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## BRAND BALLER

Landry's Tilman J. Fertitta



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# BRANDBALLER



Landry's Tilman J. Fertitta



BY TYLER DAVIDSON

**F**ew individuals have impacted the hospitality and entertainment industries in recent years as much as Tilman J. Fertitta, a Galveston, Texas, native who as sole owner of Fertitta Entertainment presides over an empire that includes Landry's restaurants, hotel and casino holdings, an NBA franchise and even a starring role in a reality television show.

Thus, one could argue that even the terms hospitality and entertainment are one in the same in his brand kingdom, as Fertitta's labels all cater to the customer through the prism of providing entertaining experiences that deliver a specific, tangible impression, no matter what segment they serve.

Landry's restaurants cater to all tastes and price points and include many popular group dining options in major convention center entertainment districts, from casual themed restaurants such as Bubba Gump Shrimp Company, Claim Jumper, Rainfor-

est Cafe, McCormick & Schmick's and Joe's Crab Shack, to upscale eateries in the Signature Group like Morton's The Steakhouse, Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse, Grotto and The Oceanaire.

From Golden Nugget Casinos and Hotels and Galveston, Texas' San Luis Resort to the ultra-luxe The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston offering set to open in March (see sidebar on page 58), a variety of hotel, resort and gaming custom-



ers are satiated.

With other recent moves that have included the purchase of the Houston Rockets for an NBA franchise record \$2.2 billion and the starring role in CNBC reality TV show *Billion Dollar Buyer*—which just entered into its third season of production and gives entrepreneur contestants the opportunity to pitch Fertitta on investing in their products—his businesses reach into the disposable income of every segment of society and are perpetually in growth mode through acquisitions and innovation. Fertitta began his rise in the real estate development business, opening his first hotel when he was 26 years old, and then became a partner in Landry's, eventually buying out the Landry brothers in 1986 and embarking on a restaurant-opening spree. Following the economic collapse of 2008, Fertitta decided it was an ideal time to up his game.

"When the world fell apart in 2010, it gave me the opportunity to go private again," he said, adding that his company will do more than \$4 billion in revenue in 2017.

His Landry's operation alone owns more than 600 properties in 36 states and 15 countries at last count, and is one of the largest employers

in the U.S., with more than 60,000 on the payroll. Forbes recently estimated Fertitta's net worth at \$3.6 billion, landing him the #212 spot on the Forbes 400, with the publication calling him "The world's richest restaurateur."

Not bad for a self-made man who dropped out of both Texas Tech and the University of Houston but now chairs the latter university's board of regents as well as serving on the boards of the Houston Museum of Fine Arts and the Texas Heart Institute.

"Some people are good multitaskers—that's something that's a gift," Fertitta said, in more than a bit of an understatement. "I've had a lot of people with me for many years, which helps tremendously."

Besides what one could interpret as a bit of Texas-size branding bluster when watching him on *Billion Dollar Buyer*—in one CNBC promotional spot he actually described himself as being, to paraphrase, a "mother f'er,"—during a recent interview

with Meetings Today, Fertitta was quite the reserved, mannered gentleman, giving the credit to his team, which extends to and is nurtured by his management philosophy.

"If you look at the people who work for me, that answer to me directly, they probably average over 20 years," he said. "I think what

## Brands-TACULAR!

The holdings of Tilman J. Fertitta's hospitality and entertainment empire are vast. If you or your group hasn't experienced at least one, if not many, of these companies, you really should think about getting out more often.

- Fertitta Entertainment
- Landry's restaurants
- Golden Nugget Casinos and Hotels
- Houston Rockets NBA franchise

### Landry's

This restaurant and hospitality company owns more than 600 properties in 36 states and more than 15 countries, and is one of the largest employers in the U.S., with more than 60,000 employees.

The Signature Group includes the following premier concepts:

- Mastro's Steakhouse and Ocean Club
  - Morton's The Steakhouse
  - The Oceanaire
  - Vic & Anthony's
  - Brenner's Steakhouse
  - Grotto
  - Atlantic Grill
  - La Griglia
  - Willie G's
- Plus 8 more*

Its multi-unit restaurant brands include:

- Chart House
  - Landry's Seafood House
  - Rainforest Cafe
  - Saltgrass Steak House
  - Bubba Gump Shrimp Company
  - Claim Jumper
  - Mitchell's Fish Market
  - Dos Caminos
  - Bill's Bar & Burger
  - Joe's Crab Shack
  - McCormick & Schmick's
  - 50% of Catch (in Los Angeles and New York)
- Plus 27 more*

### Gaming and Hospitality

- Golden Nugget Casino and Hotel brand (Five locations: Las Vegas and Laughlin, Nev.; Atlantic City; Biloxi, Miss.; and Lake Charles, La.)
  - GoldenNuggetCasino.com
  - San Luis Resort (Houston-Galveston area)
  - The Westin Houston Downtown
  - The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston (opening in early 2018)
- Plus 4 more*

### Entertainment Destinations

- Galveston Island Historic Pleasure Pier
- The Kemah Boardwalk
- Downtown Aquarium in Denver and Houston
- Tower of The Americas in San Antonio
- Boardwalk Fantasea Yacht Charters

### Sports

- Houston Rockets (NBA)

### Television

- *Billion Dollar Buyer* (CNBC)

# Towering OAK

The Post Oak at Uptown Houston is the newest member of Tilman J. Fertitta's hospitality and entertainment family, and it's one Golden Child.

Set to open in spring 2018, the 250-room luxe hotel is part of a Gensler-designed mixed-use project near Houston's tony Uptown and Galleria areas set on 10 acres that also includes office, residential and restaurant spaces. The development is also near Fertitta Entertainment's corporate headquarters, which allows for the hands-on touch when it comes to planning and monitoring the construction.

The suite offering will include a 5,000-square-foot Presidential Suite and 4,000-square-foot, two-bedroom chairman suites with private elevator access and all the latest high-tech amenities. Restaurant experiences will include the first Texas Mastro's Steakhouse and a Willie G's Seafood & Steaks. Other highlights will include a spa, salon and designer retail and boutique office space.



For meetings, a 16,000-square-foot ballroom—the largest in the Uptown area—and conference center, offering a total of 35,000 square feet, will be adjacent to the tower. Two large prefunction areas and a second-level,



3,000-square-foot ballroom and 10,000 square feet of conference and breakout space will round out the meeting facilities.

And when it comes to ultra-luxe, nothing says exclusive like the two-story Rolls-Royce showroom and Bentley and Bugatti showroom on-site at Post Oak Motor Cars, which will be on display from one of the prefunction areas.

The development will also boast an open plaza that features outdoor dining and pedestrian areas. Fitting with the name, Fertitta is said to have spent more than \$1 million to transplant mature oak trees, along with preserving the existing oaks.

For more information, access [www.thepostoak.com](http://www.thepostoak.com).

—Tyler Davidson



people like is there's not a lot of games, and I tell them what I want and where they can improve. I think people respect you as a leader if you shoot straight and you take care of them."

The bluster, such as in the aforementioned CNBC promo, is all part of elevating the brand.

"That's drama," he said, with a telling laugh that seemed to convey a little bit of blush about having crossed the line a bit in the spot promoting the show and the larger-than-life persona he exudes on it. "I have brands that are all over the country. It's another way my brand is exposed. It doesn't look like an infomercial—it's definitely not an infomercial. It gets me out to see what's new out there. It's as much educational for me as it is mentoring for them."

Another side of Fertitta is his philanthropic endeavors, including serving as chairman of the board of both the Houston Children's Charity and Houston Police Foundation, and his work on the executive committee of one of the largest charitable organizations in the U.S., the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. He also recently kicked in \$1 million to victims of Hurricane Harvey through the Landry's Hurricane Relief Fund.

"It's just kind of the way it is,"



FERTITTA AND CARLOS CORREA, HOUSTON ASTROS WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONS THIRD BASEMAN

a modest Fertitta said, recognizing the responsibility of those who have amassed great wealth to give back. "We're all in very visible business... they're just different organizations that I've always been involved with."

But as nice as it is to be nice, and as any professional basketball player would attest, the competition is always hot on your heels, and the dynamics of the game are always changing, so letting up is not an option.

"Stay on top of your game," he said. "There are no spare customers. Treat every customer like they're your last."

That philosophy also extends to those in the business of planning meetings and events.

"I think that you always try to be innovative, especially when you're dealing with meeting planners," he said. "You want to roll out the red carpet and treat them better than everyone else. Anyone who does not know how to treat a meeting planner is pretty stupid. What we preach here is make your meeting planner look good." **m**



FERTITTA AND GEORGE SPRINGER, HOUSTON ASTROS WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONS OUTFIELDER

# UPGRADES + OPENINGS

NAPLES GRANDE BEACH RESORT



## FLORIDA

**Naples Grande Beach Resort** reopened its doors Dec. 15 following a three-and-a-half-month closure due to Hurricane Irma. The independent luxury resort underwent a multimillion-dollar refresh that renovated its guest rooms, public spaces, pools and outdoor landscaping. Rather than working with outside contractors, staff volunteered to assist directly with the renovations, helping with painting, landscaping and cleaning throughout all 23 acres, according to the resort. The 474-room property, which offers over 83,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, is set on 23 waterfront acres and adjoined by a 200-acre nature preserve and man-grove estuary. [www.naplesgrande.com](http://www.naplesgrande.com)

Tavistock Develop Company unveiled plans for a performance-oriented resort and spa at its sprawling Lake Nona master-designed community in Orlando. **Lake Nona Resort** is scheduled to break ground this year and open in 2020. Plans call for 20,000 square feet of meeting space, including a ballroom that can accommodate large groups and other functions. Other highlights include 250 guest rooms and 80 condominium units; the world's largest tennis campus, with 100 courts steps away from the new USTA National Campus; a 120,000-square-foot beach volleyball venue; and one of the largest manmade lagoons in the U.S. Besides traditional dining outlets, the resort will offer performance-based food and beverage options with menus designed by leading nutritionists. [www.lakenona.com](http://www.lakenona.com)

## GEORGIA

**Barnsley Resort**, set on a 3,000-acre expanse about 60 miles north of Atlanta in Adairsville, will debut the 55-room Inn at Barnsley Resort, as well as the Georgian Hall,



BARNESLEY RESORT

in March. The Inn will allow all meeting attendees to convene within the same building as well as expand its meeting offerings to larger groups. The Georgian Hall will add more than 9,000 square feet of indoor space, bringing the resort's total amount of meeting space to 16,000 square feet of indoor space. With the addition of the Inn, the resort will offer a total of 150 guest rooms. Highlights of the Inn at Barnsley Resort include a grand staircase and fireplace that will serve as focal points for guests. Barnsley Resort is set on an 1840s estate and features a Jim Fazio-designed golf course, a 26-station sporting clays course, bird hunting at SpringBank Plantation and horseback riding. [www.barnsleyresort.com](http://www.barnsleyresort.com)

## TEXAS

**The Post Oak Hotel at Uptown Houston** is slated to open in early 2018. The 250-room, 38-story property will sit on 10 acres and offer a 35,000-square-foot conference facility, including the largest ballroom in the Uptown Houston area. The ultra-luxury hotel, owned and operated by Fertitta Entertainment, is located near The Galleria and River Oaks District and set amid a district brimming with mature oaks and water fountains. Highlights will include a two-story Rolls-Royce showroom and a Bentley and Bugatti Post Oak Motors dealership on-site, as well as Texas' first Mastro's Steakhouse and the new Willie G's Seafood, a luxury spa, salon and designer retail and boutique office space. [www.thepostoak.com](http://www.thepostoak.com)

## VIRGINIA

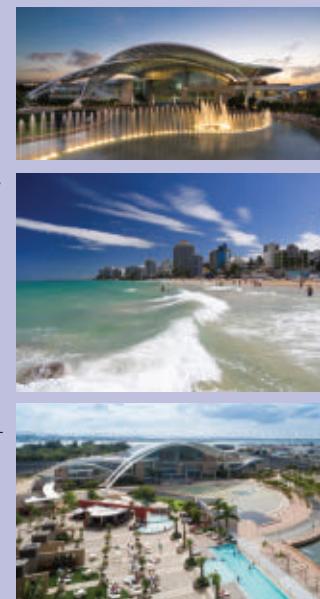
**Virginia Crossings Hotel & Conference Center** is the second property to join Hilton's Tapestry collection of independent upscale hotels. The 183-room hotel located about 15 miles north of Richmond in Glen Allen, contains over 28,000 square feet of event space. The Southern-style estate includes a variety of gardens, courtyards and is next to the Crossings Golf Course, an 18-hole course designed by Joe Lee. Other recreation highlights include a 24-hour fitness

center, a sand volleyball court, an outdoor swimming pool and activities such as basketball and horseshoes. The property also offers a ballroom that seats up to 400. On-site food and beverage options include The Glen Restaurant (seasonal buffet-style dining) and The Tavern, which features Southern-style food in a relaxed and casual environment alongside lighter menu items. <http://tapes trycollection3.hilton.com/tc/virginia-crossings-hotel>

# PUERTO RICO REBOUND

Meet Puerto Rico, the destination marketing organization (DMO) responsible for attracting meetings, conventions, tradeshows, sporting events and incentive groups to Puerto Rico, launched the "Check Off Your Bucket List" promotion with one message—Puerto Rico's meetings industry is here, despite recent hardship—from the convention center to member hotels to many attractions and experiences.

"We were hit hard, that is for sure," said Milton Segarra, president & CEO, Meet Puerto Rico. "But we are still standing. Right now, according to the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC), 72 percent, or 108 out of 149 endorsed hotels, are operating. This means that 82 percent of endorsed rooms are available and accepting reservations for new bookings. We also currently have 1,747 weekly nonstop and direct flights to Puerto Rico from the USA, Caribbean and international cities. [Operational hotels and flights] coupled with attractions updating us on their ability to host guests, a convention center that is in such good shape ... we are ready to turn your meeting lists and ours, into bucket lists, to be fulfilled in Puerto Rico."



The "Check Off Your Bucket List," promotion, rewards meeting and incentive industry planners for booking groups at select participating hotels and resorts in Puerto Rico. A one-time "bucket list experience" will be provided to a group for any day; select from either culinary or cultural options.

The Check Off Your Bucket List promotion applies to new leads or groups booked with a contract signed by March 31, 2018. The travel window for meetings, events and incentives extends until Dec. 31, 2019. For 100-499 room nights, Meet Puerto Rico will contribute \$10 per booked room night; 500-999 room nights, \$15 per booked room night; and for 1,000+ room nights, \$20 per booked room night.

"We are not just coming back, we are moving into a new age with the amazing opportunity to try new ideas, new approaches and new commitments to our clients, and we want you to participate in our progress, and share in the anticipation of relaunching and rediscovering Puerto Rico," Segarra said.