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Q&A... *Jeff Stober*  
**A PLACE TO  
CALL HOME.**  
*The Drake Hotel  
has become the heart  
and SOUL of its  
neighbourhood, playing  
a role in the COMMUNITY  
that was carefully thought  
out by its founder.*

By *Will Kitchens*  
Photography *Mark Sommerfield*

It's difficult to imagine Toronto without the Drake Hotel. Transforming the former flophouse into a 19-room hotel was an important chapter in one of the city's biggest regeneration success stories. It was opened in 2004 by Canadian technology entrepreneur Jeff Stober in Queen West – once a neighbourhood of artist studios and many of the city's immigrant communities and now one of Toronto's most desirable areas.

The Drake brand today includes restaurants, a shop, a lakeside inn north of the city and the Drake Commissary, which supplies its dining rooms and burgeoning catering division. It's also a key patron of the arts in the city, with installations, paintings and murals gracing the Drake's walls and an intimate music venue hidden below the hotel. In July the Drake broke ground on its latest development, a 32-room expansion of its hotel. Here, Stober shares his vision for the brand. — (M)

**MONOCLE: The Drake has become a hub for locals as much as for travellers. Would you say hotels play an important role in neighbourhood-building?**

**JEFF STOBER:** Hotels are the anchors of neighbourhoods. If you look to the history of great hotels, they've always played the role of a virtual town square, both as a physical space and as a provider of services, from gift shop to café. We looked at the history of the grand dame hotels that have always played that vital role and it's a tremendous responsibility, as a hotelier, to undertake that mandate. We work very hard from the get-go to build deep roots in each of the communities we're located in. We hire locally, we collaborate with local artists and fabricators and establish a local supply chain in terms of goods and services. We immerse ourselves in our communities. We're looking at the long-term game for all – and it has to work for everyone.



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**M: How do you ensure that growth as a brand remains in line with the Drake's core values?**

**JS:** We grow organically and carefully. Keep in mind our growth trajectory has been over a 15-year period so while it might seem like it's happened rather quickly, it's been quite organised. At the Drake Hotel, a new five-storey building will be completed in about 18 months. It will add another 32 hotel rooms, expanded public spaces and art programming, while being completely in line with the streetscape. We think this will be a new chapter for the Drake's contribution and commitment to Queen West.

**M: Will the Drake become a cross-Canada brand?**

**JS:** We're excited that all of our growth has been in



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(1) The Drake Hotel (2) Photo booth in the lobby (3) Jeff Stober (4) Looking in (5) Books and vintage radios line the dining room walls (6) The Drake is a champion of local artists (7) A drink and a chat at the Drake