Christian Baudat

Interviewed by Tamara Michel, EHL Bachelor Student, Class of 2027

GRADUATED IN 1985

Japan

COUNTRY GENERAL MANAGER OF ASCOTT LIMITED



FORTY YEARS, THREE CONTINENTS AND AN EHL FOUNDATION

"EHL is part of me. It opened doors, but opportunities only become achievements through the choices you make beyond those doors."

Christian left Switzerland for Japan straight after graduating from EHL in 1985. He started as a management trainee at the Hilton Tokyo, on a trainee's salary and in a flat of barely 14 square metres. Twenty years later, he returned to lead the very hotel where he began. Along the way, he led some of Hilton's largest operations in Asia and served as VP Operations at Rotana in the Middle East.

Today, he is Country General Manager for The Ascott Limited in Japan. Looking back, he sees EHL as the starting point of it all: the technical base, the network, the mindset and the approach to excellence he can still rely on today.

From Languages to Hospitality

At 16, Christian had a plan: study modern languages at university. He loved languages because they gave him the chance to travel and discover other cultures. Then an EHL graduate, the son of his parents' friends, suggested visiting the school in Lausanne, and things took a new turn. Christian realised hospitality offered everything he was looking for in languages and more: a way to travel, to meet people from all over the world and to live in different cultures. Having grown up in a family that loved good food and discovering other countries, hospitality felt like the obvious choice.

"I went there because I wanted to learn hospitality management, and it was giving me an opportunity to travel and to go abroad." He switched to business classes in high school to prepare, completed his military service and started his Bachelor at EHL six months early, beginning with the school's English preparatory course. Although the curriculum was taught exclusively in French, he quickly immersed himself in an international environment, learning alongside classmates from all over the world.

EHL

Lessons that travelled with Christian

The program at this time was much more hands-on, and for Christian, that practical training gave him a great foundation with lessons he still uses today.

"When you work in the kitchen, you learn about teamwork" he says. Working alongside his teachers was always a collaboration, and pastry taught him the value of detail and precision. He kept his EHL cooking and bar books for years and took them with him into his first internships.

Those internships were where his career truly began to unfold. From Montreux to Interlaken and on to Hong Kong, he experienced firsthand how a strong hospitality education and global network could create opportunities across borders. "It certainly made finding my next internship easier" he says. "When we visited other hotels, we were always met with incredible hospitality and respect."

These internships also shaped the way he approaches every new team. "You cannot enter any environment, any country, culture or company thinking that you know it all," he says. For Christian, that curiosity is essential, and it is something he still emphasizes today.

"If you have the opportunity to go away from your comfort zone into a completely new environment, look around you and stay respectful of the culture or the environment that is accepting you".

More than 40 years later, that open mind is still with him. From to Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and the Middle East, he has always adapted the way he works to each environment, while keeping the same respect for the people around him.

"A book only comes to life when you open it, absorb its lessons and let them shape what you do next."

From the Classroom to a Career Across Three Continents

At EHL, Christian was taught to stand up for his ideas. During his final year, his group worked on the redevelopment of the Hotel Angleterre. Convinced that a luxury hotel would not work, they repositioned it. Having put so much work into the project and believing in its potential, they decided to take it further. When they asked their teacher whether they could sell it, he encouraged them to go ahead. The group presented it to the city's head of buildings, who bought it for CHF 500. Him and his group were the first to do one of those projects. For him, this is exactly what EHL taught him: *"You learn how to push for things that you believe in."* He sees the same spirit in today's final year student business projects, which give students a real-life type of experience.

From there, his career took him to Singapore, Nagoya and Zurich, before his first General Manager role, opening a hotel in Otaru, in northern Japan. *"I arrived alone with two suitcases and a big empty office,"* he remembers.

Twenty years after arriving as a trainee, his journey came full circle when Christian returned to the Hilton Tokyo as General Manager, leading some of the people who had once trained him. Along the way, the EHL network kept opening doors, from Rotana in the Middle East, where he became VP Operations, to Oakwood in Japan, where he took over from a fellow EHL alumni.

From selling a student project to opening a hotel from an empty office, Christian has kept pushing for what he believes in, a mindset he developed at EHL.

For him, it always comes back to one thing: *"Our industry is all about people."* It is a belief he has carried into every role.