

Celebrating a hotel for art



By Dottie Ashley

A tangible swirl of energy surrounds Charleston hotel developer Jonathan Weitz, as he happily fast-walks a visitor through The Vendue, his evolving dream of creating a hotel-gallery on both sides of Vendue Range, off East Bay St.

Having grown up on N. Adgers Wharf, the genial Charlestonian, a former lawyer, promises that “this hotel will be dedicated to every aspect of fine art: from displaying it, to offering art classes, to inviting art experts to speak, to providing a studio for working artists.”

Weitz and his wife and business partner, Lisa, co-own the Avocet Hospitality Group, which, in 2012, purchased the Vendue Inn, at 19 Vendue Range, and its partner hotel across the street, at 26 Vendue Range. Sharing a wall with 26 Vendue was the Anchorage Hotel, which, in 2013, was also acquired by Avocet. After renovations, the two hotels were combined under the umbrella name, The Vendue.

“We hadn’t planned on creating an art-centered hotel,” says Weitz. “This all happened because of Mary Martin of the Mary Martin Gallery, who first messaged me in early 2013 asking permission to

place a painting and business cards in my lobby.

“I delayed answering her because we were just starting our extensive renovations,” said Weitz. “But, one night as I was standing on Vendue Range wondering about a theme for the hotel, I suddenly realized that many of Charleston’s 72 art galleries were located nearby. Then, when I happened to check my cell phone and had another message from Mary, the art idea firmly stuck!”

Immediately, paintings from Mary’s gallery were placed in the pre-renovated Vendue Inn; later, when the Inn’s total renovations began, they were transferred across the street to the previously renovated lobby of Vendue 26.

“As I became more serious about art being The Vendue’s ‘calling card,’ I consulted Mary, and we decided an artist should handle the art side of the business,” said Weitz. “So, we approached Robert and Megan Lange of the Robert Lange Studios about becoming the project’s creative directors.”

After realizing Weitz would give them complete curatorial control, the Langes gladly accepted.

“Jon is providing us the opportunity to select artwork that mirrors what’s happening in the local art scene,” said Lange. “The Vendue will retain its beautiful antiques and embody Southern charm; however, these may be enhanced by contemporary art.”

In her gallery at 2 Queen St., Megan Lange, who is expecting a baby in May, cheerfully remarked, “Robert will actually be creative director, since I’ll be really busy at home for a while!”

The Langes were assembling The Vendue’s premier exhibition scheduled May 1. Titled “Charleston: Here, Now,” it will showcase 65 artworks by 30 artists, with 200 additional paintings filling rooms and hallways of both hotels, including the enlarged Library restaurant to be renamed The Drawing Room.

“We look forward to working with all galleries and all artists, equally,”

said Robert Lange. “Also, we hope they will submit artwork for The Vendue’s juried thematic shows.”

Since the The Vendue’s unusual arrangement could be confusing, Weitz elucidated: “Vendue 19, with 45 rooms, and Vendue 26, with 40 rooms, will act as two separate hotels operating under the same ownership and under the same name, The Vendue.”

Dashing off to another meeting involving his approximately \$5 million project, Weitz appears to savor a challenge, no matter how demanding.