like my father.»

### **Hans Wiedemann: a success story**

Since Hans Wiedemann has been director of the Palace, the hotel has posted double-digit growth figures, and turnover has doubled over the past decade. An important success factor for Hans Wiedemann is his professionalism as hotel director – he does not wish to and cannot manage the hotel alone, but runs it jointly with a team of managers. The Wiedemanns no longer see themselves as the managing couple. As wellness manager, Martha is an employee like any other. Not least because the family lives in the hotel and is in fact present 24 hours a day,

she keeps her professional and family life strictly separate.

At the same time, Wiedemann sees it as his task to convey the special atmosphere of the hotel to his employees: «The friendliness and helpfulness of the staff towards the guests are key.» For this reason, he attaches great importance to training the 550 employees during the winter season, organising advanced training courses with motivation coaches, and seminars on the body language of guests. He also sets an example of the Palace’s famous hospitality on a daily basis. In this respect, for him the «Independent Hotelier of the World» award won in 2009 is «a great recognition of our work and vision.» Yet he stresses that all the employees of the Palace, as well as the owners and the Board of Directors, also made their contribution. He sees himself primarily as the hotel’s ambassador.

### **Asian guests: a new target group**

The Palace is still famous for its glamorous events, exuberant parties and prominent guests. Hanspeter Danuser, formerly the tourist director of St. Moritz for many years, characterises the director of the Palace as follows: «Hans Wiedemann thinks globally. He has precise knowledge of the market. And above all, he likes people.» Therefore, for Hans Wiedemann, it is not important whether he is welcoming an aristocrat, an American actor, an Arabian sheik with his family or a group of Russian industrialists. Wiedemann is convinced that more guests from China and India will visit the Palace in future – and is already looking forward to it.

### **Details make all the difference**

Yet Hans Wiedemann is not merely a cosmopolitan with Swiss and Aus-



*Grand Hall, Badrutt's Palace Hotel, 2010.*

tralian passports. He also thinks a great deal about what he can do to make his guests feel even more comfortable. The Palace has three employees per guest, and butler service is available for all rooms. Visitors still appreciate the Palace's chauffeur with the Rolls-Royce that once belonged to Queen Elizabeth II, the solid silver in the restaurant, and the hot water bottle provided on cool nights. Many regular guests literally have «a suitcase in the Palace,» they leave them behind after their holiday, and before their next visit everything is set up as they left it. Hans Wiedemann sums up: «We invest a huge amount of effort in the smallest details, but never lose our sense of humour.»

### **Another pioneering act of the Palace**

The Palace is constantly being renovated and improved. At the beginning of the 2009/2010 winter season, the renovated wellness centre was reopened under the management of Martha Wiedemann. In the 2010 low season, the children's playroom «Kid's Club Palazzino» and the gym were completed. Every year, about

10 million Swiss francs are invested in sensitive renovation work, which is always begun immediately after the close of the season so that everything is finished for the start of the next and guests are not disturbed by building work. It is planned that a new staff house should be built in St. Moritz-Bad; there shall also be an extension of the hotel on the other side of the street, connected to the main building by a tunnel.

Since 2006, 80 per cent of the Palace's heating in winter has been provided by heat from Lake St. Moritz. Energy is extracted from the water, which is at 4 degrees Celsius, and heats the hotel by means of a heat pump. Cooled to 1°C, the water then flows back into the lake. St. Moritz school also benefits from this environmentally friendly method of power generation, saving almost 676,000 litres of heating oil every year. Badrutt's Palace Hotel has once again proved itself to be an energy pioneer, and St. Moritz has distinguished itself as an eco-friendly municipality. The Palace thus continues in the pioneering spirit of its founders.

## The mystery of the «Sistine Madonna»

One special legend at Badrutt's Palace Hotel concerns the oil painting of the Sistine Madonna attributed to Raphael. This famous work of art was discovered by Johannes Badrutt in the northern Italian city of Reggio in about 1887 and acquired from its former owner, Elisa Bertoni, after four years of negotiations.

The picture was in a much-neglected state. After thorough cleaning and restoration in Augsburg, it embellished the public rooms of the Hotel Engadiner Kulm. As is known from letters, the art enthusi-

ast Caspar Badrutt had been active in this project from the very beginning and later had the painting brought to the Palace.

In a lavishly-designed publication of 1894, Caspar presented the work of art to the experts and suggested that this picture – and not the one in Dresden – was painted by Raphael. He therefore contradicted those experts who described the Dresden painting as the original.

To this day the picture, which is one of the attractions of the hotel foyer, remains shrouded in mystery.

*Shrouded in mystery: the painting of the Sistine Madonna in Badrutt's Palace Hotel.*

