



## THE THRILL OF THE MILL

*Interview with Thomas SWIECA, General Manager  
at Radisson Blu Old Mill Hotel Belgrade*

TEXT BY GORAZD ČAD

***“The Radisson Blu Old Mill Hotel, Belgrade is poised to become Belgrade’s premier meeting and events venue, with its impressive conference room and six flexible meeting rooms, perfect for board meetings, receptions and banquets. The largest conference room can hold up to 220 people.”***

**Thomas Swieca**, the general manager of the Radisson Blu Old Mill hotel in Belgrade, was born in Germany. He graduated from WIHOGA Dortmund Academy of Operational Management in the Hospitality Industry and has many years of experience in the hotel industry. He has built his career based on various posts at the hotels Maritim in Cologne, Konigshof in Bonn and SportSchloss in Velen.

He joined the Rezidor group in June 2005, when he became general manager, responsible for opening the Radisson Blu Media Harbour hotel in Düsseldorf. In 2010 he became General Manager of the Radisson Blu Resort El Quseir hotel in Egypt, and in May 2011 he participated in opening the Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Cesme in Turkey as executive manager.

Since 2005 he has been a member of E.H.M.A. (European Hotel Managers Association) and since September 2013 he has been head of the Radisson Blu Old Mill hotel.

**Q: When did you join Radisson?**

I started my journey in 2005 in Dusseldorf, where I built a hotel, which was actually the first life-style hotel for Radisson. Now we already have 4 different brands all over the globe. The hotel in Belgrade is the first design hotel in the city, designed by Graft Architects.

**Q: What are the vital statistics of the new Belgrade hotel?**

The hotel has 236 fashion-inspired rooms, including 14 suites designed by the prestigious Graft Architects with brilliant artwork selected by Strauss & Hillegart. The hotel’s OMB Larder + Lounge offers a unique dining experience, incorporating theatre, fun and an element of the unexpected into every dish. The atmosphere harks back to the mill’s authentic heritage, with an industrial-chic aesthetic.

**Q: What sets the Radisson Old Mill apart and makes it attractive to the meetings market?**

I think we are different because of our open mind and concept, our staff is very handy and also has some freshness, which gives us a whole new look. Our meeting rooms are large and we have meetings for everyone. Here in Serbia I get the feeling that the people are very different than in most of European countries, because they are simple and friendly.

All in all, the hotel is specialised in offering services for business people, among which is also a modern conference centre with stateoftheart equipment and technology. The biggest difference can probably be found in the cuisine the hotel offers, which is opening new horizons with its team.

**Q: Where is the greatest competition and how do you face it?**

Before anything else Belgrade is at the moment a business destination in our category, in which we are all fighting for the same customers. We expect many guests to come due to our brand, which is recognisable, but also because we understand their needs and expectations. By and large we will, however, try to orient ourselves on key European and regional markets. It goes without saying that we cooperate with all other hotels as is appropriate and I believe that there is still enough room for development.

**Q: Where would you like to see Belgrade in two-years time?**

First of all we need to attract tourists to come to Belgrade. The culture, night life and restaurants are fantastic, but I feel like there should be more hotels and the connection between these things. Also many countries are concerned about safety. In the German newspapers there is constantly bad news about people in the Balkans and I think that is the main reason for fear in my country. The trend in the world right now is to go back to our roots and to nature, which Belgrade does offer, just out of town.

**Q: How popular is Serbia as a destination for meetings and events?**

Personally, I am confident that the future of the meeting industry will be positive. The number of topnotch hotels is growing, and with its rapid development and the expansion of its airways Air Serbia is creating optimism. Many companies are moving their headquarters to Belgrade. However, the Sava Centre needs to be restored and changed into a modern congress centre. A lot of work needs to be done in the fields of infrastructure and public transport, where we are still falling behind.

**Q: What is the most positive thing about the meetings industry in Serbia?**

In only a few years, the image of Belgrade has changed and the exponential growth in congresses did not go unseen. Moreover, media helped positioning the city as “the new capital of cool”, a city that is vibrant 24 hour per day. The local meeting industry is extremely positive and has lots of experience. Maybe it lacks in structure and a systematic approach. But it is economically attractive and if good use is made of its strategic position between east and west, it has a bright future. Probably the greatest assets of this destination are human resources and their competencies. Belgrade has high-quality personnel to offer.

**Q: What do you enjoy most about being hotel manager of new hotel in Belgrade?**

After one year spent in the amazing city of Belgrade, I am thrilled to finally open this inimitable property. Yes I Can! service, surrounded by the 19th century’s details, successfully combined with the latest designer touch. Belgrade is where you want to be if you want to drink Russian, drive German, wear Italian, kiss French and ... party Serbian.





Business Class Room Wall

# RADISSON BLU OLD MILL BELGRADE

OMG OH MY GOD!

PHOTO CREDITS RADISSON BLU

### INDUSTRIAL ZEN

Intensive industrialisation reached its peak in Serbia at the end of the 19th century and was based on food and textile industry. In 1904, when development was in full swing, the first industrial mill was built in Belgrade. A fire interrupted the building’s simply charming and rich history in 1994. From that moment on the building started decaying in a sad manner until it ended up in the hands of the Austrian company Soravia.

### AUTHOR’S SIGNATURE

In Europe there are only a few hotels which have been constructed on the grounds of former industrial sites. Revitalising such buildings creates a hotel architecture of exceptional quality – an architecture which on the one hand gives the impression that time has stopped and on the other expresses a modern lifestyle. The owners

entrusted the building’s architectural restoration to the renowned GRAFT architects from Berlin. The state in which the architects found the building can now be seen on the artistic photographs which are displayed in the hotel rooms. A new hotel architecture was created which excites at every step.

### REVITALISATION OF THE AREA

The Radisson Hotel gave new life to the industrial area located next to one of the most important roads in Belgrade. It can be found only a stone’s throw away from the Belgrade Fair and together these two sites have put a new venue on Belgrade’s map. If we are to believe the planners of the project “Belgrade on Water”, the hotel at the edge of the new city centre will also soon become part of a completely new appearance of this part of the city.



Front Office





Guest Elevator



Executive Room



Old Mill Corridor

#### OLD

Try to imagine you find yourself in a house from a futuristic movie. The architects created a space which combines history, technology, art, fun, and relaxation with exquisite culinary art, and which seems to be both very modern and very traditional at the same time. Today, the old part of the former mill forms the impeccably restored central part of the hotel, decorated with a number of cleverly thought out details, such as the hotel sign on a copper wallcovering behind the reception desk. The central square is an integral part of the story. Ksenija Vujović, the marketing and sales director, stressed that in warmer months the square in front of the hotel will turn into a special venue.

#### NEW

Without exception, the Radisson Hotel understands the needs of its business and congress guests. The elegant hotel rooms attest to the fact that this is truly a first class hotel. The selected materials and the less-is-more approach will fascinate even the even the best-travelled congress guests. Artistic photographs portraying the old mill found their place in each room. The



Brain Box

painted raw concrete walls seem like some sort of a reflection of the hotel rooms and highlight them even more. The authors of the paintings are Strauss & Hillegart.

#### BRAINBOX

The hotel's congress premises were designed to stimulate the participants' creative thinking. This concept is embodied in a special room called the Brainbox, where select colours, specially designed chairs, and the general atmosphere contribute to promoting the creative process. The larger congress hall with natural daylight and a capacity of 220 delegates is currently one of the most beautiful conference centres in the city. The beautifully refurbished premises of the old mill with a hint of modernism create a sense of wellbeing. As all other Radisson Blu hotels, the Old Mill hotel offers highspeed Internet access and the Brain Food programme, which is known for its sustainable approach and selected menus.





OMB Larder and Lounge

### THE OMB RESTAURANT – OH MY GOD!

What a surprise! You won't be able to enjoy such a culinary experience at other hotels in the region for a long time: a new culinary concept which is modern and outstandingly fashionable, with a blistering combination of new techniques and textures, and a blend of Serbian and international cuisine. The minimalistic menu available only in Serbian Cyrillic and English looks quite promising. Less is more and the Old Mill always finds the perfect balance.

To start off, there are creative appetizers each with select local cheeses on the side. Indulge yourself with a Serbian “Bašta”, with goat cheese from the mountain Stara planina and a tomato tartar. Or let the “Busa Burger” dazzle your taste buds with its “Lutenica”, a spicy vegetable spread, and grade-A ground meat, served on a beech tree board with an imprinted OMB logo for inspiration. The juicy mangalitza without cholesterol speaks for itself. Eating such pork is a once in a lifetime experience and is not not to be forgotten easily. And for the grand finale sip a beer from the Kabinet craft brewery in Kosmaj. A family brewery with large unfiltered beers and premium branding.

Fabrizio Bigi



M1 and M2

### AN OUTSTANDING CULINARY TEAM

With the Old Mill, the hotel scene in Belgrade has gained a new passionate, dedicated and experienced culinary team that was born under a lucky star. It is characterised by a youthful determination and mastery that will attract culinary enthusiasts to the hotel and serve them culinary delights no one in the city can compete with. These are created using locally produced fresh and organic ingredients, which are in themselves a reason to visit this hotel. Chef Fabrizio points out “local ingredients are my true inspiration. In order to maintain the quality of the hotel's kitchen we bought a herd of sheep from the mountain Stara planina none can match.”

### FABRIZIO BIGI - Executive chef

He is responsible for one of the best young culinary teams in the local hotel scene. The wunderkind of cooking was born in 1974 in Modena. He started his international career in Jordan, in the Kempinski Ishtar and Kempinski Aqaba hotels. He continued his professional path in China in the Westin Beijing Financial Street



Fabrizio Bigi, Executive chef

hotel and as a chef established the cuisine of the Meridien hotel in Kuala Lumpur. Due to the fact that he was a member of staff when the prestigious JW Marriott hotel in Baku was opened, he has profound experience in opening new hotels. He is the most creatively consistent chef with great respect for local cuisine.

### MILAN LEKIĆ - Pastry chef

A chef born in the Serbian province of Vojvodina, who started his professional career in the city of Somobor and moved to the capital shortly afterwards. He developed his enthusiasm for pastries at the Hyatt Regency hotel and has been creating delicious desserts ever since. In 2008, he collaborated in establishing the culinary story of the Zira hotel.



Milan Lekić, Pastry Chef

Milan likes to experiment with new tastes and textures, and creates noble culinary creations such as the “chocolate retrospective”.





**VANJA PUŠKAR - Souschef**  
Vanja's culinary philosophy is as unusual as his path to the peak of the Serbian culinary scene. At only 28 years of age he was already improving his knowledge at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Belgrade. Despite his youth, he contributed profoundly to the cocreation of Belgrade's culinary landscape. In 2012, he opened the "Chefs Club Beograd" together with a couple of friends and set the goal of reconstructing Serbian cuisine and adapting it to modern trends known under the term "Soul Food". This way of thinking has become a big hit in the city.

**LESS IS MORE**  
Radisson Old Mill went right to the edge and succeeded. It seems as if they were able to find the right aesthetic measure. They don't put any unnecessary frills on the premium ingredients and the space resonates with the mill's past history. The concept of an elegant and authentic hotel, a cult restaurant and a dynamic lounge bar has been created, giving a new dimension to tourism in Belgrade and setting new standards. What's more, its innovative cuisine also makes it a mirror which reflects Serbian culture.

Outside Night View



# RADISSON BLU OLD MILL HOTEL, BELGRADE

**Bulevar Vojvode Mišića, 15, Belgrade**  
**T: +381 (0)11 6 357 357**  
**F: +381 (0)11 6 357 358**  
**E: info.belgrade@radissonblu.com**  
**www.radissonblu.com/hotel-belgrade**

**ACCOMODATION**  
236 rooms including 14 suites

**Rooms:**  
Standard (34 m2)  
Business Class Room (45 m2)  
Executive Room (35 m2)  
Executive Suites (54 m2)  
Old Mill Suite (55 m2)

- Flooring is parquet or fitted carpet
- Free WI-FI Internet access
- Wireless telephone
- Individual climate control
- Mini bar
- Bathrobe and slippers
- Free daily newspapers
- In-room coffee machine
- Laptop-sized safe (17" laptop size)
- Fully stocked large minibar
- In Executive Rooms and suites access to the Executive Lounge

**RESTAURANT, BAR & LOUNGE**  
• OMB Larder & Lounge Restaurant  
• Lounge Bar  
• Radisson Blu Super Breakfast  
• Grab & Run Breakfast

**RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**  
• Fitness centre

**SERVICES & FACILITIS**  
• Free high speed Internet  
• Express checkout  
• 24-hour room service  
• 24-hour Concierge service  
• Express Laundry

**VISITOR INFORMATION**  
Language: Serbian  
Currency: DIN (Serbian Dinar)  
Electricity: The hotel operates on 220-volt power  
Visas: Visa requirements are determined by nationality.

**LOCATION**  
The hotel is located near the city centre, the fairgrounds, and the Arena. Traveling to nearby attractions like the Belgrade Arena and the fairgrounds

- Indoor parking
- Currency exchange
- Valet parking service
- One-touch service
- Conference centre (6 meeting rooms)

**POINTS OF INTEREST**  
The hotel's home in Belgrade, Serbia surrounded by history  
The hotel is located in Belgrade, Serbia and lies adjacent to the Belgrade Fair, the city's central trade show. Guests can easily access the array of historic and cultural attractions that dot the area, including the House of Flowers, the Royal Palace, and the Nikola Tesla Museum. The Topčider Park is Belgrade's first public park and is within walking distance of the hotel.

**Nearby attractions:**  
Belgrade Fair – 300 m  
Museum of African Art – 1.7 km  
House of Flowers – 1.7 km  
Home of Archibald Reiss – 1.8 km  
Temple of St. Sava – 2.1 km  
Topčider Park – 2.1 km  
Residence of Prince Miloš – 2.2 km  
Monak's House – 2.2 km  
Old Palace – 2.4 km  
Knez Mihailova Street – 2.7 km  
Nikola Tesla Museum – 2.9 km  
Skadarlija – 3 km  
Fortress/Kalemegdan – 3.5 km  
Museum of Vuk I Dositej – 3.7 km  
Royal Palace – 4.5 km  
**TRANSPORTATION**  
Bus and tram station – 300 m  
Belgrade-Glavna rail station – 1 km  
Belgrade Nikola Tesla Airport – 16 km

is easy from the hotel's location in the Belgrade city centre. In addition to being close to palaces, museums, and churches, the hotel is also just minutes from New Belgrade, the city's upandcoming corporate area with a variety of businesses and Serbian government offices. Additionally, the airport is only 16 kilometres away.