

**Peter Lawrence interview 3/29/13,
at the Wythe Hotel, 80 Wythe Ave, Williamsburg**

AM:

OK sounds good

PL:

I'm happy

AM:

I'm happy

Well, thank you very much for taking this interview.

PL:

My pleasure

AM:

I've never done an interview with someone who is currently my boss.

PL:

Let's see how we go.

AM:

Alright.

So, if you would please introduce yourself.

PL:

Sure, my name is Peter Lawrence and I am one of the co-founders and the partner and function as the General Manager for Wythe Hotel.

AM:

Can you do that again, I apologize.

PL:

Sure, my name is Peter Lawrence I am one of the co-founders and partners and I currently function as the GM for the Wythe Hotel.

AM:

Wonderful, ok

And Peter is my boss.

AM:

So why did you, Andrew Tarlow and Jed Walentas (SP) want to build a hotel in Brooklyn.

PL:

Because there wasn't one that felt like it really represented Brooklyn and what Brooklyn was becoming. There's obviously a creative renaissance, that's a terrible phrase, but however you want to describe it, happening in Brooklyn and in that general rhythm of real estate a hotel is usually that last piece of gentrification process. And we really thought that it didn't need to be and that we could build a hotel here and if we built the right place it would become a destination

for people within the community as well as more, as importantly, people from outside the community that would feel like, by staying here, they were being involved in what was happening in the neighborhood.

AM:

ok Great, I didn't realize that a hotel is the last part of the gentrification, of course, it makes sense, I just don't think in these terms.

PL:

Usually that's the rhythm, yeah.

Artists first, then the ubiquitous coffee shop with poetry readings or whatever else happens in there. No, creative people come with their talents and their energy and they create a community that's interesting and vibrant and then there's a critical mass where they're big enough to support retail and then you know the second wave of adventurous people who want cheaper accommodations move into this vibrant community and then it all stacks up. Yeah, a hotel is usually you need a real critical mass of people and disposable income. And of commercial activity to support a hotel. That's why it's usually the last piece of the puzzle.

AM:

Right, and Williamsburg certainly has that.

Can you describe the neighborhood which is Williamsburg, from your perspective?

PL:

Sure. I always think about it a little in terms of the process that SOHO went through just 'cause some people have a connection with that, so it's a little easier. But where we are particularly, it's a manufacturing district with lots of big buildings, some of them dating back to late 1800s or early 1900s, like ours that are filled with character and charm. And the manufacturing business had moved out of the neighborhood almost completely, so it left inexpensive space and lots of space, what folks like you like.

AM:

Exactly

PL:

And so that attracted all of those creative folks with lots of energy. There are obviously lots of people and many different kind living here. Puertoricans, Orthodox Jewish enclaves, Puertorican people sort of working class in the last decade or so. And then as the second wave of people move into the neighborhood more housing gets built, more retail pops up, more activity occurs, but we were most attracted. Well when we searched for a place for the hotel we wanted to find an existing building that we really loved and we wanted to be reasonably close to a subway station. And we wanted to be in a neighborhood that we were really excited about. So with this building we got all three of those things.

AM:

Right, and do you want to maintain this area as it is? In any way that you can.

PL:

I don't think that's possible.

AM:

Right, you don't have this control?

PL:

I do not have this control.

AM:

But in a way I sort of feel like perhaps you are by, I'm going off subject of my own sort of subjects, in a way perhaps you are maintaining this neighborhood or the energy and vibrancy by having a lot of your guests be musicians and artist and of the like.

PL:

Sure. It's a reflection of the neighborhood as it is right now. And yeah that's why we wanted to do this and that's why we built this hotel in the way that we built it with the hope that, you know, those would be our guests because those are the people we like hanging out with.

AM:

Right

PL:

It's going to continue to evolve. Do I think it's going to continue to be a vibrantly creative neighborhood and community, absolutely. Is it going to stay like this no.

AM:

No way

PL:

The only part of this neighborhood that we have managed to preserve is this building and all of the great well worn stories and charm that come along with it.

PL:

So that will stay the same.

AM:

Right and right now we are actually in Reynard the restaurant and there's exposed brick walls, gorgeous windows overlooking the Brooklyn view, we'll talk about the Manhattan view later, but this building is really beautiful and you feel comfortable in here because of the high ceilings and all of the re-used materials.

PL:

Yes

AM:

This isn't a new box, this is an old box redone.

PL:

Yeah, it's a spectacular old box that was built in a way that no building will ever be built again.

PL:

The masonry walls are two feet thick. The timbers are 200 years old and the beams are 16” by 16”. These things just don’t exist anymore.

AM:

Right, and this was a cooperage.

PL:

It was originally built as a cooperage in 1901, yes.

AM:

I do know the history, but I prefer not to do the talking. [I joke]

PL:

This is not going to turn into a test.

AM:

So it was a cooperage and then what was it?

PL:

As best we can tell it was an armory for some fairly brief period of time in the second World War and then a textile factory for many years after that, 60 years or so. And the textile company that made all sorts of things, up to and including fabrics for the space program, also I think they were doing fairly high tech stuff in here. But at the same time lay for 60 years and we bought the building from the second generation owner of the same company, so lots of history.

AM:

Yeah, there’s a lot of history here. I suppose I will go in order of what I have. This will be edited in so many ways, you might be in three shows. So, if you would describe the real estate issues that you dealt with and the timing of this project if you would like.

PL:

Yeah, our timing was great and terrible all rolled into one.
We ok?

AM:

Kind of, there’s a lot of background noise.

PL:

Yeah

AM:

I’m hoping that I can edit out, but it’s really loud in here, if you heard what I’m hearing

PL:

It will only get louder.

AM:

I know I know

Those damn people in the library.

PL:

We can, yeah they are going to be banging and clattering in there.

AM:

Yeah I know I suppose that was a better seat.

PL:

Yeah, I was hoping that library would be free but it's not. We can go into the event space.

AM:

Can we?

PL:

Yeah

AM:

Ah, this is so much better, it's echoey, but it's sort of fabulous, ok let's see. Alright, you speak and let's see what goes on.

PL:

Testing

1,2, 3

With birds

What did you just say to him, "Welcome to the rest of his life?"

Chef 1:

I said, "Welcome to the rest of your life," while getting yelled at.

PL:

That was a very gentle yell for you Aaron.

Chef:

Well you are in here recording.

AM:

Well, we don't know you're names, so it is ok.

Now I have my questions in my bag, in my pocket.

Oh that was great,

He was like, "Welcome to the beginning of the rest of your life. "

Gentle, I thought chef's yelled, loudly?

PL:

Yes, no, that was gentle.

PL:

So, yea, the timing was perfect and the timing was terrible. We found the building at the wrong time, we found the building just at the end of the, sorry.

AM:

No, I'm ok, now I'm distracting you.

PL:

No, no, you're good.

We found the building just at the end of the boom and there was a lot of speculative money that was available so there were a couple of other people looking to buy the building. And the world took a little fall and most of that money evaporated so we were able to buy the building and then the world really fell apart and there was no money for anything, certainly not for a very speculative hotel that was viewed as being on the edge of the world as far as people that usually finance these kind of projects were concerned.

AM:

Brooklyn, where's that? ok

PL:

So we spent, well we ended up having two years between that and getting financed and starting construction which was a little terrifying at the time, but looking back it was probably the very best thing for the project. So we had a ton of time to really live inside the building and do the demolition and clean up slowly and build model rooms and mess around with them, tear them down, build them again. I had time to go and spend a year working, opening another hotel for people who I respected and learned a whole lot during that. We had time to find Andrew, which is obviously a huge piece of the puzzle for us. And in the end the whole project has benefitted from that sort of scary, is this ever going to happen, two year period that we went through. So it was totally messed up and couldn't have been better.

AM:

OK. Because you knew at some point you weren't going to fail, you couldn't fail.

PL:

I don't know, no I didn't know that.

AM:

OK

PL:

I knew it was an opportunity of a lifetime and that I was going to stick it out until it was clear that it was completely dead.

AM:

OK so you didn't know but you would have been damned if you couldn't do it

PL:

Sure

AM:

So you were just going for it.

PL:

Yes

PL:

And now I have a incredibly smart, you know, business partner to whom this is a fairly small project and without him and his faith and his willingness and ability to write a huge check a project like this doesn't happen.

AM:

Right, yeah this is a big project.

PL:

Yes.

AM:

And it's, and for a long time it will be. This is a 24 process here. ok

PL:

yes

AM:

Alright. I suppose that being said, now that the project is up and running and you have this business in full swing, what is the, I don't need to know monetarily, 'cause I kind of know just by having my studio down the street, and looking up tax lots, yes I used to work in real estate, by the way, and you know I'm about to lose my studio down the street because this neighborhood is getting better and they don't necessarily want the cheap rents that artists are paying for their studios. So, I suppose what is the current value of the building and location to you, not necessarily monetarily but in your personal value, now that this project is happening, so what does it mean to you now?

PL:

Right

Yeah, there are people that are discovering the heart of this little corner of the world that would certainly not have come without the hotel. That said there have been amazing businesses in this little corner for many many many years bringing people that wouldn't have come otherwise so the Brooklyn Brewery has been here for 25 years and they have been bringing people out here for tours and tastings and beer school and all this great stuff for many years.

PL:

You know the place Beacon's Closet is right across the street, and they've been bringing people out here for many many many years so we certainly didn't start from zero, we had a pretty amazingly, we do continue to have amazing neighbors. But they, you know they put this little neighborhood on the map. When we first opened everybody I talked to was like 'where is that?'" and I'd say it's across the river from the Brewery or it's across from the Bowl. And they know exactly what I'm talking about even if they've never been out here. So...

AM:

And you're growing together too - because VICE is also down the street and has been there for such a long time and now they have a television channel.

PL:

Yes, no, those guys are a power house. But, yeah we've had an affect on the neighborhood in lots of ways. We've obviously attracted a lot more attention in a very short period of time, just

because of the press, then some of those business have over time and we're proving something that wasn't accepted before we opened, that you can get people to come out here. Whether it's to come eat dinner or drink cocktails, or have events or stay in a hotel room people are, if the product is interesting and good enough people will come. And that is very clearly having an effect on real estate around us.

AM:

Yeah that is proving true

PL:

So, places that were happy to have artists at fairly minimal rents are now thinking, 'no, I can probably build real office space and have people pay me much more money for that space, or I can have technology companies come in and open studios or photo studios or all sorts of other options are suddenly available for people who own the real estate in this neighborhood.' Yes, and sadly that is making tenants like you

AM:

You weren't the cause.

PL:

prove less attractive for those guys.

AM:

The five year lease was up and they were waiting, they were counting down the days I have a feeling. Anyway.

PL:

ok, I am sure there's other people who are, one of my favorite tweets about the hotel, was and I forget the name of the celebrity, but the tweet was, I am sitting at Reynard having dinner and such and such is here and my rent just went up.

PL:

It's kind of, you know, that's what happens with this kind of process.

AM:

It's true.

And so what does the building personally mean to you? Not the building, the business, the hotel.

PL :

You now it's a huge investment of personal time and energy and you know, people's money and you know very literally sweat and blood and tears and you know we it's very flattering that it's been so well accepted. And I am very proud of the result. But it was entirely a team effort and the expectations on that team were incredibly high all the time and that's not always so much fun. But, it's how it needs to be if you want to end up with a great final product. And so Jed really drive that process and is very good at maintaining that level of expectation. And if you now matter how good the idea is and if he's in love with the idea the moment it comes out of someone's mouth, he's going to do his very best to poke as many holes in that idea as possible with the sole purpose of finding out it's flaws and figuring out if there's a way to make it better. And so, it's a you know it's very personal and to sort of go through that process about design

decisions and philosophical choices about how the things should be and then really have to fight for that, makes you all the more invested by the time it comes true.

AM:

Because what you're doing....Right and the IT is so many things, I mean you're forming people's experiences, their vacations, their honeymoons, their I don't know, their weddings.

PL:

No that's the best part. That people have proposed to each other here.

PL:

And got married here and conceived babies here.

AM:

laugh

PL:

And we've done all sorts of like you know, real sign posts in their lives have happened within our little house.

AM:

Within your work of art if you will.

PL:

laugh

AM:

I mean really, and it, that is a lot of pressure.

PL:

Yeah, that part, there's no pressure, that's the fun part.

AM:

That's the great part. The hard part is making sure this sustains.

PL:

Yeah, that becomes less hard as we go along too. It's definitely a, I think most hospitality stuff has a cycle and once the hard part is getting that beginning momentum. Which we were really lucky and came out of the blocks super fast so that's been less of a concern. Once you have the momentum, as you were saying before, like you feel like there's, it feels like people are just discovering it. And that's entirely true, I get calls everyday from people all over the world, that are like "this is happening and that's happening and I didn't know you were there and that's great."

Hey Veronica!

AM:

And a tour as we speak.

PL:

Yeah.

SO, no it's, I think that the real process is that we are just about to finish our first year during which we've been sort of the new and interesting thing in hotel world to talk about, especially in New York. And there will very soon be something amazing and interesting and cool that will take our place as it should and then our job will be to start really programming a bunch of really interesting stuff here between the screening room and the events and Andrew's visiting chef program that keeps us relevant and interesting and keeps the staff you know excited about coming to work everyday 'cause there's always something a little different happening inside the building.

AM:

It won't become stagnant. Basically.

PL :

No it can not.

AM:

Nothing can, basically. Not in NY at least.

PL:

Not in NY. NO.

AM:

Speaking of New York. You're a foreigner, where are you from?

PL:

I grew up in Australia. I'm not that foreign, but a long way away.

AM:

OK, what's the word for money in your country? Remember the other day.

PL:

Oh, no, that's just my word. I don't know what the word for money in, yeah - Australians have a funny notion with money. It's not a cool thing to have so much cake in Australia.

AM:

I'm wondering if it's cool to have so much bread or pasta here. I know, I know. Anyway. It is special, is it specifically special for you to make it here in NYC?

PL:

Oh sure, for anyone! For anyone.

AM:

But is it because you're a foreigner or just because, excuse me because you're Australian or because it's just - if you make it in NYC you're

PL:

Yeah, just like the song says, right. It's definitely special to me, I think it's special to everyone, whether you come from the other side of the world or if you come from NJ or you come from Oklahoma or you come from other places, it's definitely a bar if you can you know, flourish in this town, you can do better than survive just about anywhere. But it's a, it's one of - whenever I'm feeling a little out of sorts or not really sure, I take great solace that people that enjoy what we've made here are not people that are easily impressed or won over.

AM:

They're not.

PL:

They have high expectations of themselves as well as everything around them, they look carefully at things, they can be super judgmental although, I've always found New Yorkers to be incredibly supportive of good things.

AM:

Right

PL:

Obviously that mean different things to all sorts of people, but no, it's one of the reasons I love NY. You can have the most wacky, bizarre idea and you'll find someone who's like, "you know what, I know a guy who knows something about that and you should talk to..." It's a great chain in that way, people want each other to do well, generally.

AM:

Right

And in a way, I tend to find myself in this point in the conversation where it's like - in NY you really need to collaborate - you can not live alone, you can not do everything by yourself - you really need to collaborate.

PL:

Why would you want to though, given the amount of talent and just sort of the amazing accomplished people that live here and come in and out of here all of the time. No I mean there are hotels, certainly, that are one guy's vision, and some of those are spectacular, but our biggest strength was that we had a great team of people that had very different ideas about what this should be and it's - the end result is not my vision or Andrew's vision or Jed's vision or any of the other people but it's a conglomeration of the very best ideas that fit into a you know a box of philosophy of what we were trying to accomplish.

AM:

Right

PL:

And yeah, you need someone to call you on your bullshit too - if you work by yourself you can get lost in that really quickly I think.

AM:

I like to call it the vacuum.

PL:
There you go.

AM:
And it is the worst place to be.
Yeah, New York is a place where you can share ideas with some of the most intelligent, or most creative people in the world.

PL:
Yup, yup

AM:
Or, at least we like to think so, that they are all here.

PL:
Lots of them are here.

AM:
Lots of them are here.
So, how did we meet?

PL:
You and I?

AM: uh huh

PL:
You walked in looking for a....
I don't know the right way to describe it.
You didn't walk in looking for a job, you walked in looking for a little financial security in an insecure, an insecure career that you've chosen for yourself.

AM:
Right, exactly

PL:
Is that a fair description?

AM:
Well and it's because, and I walked in here specifically because you posted on NYFA, New York Foundation of the Arts.

PL:
Oh yea. That's right, I had forgotten about that part.

AM:
And I looked at it and went, um The Wythe Hotel, two blocks from my studio?

PL:
There you go.

AM:

That hotel is looking for artists?

Done. I'm going to apply.

And i had walked in here, I had had eaten in here, at Reynard, a few times at that point and I mean I love this space and I went - well what do they need there from us?

So, I guess that's my question.

PL:

Right. What do I need from you?

AM:

Yes.

PL:

You know I have, I have a theory that you're and

AM:

My kind

PL:

laugh, and the other good folks that work here are helping me test out, which is that I - the very best way to take the next step and have people come stay here, eat here or drink here be immersed in the nature of the community is to have people who are equally immersed in what's going on working here. And Andrew talks very thoughtfully about lowering the gap economically and educationally and in every other factor between the guest and the and the group of staff that we have here. So we're trying to get as close as we can to everything functioning on a peer level. Now as hotel rooms get more expensive that becomes a little more difficult, but the idea is that same is that the, in this case the front desk of the hotel, is staffed with accomplished people who are doing really interesting things outside of the hotel and they for whatever reason, certainly financially is part of it, but also that they agree with the logic behind what we are trying to accomplish, this is a good place for the to work and then the guests get to interact with these people, whose interest is not checking them out efficiently, although that's a big part of the job, whose interest is to come back for....

AM:

Have a quick conversation about something interesting that's happening here.

PL:

Come back from a great experience that you've had, you saw something fabulous that got you excited in the morning, whether it was a piece of art or a walk that you went on or a store that you found or something and you meet two guests who think about the world or are interested in the world and some thing? of the same way you are and you turn them on to the experience, then that's not a vacation or a 'that hotel was nice' that's like that's a whole thing that becomes a whole 'nother piece of their life, that's a great story. They didn't go to Brooklyn and I stayed at this sort of cool hotel, I went to Brooklyn and I met this artist who worked behind the desk and she told me to go and see this thing and it was fucking amazing. Then they're really becoming a part of our you know further and further extended family. And calling it family is a little bit of a stretch, but they're coming into our house and that's how I like to think about it and talk about it. You know those people are coming into my house, you know, you guys are hosting them on my

behalf and I want them to feel like their you now part of our wacky and interesting family of employees and people that rely on the hotel to help them pay their rent.

AM:

Right, well we appreciate it. And I definitely appreciate my schedule, thank you very much.

PL:

You're welcome.

AM:

I have to say and I'm going to repeat this in the third brain of me which is like the background of what's happening here, when it goes into editing, but perhaps I can say it in front of you and who knows what will happen there, but basically my schedule revolves around the art world and around this radio show and around making work and around being social and being social necessitates me being out in the streets essentially at openings, I have one tonight. Which I am free to go to.

PL:

Yeah

AM:

But they usually happen on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, which are weekend days of a hotel and I had had a conversation with you, saying, listen I gotta have those nights free and then boom, done.

Those nights were free. Thank you, I appreciate it.

OK

PL:

You're welcome.

AM:

So, you are very accommodating.

I mean it's nearly impossible, I don't know how many people you have working for you here, I can imagine the nightmare or headache it is to sort of balance it out, be fair, give people time off, I'm also going to Spain for the month of May and you're allowing me to come back and continue to work.

PL:

Sure

It's a, yeah, listen I realize it's not normal and I appreciate that you guys all appreciate it and I still firmly believe that I am getting the better end of the deal. I really want to build a, and we've talked about this before, I really want to build a group of people that i might not necessarily be working here. So, I have this fabulous girl Taylor, who was here for a bunch of time...

AM:

She was great.

PL:

And she's gone off to manage, some insane band that

AM:
Fabulous

PL:
who will probably be fabulous and amazing.

AM:
His name is actually Fabulous.

PL:
There you go. Of course it is. That may be what she does for the rest of her life, more likely it is what she does for a certain amount of time. And with the kind of projects that you do and with Kimia and Bex and everybody at the front desk do, there's going to be dream projects that come up and you're going to come and say, I 'm going to go and do this thing for a month, and I'm going to say great, go ahead.

AM:
And this is so hard for artists, I mean I can't even express to you the difficulty of finding a job, nobody, first of all nobody wants to hire an artist because they know we are a sort of, I mean I have a Masters degree, we are overeducated, overqualified, but under-qualified at the same time for any sort of career job. So we'd have to start at the bottom, but we don't want to start at the bottom because we are overqualified so it becomes this conundrum really and working here I mean it's not a challenge in that the work is actually difficult or anything, but it's a challenge in that we challenge ourselves to make better conversations, be more interesting or just find out what's going with the guest or with ourselves that can make a balance. And...just a pleasant experience for all really.

PL:
No, it's a difficult piece to find inspiring people on a day to day as sort of cheesy as that sounds, is a big part of this. Right, the whole way the building feels is based on how the energy that you guys are projecting from the front desk. If you guys are happy to be here, it doesn't matter if you're smiling people are going to feel that as soon as they walk in the front door. And you're much more likely happy to be here if you have your Thursday and Friday and Saturday off and fill that need.

AM:
You can take it, it's ok.

Girl:
I'm trying to be quiet

PL:
That's my favorite thing, beer and folding napkins. The perfect combination of calm happiness. No, like you guys, because you have that balance are inspired and happy to come to this place and and all of you are all sort of wise and mature enough to recognize when you're on a good thing. Right. It's, I am sure you and all of the other guys have had enough crappy jobs, that either didn't pay enough money or were unwilling to be flexible or just had a tyrant as a manager or all the other reasons we've all had crappy jobs.

PL:

That when you have one that has reasonable expectations, and a reasonable pay and a reasonable boss, are like this is kind of great and I try and always have really high expectations of the people and so I expect you to be wise and thoughtful and intelligent and actually care about your job and the people coming in and out, but it's much easier to do that when you're fulfilled outside of getting a paycheck.

AM:

Right, right, and I feel that because artists are competent in many facets of having a job because our job in general is to not just make the work, but to sell it, well, I mean everything, you know it's the judge and the jury, you know and the defendant and the criminal. We are every facet of the process.

PL:

Especially in NY. You're running a business even if that's not what you want to be doing in some form or another you're running your own one girl business.

AM:

Or one girl radio show, or both. But we understand that you too are running a business and that we should treat it with the same respect.

PL:

Yes.

AM:

Thankfully.

So, you're clearly making an investment in us and, you're making an investment in us as employees but you're making an investment in us as artists too because - interruptions

PL:

It's a good stream

AM:

It's good, it's good. Because without the money I might not be able to pay my studio rent or my rent for the house of food or...whatever. So that's great.

So I think we covered what artists essentially represent to you but in a bigger way you also have an art collection here, there's a Duke Riley in the entry way, which as someone who works at the front desk, I can see people looking at it, constantly.

PL:

It's a great piece.

AM:

It's a great piece

PL:

He's awesome.

AM:

He is

PL:

No, and it's a great piece and it's perfect for a hotel lobby. It's not a walk past and be like oh that's kinda cool and you're done with it - you could literally sit in front of that thing for an hour and still find new nuances and messages and you know all sorts of completely inappropriate ideas that are floating around in there in the very best way, so.

AM:

And that's what a good piece of art is, when you can come back to it many times and it will consistently be something new.

PL:

Yes, so Jed, part of Jed's history is that his family did a lot of work, I don't know the right word to use, they own a lot of real estate in DUMBO and they have for a long time and they're sort of credited with creating that neighborhood, but there were a lot of artists in DUMBO and they spent a lot of time subsidizing many of those artists and have for a long time recognized how important that is in flavoring a neighborhood and not

AM:

to grow their community.

PL:

just sort of wiping that out so they can maximize their rental income in putting a bunch of offices in. So, Jed sits on the Board of creative time and he spends a lot of money on his own art collection and he sees the value in the whole spectrum. So, yeah, opening the hotel, we wanted to make a couple of really big, really spectacular pieces apart of the hotel when we opened and Duke's piece is one of them and the Tom Fruin's (SP?) sign out the front as much as it is a word that says what we are is also a spectacular piece of art that only Tom could put together and then while we haven't really started it yet, we have grand plans to the continue that relationship with local people who are doing interesting stuff and start to fill the rooms with stuff that we really like from the people that are a part of our family. And that hasn't really started properly yet, but we'll get it begun and we shy'ed away from sort of shopping for art and outfitting the whole hotel on day one.

AM:

So, a slow building collection of pieces that you're really interested in, literally collecting not a printout that repeats in every room.

PL:

Yeah. No, I want to have stuff on that walls so that if I walk into the room I can feel like, oh, you know what, this girl Allison that used to work here made that for us and it's you know, this is who she was, and this is why this is here and this is where she is now, and we see her from time to time. You know, if there's a real story behind each piece in the way that there is behind Duke's and the way that there is behind Tom's then it really belongs here rather than it just being something that we just thought that's kind of pretty and inoffensive, which is definitely part of what you have to think about with hotels.

AM:

True

PL:

You know, it's all part of the same thing, right. We'll continue to strengthen whatever connections we have with people who live and work and create stuff here.

AM:

I guess are there further, clearly that's your plan to start a collection, that you - or to build on the collection that you already have, are there further plans dedicated to artists like residency programs, I mean you have so many rooms here....

Just saying, I am losing my apartment soon.

PL:

We have talked about it a lot. And we have a lovely problem where we're busy and we sell out often and none of this stuff is possible if the enterprise is not profitable. So, that, while that, while we try really hard to try to not make that how we base our decisions, it's obviously the bottom line, and so there is some tension between those two things. We do a lot of stuff to help us stay connected. So the Frieze Art Fair was one of the very first groups we did when we opened last year and they are coming around to do their first year again.

PL:

So we give rooms to some artists so they come and stay with us and we are their home base, we stood as one of their hotels of choice, those kinds of relationships are great for us. And I hope when we come around to the quieter times of the year that we can be organized enough to have someone come and stay with us for a week or a month or whatever amount of time it is. And we've done that a little bit in the past, Steve, who did all the paintings on the back wall, the ESPO paintings, had a friend.

AM:

Which rooms face actually. Some of the rooms in the hotel I just want to describe.

PL:

Yeah

AM:

Actually face this wall because that ends at the fourth floor and then above the fourth floor is the view of Manhattan.

PL:

So Steve had a friend come while he was painting things just as we were open for friends and family who was coming from the west coast and working with the sign painters here on Wythe Avenue and he just called us and said he wants a place to stay, I know you're not really open, but can he come and stay with you? And he was awesome and so he came and stayed for three of four weeks while we worked on the project, he was here, he left us a fun little piece of artwork that we have. So, he was definitely our first artist in residence.

PL:

Yeah, and that was great so we....

You know, the visiting chef program brings chefs that come and live with us for the week or so that they're here while they cook and so doing some art version of that, yes is definitely part of our plans too.

AM:

And I guess this is a good time for me to admit to you that I've been taking the stubs, the used stubs, of the luggage bags from the porters and from the front desk and um, you know Claudine and everybody at the front desk knows I'm sure you know already. But I've been taking them and creating a pile so that I can make an art piece.

PL:

Oh! That's awesome!

AM:

yup.

PL:

I didn't know that at all. They never tell me anything so...

AM:

Oh, you didn't know this?
Unless it's really important.

PL:

But that's a great idea.

AM:

They're not going to tell you, and this falls in the unimportant category

PL:

No, that would be a great idea, yea. I like that stuff too, part history of all who have come in and out of here and now a piece.

PL:

Yeah yea

No, I'm a big fan of that sort of stuff too and I'm not going to remember the person who's name, but they were the one who made those very beautiful little pristine plexi glass boxes and then would fill them with a little selection of trash that they discovered on the street that day or wherever they were and they would tag them with where I was and what I was thinking about and whatever I was doing and there was a growing collection of trash that they'd discovered as they were wandering around.

AM:

I mean is this an artist from

PL:

It was in NY a couple of years ago. I'm not going to remember the person's name.

AM: I mention a guest

PL:

Yes, yes

No we are very lucky and it's one of the nicest - I take it as a real compliment that again

AM:

That certain people stay here.

PL :

that really accomplished people who think thoughtfully about

AM:

aesthetics

PL:

What they eat, what they drink, what they wear, what music they listen to, what they expose themselves to, chose to come and sleep in our rooms is lovely.

AM:

It is. And I suppose the last part. There's three more questions but, you know in Istanbul there's this idea that if you have a view of the Bosphorus, you've made it, you know - your location is money. Here you have a view of the Manhattan Skyline that is to die for, and like I said is the fourth floor and up, but you also have the Ides bar on the 6th floor. That the bar is actually glass on one side so you can look out as your sitting physically at the bar. And then also the terrace looks out. So, clearly this was part of your plan to have a spectacular view of the other side if you will, the GOOD view. Because from Manhattan to Brooklyn maybe not such a great view.

PL:

You know, it's funny, the view was something of an afterthought. The only place when the, before we started construction that you could get the view was from the roof. Because the whole backside of the building was all blocked up, there were no windows facing the Manhattan Skyline at all.

AM:

I see

PL:

So the first time we really got to see it was when we knocked one of those back walls down and the whole building was open to that skyline.

AM:

Gorgeous.

PL:

Yeah, it was pretty amazing. So, we did lots and lots of construction tours with friends and family and interesting people and it was one of my favorite things because no matter how jaded and well traveled and accomplished they were, when they walked off the elevator and saw that and you got that little kid sort of smile or giggle out of them.

AM:

It's New York City

PL:

It's New York City, yea.

And it's, having lived in both places, especially for Manhattanites, they know how much of a weird bubble that can be and can sort of forget how spectacularly insane that island is and so to get a very short distance but a huge amount of perspective by being able to be here and look and see how beautiful it is and how clearly crazy it is that anyone let that happen.

AM:

You're right

PL:

And, what we were talking about before, the idea that it's like - I'm in there and I'm doing good. Is I think a a good feeling for lots of people who spend their time working really hard in Manhattan.

PL:

They, I usually get it when you run in and out of an airport over the bridge and get a quick flash of the skyline and maybe you're right and it's more true for people that didn't grow up here, but for me it was coming in and out and seeing that view it was always a reminder, like holy shit look where I am, I'm doing good.

AM:

Everything will ok, you're making it here.

PL:

This is the real deal. This is not a sleepy little corner of Australia this is you know, this is where serious people come to play.

PL:

So, so I love that that's part of people's experience. Whether they're coming from Manhattan for a beer, or whether they're coming from anywhere else in the world and they walk in to those rooms and get that out their windows works well.

AM:

It's so gorgeous and I've seen it a hundred times over and I mean hundreds and hundreds of times. My family's actually from New York City and then I was raised, they moved out and I was raised in NH and when we would come in we would call it Light City and we'd giggle and we'd always called it Light City and it like I said, Light City never gets old. And...I don't care who you are, we are all visual people...

PL:

It works on everybody.

AM:

It works on everybody.

So space clearly, and to have one of those spaces inside the city, or near it is success. OK

Do you ever stop working?

PL:

Yeah. I'm not very good at it, but I'm trying to get better. It's yeah you'd get a different answer if you asked my wife that question.

AM:
Hi Mary.
There's note passing.

PL:
You're welcome.

AM:
Alright. I know, it's not easy to do a big project, whatever that project is.

PL:
Having done little and big, they both have their challenges. The little one is difficult because it's just yours, just you and one partner and there's very few resources, especially financially.

AM:
And just in terms of support too - mental support.

PL:
Yes, and doing a big one you have many more resources, especially financial ones, but there's many many more moving parts and many more pitfalls and ?

AM:
And a lot more pressure

PL:
Yeah. Higher expectations, higher pressure, the fall is further for sure.

AM:
I actually like the later.

PL:
Yeah.

AM:
I don't know, maybe the both of us are crazy.
And the last question, what are you reading?

PL:
I am not reading anything, I wish I was. No, I read the New York Times as much as I can all the time. And now I somewhat obsessively check what people are saying about the hotel on Twitter and places like that.

AM:
That's good reading.

PL:
I'm trying to think of the last thing I read. The last thing that I read that qualifies as really reading, I read Norman Mailer's thing on God. Which was an interesting and fairly egotistical kind of fashion?

AM:
OK

PL:
But, no, I yeah I don't have enough space in my life to sit down with a book for any length of time, sadly at the moment.

AM:
In understand. And do you drive to work?

PL:
No, mostly I take the ferry actually. It is a really nice break from,

AM:
From everything

PL:
A short break from everything.

AM:
Because, yea, that's when I get most of my reading done, is on the subway.

PL:
No, the sadly the subway system doesn't do good from Brooklyn to Brooklyn.

AM:
I call it, this is funny, I actually call it the other Brooklyn, the Other Brooklyn

PL:
Right

AM:
Because it's the other one, it's not really attached.

PL:
No, you've got to come in and come back out again.
It's designed to get everybody into midtown. To all go to work.

AM:
Right, well let's redesign everything so it gets everybody into Williamsburg.

PL:
I am very happy that we have a Ferry that does a pretty good job.

AM:
It does.
I have to admit I have never ridden it.

PL:
And now is the time of year to put it on your list. It's right here.

AM:

I know, I'm finally wearing a t-shirt, everything is ok now.

PL:

Yes.

AM:

Thank you very much, Peter.

PL:

My pleasure. Anytime.

AM:

Alright and I'll see you at work next week.

PL:

I'll be here.