

## Company history

### Simple promise, genuine success

#### Inspired thinking has always been at the heart of Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts

**Baar (Switzerland), December 2016** – For the late Ueli Prager, the founder of Mövenpick, the key to a successful business was a simple idea.

“We aren’t doing anything extraordinary,” he was fond of saying. “We are simply successful because we are doing quite normal things in an extraordinary manner.”

It was a philosophy that revolutionised the European restaurant business and inspired a completely new generation of hospitality. Today Prager’s words continue to resonate throughout Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts as the company prepares to have a balanced portfolio in every of the four regions it operates, in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

It has been an astonishing journey that started when Prager and a friend were strolling the shores of Lake Zurich more than 60 years ago. He had been searching for a name for his new restaurant concept. It was another simple idea, serving the highest quality food at affordable prices in the fastest possible time. As he considered possibilities, a seagull (or Möwe in German) swooped down to skilfully pick up food mid-flight. That one elegant movement encapsulated everything Prager was working towards and Mövenpick was born.

It was the right idea at the right time. Prager’s first restaurant Claridenhof opened in Zurich in July 1948 offering – unconventionally for Swiss restaurants – food such as sandwiches and grilled meat with fresh salad. The concept of simple dishes to be ordered à la carte, instead of set menus, was the first of many innovations, and two years later his second restaurant in Zurich was open.

New dishes such as the curry-based “Riz Casimir” were added (spicy food was new to Switzerland); fine wine was served by the glass (rather than by the bottle as tradition dictated); and great emphasis was placed on employee training (something unheard of outside of America at the time).

Prager’s insatiable appetite for innovation was legendary. In 1957 he visited the United States for the first time, and was impressed by the efficiency and speed of many restaurants in New York. Their menus may have been limited, but their commitment to a high turnover of quality food served by highly trained staff was inspirational. When he returned to Europe, Prager launched his own Swiss version, the Silberkugel snack outlets, in 1962.

Two years later Prager was managing more than 600 employees and realised that a formal management structure was vital to move forward. Once again he returned to the States for inspiration, attending a modern management course at the American Management Association as one of the first entrepreneurs in Europe looking for new and efficient ways to do business.

By 1965 he was able to expand beyond Switzerland, opening his first restaurant in Germany. Incredibly, Prager had already made his mark in the country two years earlier, after the gourmet managing director of the Bavarian TV Network insisted that Mövenpick manage his company’s restaurant, a place exclusively reserved for lucky staff, visiting journalists and well-known actors.

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# MÖVENPICK

## HOTELS & RESORTS

By 1968 Prager was taking advantage of the new Swiss motorway network, serving a new generation of hungry car travellers.

When Prager turned his attention to hotels, he capitalised on the company's reputation for quality food, affordability, staff training and innovation. After the construction of the Jolie Ville Motor Inn in Adliswil, near Zurich, in 1966, the Mövenpick hotel group was launched in 1973 with the opening of two hotels in Zurich, one near the airport and the other in Regensdorf. At the time airport hotels were considered unnecessary, but for Prager they were an overlooked opportunity.

As an innovator he was light years ahead of the competition, who were still following the conventions of out-dated tradition. His favourite quote, from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, was: "I'd rather be the first man here than the second man in Rome."

It was a mantra that extended to his first foray into Egypt. When Prager met the country's Minister for Tourism and was invited to open a hotel near the pyramids, he seized the opportunity. The Mövenpick Hotel Jolie Ville in Cairo was unveiled in 1976, the entrepreneur's first hotel outside Europe, which was soon followed by others in Luxor, Heliopolis and the Red Sea – a destination previously ignored by hoteliers.

In 1976, Prager became one of the first hospitality pioneers to test the concept of management contracts. It was a success and Prager's global reach expanded dramatically. Soon he had restaurants in North America and Canada, and by 1986 he had opened the Mövenpick Hotel Beijing.

The expansion of the company into luxury cruisers on the Nile was a natural extension and in 1991 the HS Radamis set off on her maiden voyage under the Mövenpick flag between Aswan and Luxor. Today there are eight Mövenpick cruisers operating on the Nile and Lake Nasser.

In 1992, Prager sold his majority holding to Baron August von Finck, Munich. However, the legacy for innovation continues.

1996 saw the company's first opening in Jordan with the Mövenpick Resort Petra, the first of now five hotels in the country, and in 1998, the company was divided into four separate business units to allow greater flexibility: Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts, Mövenpick Gastronomy, Mövenpick Wine and Mövenpick Fine Foods.

By 2001 the first Mövenpick hotels appeared along the northern coast of Africa with openings in Tunisia and Morocco, and two years later a new concept of 'pilgrim hotels' was added with the launch of the Mövenpick Hotel Madinah.

In 2003 the company's first hotels in the UAE, Turkey and Kuwait opened for business. That year, at London's World Travel Market, the company was recognised as the "fastest growing hotel chain in the Middle East".

By 2005 the company had launched hotels in Tanzania and Mauritius and Asian expansion had become irresistible. Following successful openings in Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts unveiled its first Indian property in Bangalore in 2011.

Hand in hand with new development came international recognition. In 2010, for the second consecutive year, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts achieved the highest ranking in the "upscale" segment of the European Hotel Guest Satisfaction Study by J.D. Power and Associates.

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## HOTELS & RESORTS

In 2010, a global partnership was established with Green Globe. Green Globe is an international independent non-profit organisation that audits sustainability in the tourism and travel industry. The company progressively enrolls all hotels in the Green Globe programme for certification. Today, over 65 hotels and resorts are registered and almost all of them received already the coveted Green Globe seal.

The company's innovation continues. A simple promise that began more than 60 years ago has become a genuine success.

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