

The Hosts of Toronto

TIFF wouldn't be TIFF without a party or two, and while commoners aren't often invited to the goings on that happen behind hyper-hidden closed doors, one can get a glimpse of the clinking flutes and late-night mingling of the A-list elite through words and pictures offered up by the city's most influential party planners.

BY *Shinan Govani*

Post-parties. Pre-parties. Just-so Goldilocks parties.

Dinners, lunches, launches, and lift-offs.

THE CREEP OF FALL CAN ONLY MEAN ONE THING, in Canada's largest metropolis: the start of TIFF, and with it, a torrent of shindigs. While the film fest runs on a kaleidoscope of cinema, it's the latter, inevitably, that provides for so much of the theatre, parties often being nothing but carefully choreographed social-delivery systems for either career enhancement and/or celebrity piggybacking. With careers at stake, and billions of dollars, too, in the context of the wider movie biz, there is jockeying galore. That is to say, it may look like plain fun, but nearly everybody is at work here. Everybody is someone's instrument. Everyone is secretly thinking the word "leverage."

And, behind the scenes of those affairs? A Little Black Book-full of hosts and party-enablers, some of whom operate in the shadows, and many of whom really do make the TIFF go 'round.

EXHIBIT A: Charles Khabouth. Toronto's consummate nightlife impresario—one whose many bars and restaurants have long played a backdrop to stars, old and new. He is nothing if not nostalgic about his own memories of Septembers past. Roll back to the mid-1990s, for instance, when he hosted, and met, Robert De Niro at his now-long-gone Acrobat restaurant: "I am huge fan and he was so down-to-earth...it was just like chatting to an old friend."



TOP Teatro Verde punctuates a TIFF dinner produced by Mint for Brad Pitt's film *Moneyball*

MIDDLE Inside a TIFF party thrown by Natasha Koifman and NKPR

BOTTOM Outside a party at the Windsor Arms



Charles Khabouth



Natasha Koifman



Cameron Bailey

Other highlights in Khabouth-land include a dinner held for Madonna (when she was here for her film, *W.E.*) at his place Storys on Duncan Street (“she stayed the whole night - the evening was electric”) as well as an even more recent encounter in 2015, with John Travolta, also at Storys (“extremely gracious...just a great guy.”) And, now—upping the ante, a titch—is Khabouth’s first-ever hotel, Bisha, ready for business for its first TIFF.

About the brand new brand, which aspires to trollop past mere boutique hotel, its proprietor tells me, “We will be offering a full 360-degree experience in a sophisticated, but unpretentious, environment.”

Party on.

Up there in TIFF’s Hall of Fame soiree whipper-snappers, as well: Nick Jones, the man who brought Soho House to Toronto. One in a phalanx of private clubs around the world catering to the “creative class,” his Canadian iteration is a veritable bulls-eye for movie stars. It’s the kind of place where if crane your neck just so, you may find, oh, Jennifer Lawrence, Emma Watson, and Kristen Stewart, all in a huddle (as was the case one year). Renowned for a party spidey sense so well-attuned that Jones can famously walk into a room and know, like a chef tasting a recipe, what it needs, his motto is this: “We don’t want to have a cool place. We want to have a warm place.”

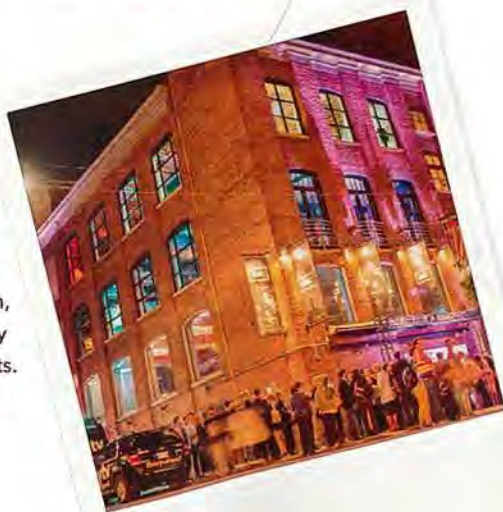
It takes a village, alright: throwing the parties of TIFF. The festival’s own artistic director, Cameron Bailey (he gets the boldface going with a night before spotlight thrown by the film fest on one particular movie star... this year... psssst... it’s Priyanka Chopra!) Ditto: Windsor Arms owner George Friedmann, whose hideaway hotel has long housed the glittery, annual *InStyle*/Hollywood Foreign Press Association party (drawing everyone from Susan Sarandon to Pharrell, over its many years).

Into this opera of self-adoration, and awards-season maneuvering, also comes, amazingly, the occasional event devoted solely to charity—like, for instance, the Artists for Peace and Justice black-tie benefit, entering its ninth year at TIFF, and devoted to bringing relief to worthy causes in Haiti. Local PR maven Natasha Koifman, who’s co-chaired the event since its inception—and who has helped host the likes of Sean Penn and Helen Mirren at the event—tells me it’s a chance during the madness of TIFF to “do good,” above all.

You have to make the most (host) of it, sometimes. **ES**

Nick Di Donato and his Liberty Entertainment Group have generously hosted numerous celebrity-packed parties during TIFF over the years, from private events at Spice Route and CIBO, to major galas at Casa Loma.

This year Danielle Pelland (our Winnipeg girl now based in Hollywood) rules the roost again. She will be producing over 20 private events for studios and their stars during the festival. And all eyes will be on RBC House this year at Storys on Duncan, where Joran Fogle’s Mint Events, along with Pelland’s company Brilliant Consulting Group will host the red carpet private events. New to watch this year is Toronto’s Carmite Cohen (formerly of eOne) and her company Edgedale Road (edgedaleroad.com) – which will be serving up some exclusive events.



A FINAL NOTE

Complete your night-on-the-town ensemble:



- 1 Hugo Boss BOSS Bottled
- 2 Prada L'Homme
- 3 Yves Saint Laurent Y for Men