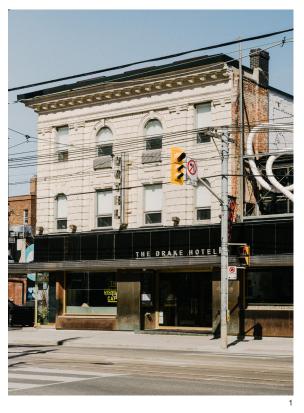
Q&A... Jeff Stober A PLACE TO CALL HOME.

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 longterm game for all – and it has

to work for everyone.







"Hotels are the anchors of neighbourhoods. They've always played the role of a virtual town square, both as a physical space and as a provider of services" Toronto and the surrounding countryside, mainly Prince Edward County. We're obviously a fiercely proud Toronto brand and because of the growth of the city, we've been able to continue to grow in it. There are always opportunities to look at any number of cities but for the moment, if given an option to ride our bikes to a location from our corporate office as opposed to hopping on a plane, we'll happily ride our bikes.

м: After 15 years in business, where do vou continue to find inspiration? **Js:** My life has become this blend of live-workplay where there's really no specific delineation or definition between them. When I'm travelling I'm obviously checking out the hotels, restaurants and the art galleries. Is that work? Is that play? It's all part of the experience of being a hotelier.

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





(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

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