

## Room with a View

Developer John Evans on celebrity run-ins at Opus Hotels, why transit matters and the virtues of giving back

**O**pus Hotel founder John deCoursey Evans takes in his stride A-listers such as Lady Gaga and Anthony Bourdain regularly rocking up to his Yaletown establishment. It seems harder to be nonchalant, however, over the infamous story about guest Ben Affleck and some strippers.

"Now that was a celebrity happening," the president and CEO of Trilogy Group of Companies muses on the episode in 2003, a year after the boutique hotel opened (Jennifer Lopez broke off their engagement after the actor was caught at nearby Brandi's Show Lounge). "The *National Enquirer* was camped across the street, and the whole world was interested in what he was up to."

It underscores part of the obvious worldwide appeal of being in the hotel business, explains the 65-year-old Calgary native and UBC commerce grad. "Hotels are coveted," says Evans, whose other Trilogy projects include Vancouver's Westin Grand Hotel and University MarketPlace at UBC. He formed Trilogy in 1991 after 11 years at Intrawest—where he steered

a billion-dollar real-estate development with Joe Houssain—and two years at Strand Properties Corp. "There's all the mystique and intrigue—it's a stage on which people can behave differently from at home, and it's fun and exciting."

It's also a business now expanding to Richmond after Opus Hotels signed a franchise agreement with MoYeung International Enterprise Ltd. for the 100-room Opus Hotel Versante, slated to open in 2017 in MoYeung's International Trade Centre development. (A victim of the recession, Opus's Montreal location was relatively shortlived, from 2009 to 2012, and Evans says he never found the right deal in Toronto.)

The former president of the Urban Development Institute of Canada and Pacific Region is also leading the charge for CAYET, a new 700-acre

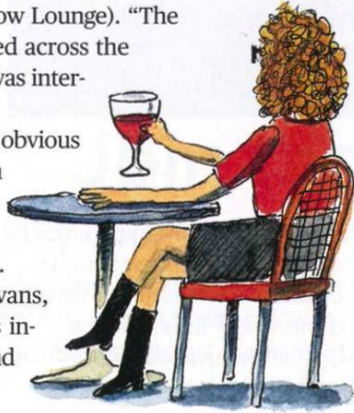
development mixing commercial with 650 single-family lots and 600 multi-family units in the Co-mox Valley (he describes it as the "most amenity-rich, affordable place to go in British Columbia"). "Development is always about timing. If the fundamentals are sound then it will happen—it's only a matter of with what degree of rapidity," he says.

As a transit aficionado whose business undeniably benefited from the Canada Line (Yaletown-Roundhouse station is opposite the Opus), Evans is hoping for a Yes vote in this month's transit referendum. "This region with the water,

mountains and all of the other obstructions needs to continue to be a model city and environmentally conscious, and mass transit is brilliant," Evans says over putanesca at the hotel's restaurant, La Pentola. That said, he thinks the issue should have been dealt with by politicians: "We elect people because we think they are learned, that they will do the necessary homework and then make the best decisions—so the conclusion I come to is that this question should not have gone to a referendum."

Based in Coal Harbour, Evans also has property in Mexico and spends time travelling there as well as Arizona, the home of his Mexican/naturalized American husband, Rene Bustamante, a computer scientist with whom he has launched a software start-up, Utiya. From a former relationship, Evans has four grown-up children and three grandchildren.

When in Vancouver, Evans spins four days a week and continues to fundraise for the Dr. Peter HIV/AIDS Foundation (he was board chair from 2007 to 2013). "I see most of my life through the growing up and success of my family firstly, then the dates projects opened—and I'm proud of them all," he says. "However, there's no doubt in my mind that the work I've done in the not-for-profit sector has given me a big personal payback." ■



by Lucy Hyslop



### JOHN EVANS'S FAVOURITES

1. "Nothing beats **Cioppino's Mediterranean Grill & Enoteca** (1133 Hamilton St., Vancouver; [cioppinos.wordpress.com](http://cioppinos.wordpress.com)) for dinner with chef Pino Posteraro."



2. "I usually grab a coffee in **Giovane Café** (1038 Canada Pl., Vancouver; [giovane cafe.com](http://giovane cafe.com)) at the Fairmont Pacific Rim, as I live in the tower."



3. "I'm a fan of breakfast meetings either here at **La Pentola** (350 Davie St., Vancouver; [lapentola.ca](http://lapentola.ca)) or **Caffè Artigiano** (various locations; [caffeartigiano.com](http://caffeartigiano.com))."



**NEXT MONTH** Lucy talks with Charles Chang from Vega, famous for its vegan protein shakes