

BUSINESS EVENTS

TORONTO

Your Guide to Planning Unique Experiences

SIGNATURE STYLE

Meet behind the scenes of our coolest events

VENUE GURUS | HOT PERFORMERS | TASTE MAKERS

ON LOCATION

Nick Di Donato has been at the forefront of Toronto's urban development ever since founding Liberty Entertainment Group three decades ago. We talk about the latest in his roster of distinctive restaurants and venues for events, and cultivating our city's capabilities to play host.

We're sitting here in Casa Loma, a venue you've managed for the city for two years. What opportunities has this created as a space for corporate events?

I think Casa Loma provided us the greatest opportunity we've had since I started in this business. It is one of the most specular event venues, not just in Canada, but in North America. How many other castles are there? It has just been fully restored on the exterior, by the city, and on the inside, by us.

It was run by a Kiwanis group for 75 years. Few of the people we cater to would have ever been here. In that sense, it's the city's best-kept secret: historic, but brand new.

How do you balance public access with exclusivity for private groups?

Casa Loma is a significant tourist attraction in Toronto and we've augmented that experience.

We added an antique car exhibit that brings its history to life. We've introduced probably North America's best escape game as an attraction: you escape an actual castle tower at Casa Loma. It can't get any more real.

We've also augmented event spaces, adding kitchens to

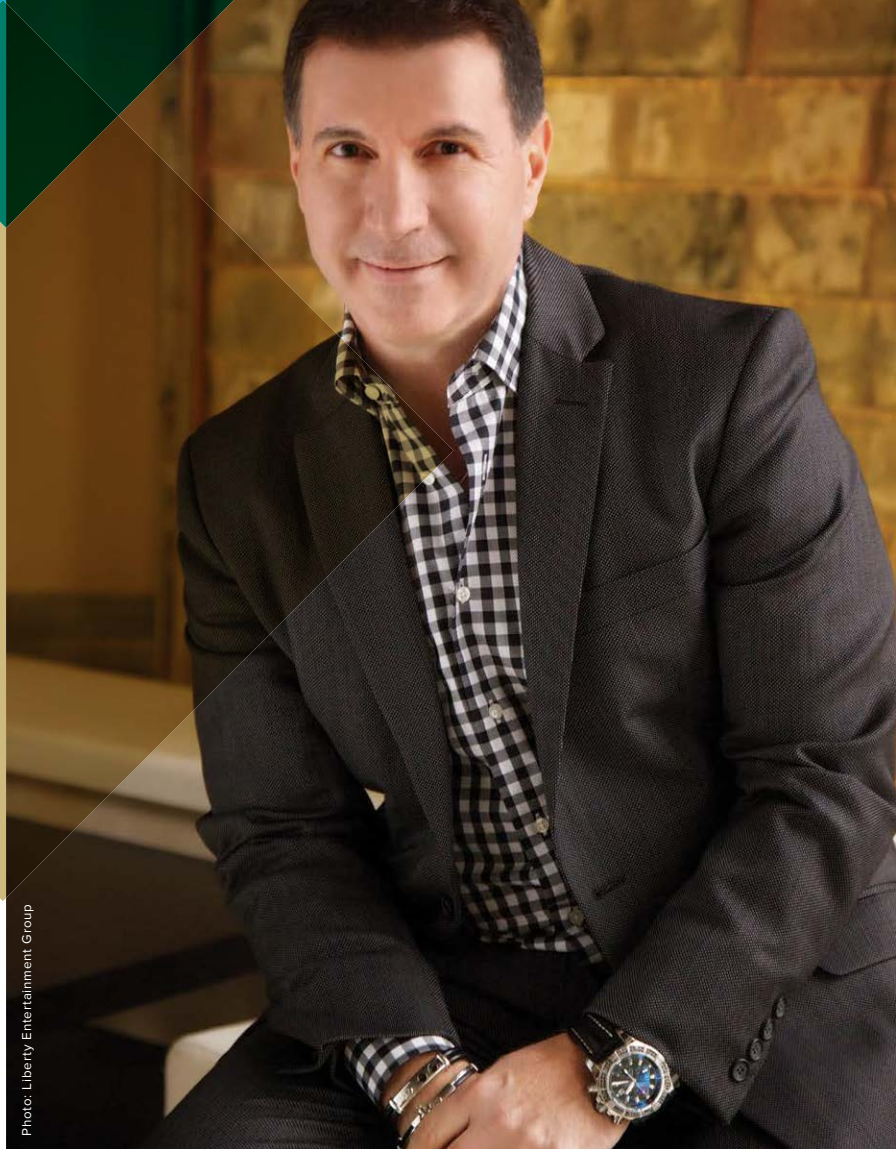


Photo: Liberty Entertainment Group

Toronto's "castle," Casa Loma, creates a grand entrance for events.



Photo: Benson Kua

improve service and investing about \$7 million into infrastructure. For example, Casa Loma was never air-conditioned. It's a \$2-million process to execute—but elevates the experience substantially.

You have invested in other Toronto landmarks as well.

I have a passion for historical structures. The Courthouse, one of Toronto's first courthouses, was one of my properties. The Rosewater is in the historic Consumer's Gas building, built in 1853, and the Liberty Grand dates to 1926. We're versed in renovating and managing historical buildings and that historic component is significant to the success of our event spaces.

Liberty Group and a few other companies have shaped trends in the city's meeting and event venues over the years. Tell us about your peers.

Your competitors are part of your community and you respect your competitors. We have great relationships with many chefs in organizations across the city. Oliver & Bonacini is a great organization. INK is a great organization. (See chart, opposite)

We're all Torontonians who have grown up together here. We have huge respect for one

another and the success we've had, because it's a challenging industry. We're the ones who made it through and are still doing well. When we work together to create great events, it's a great city.

Can you give an example?

When people come here and see what we can do in terms of event execution across all the city's venues, they're thrilled.

For example, looking to the NBA All-Star events brought here for the first time ever outside a US city: I think the people who came and hosted the events were floored at how incredibly well organized and executed everything was. Not just from us, but Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment and what they did with the All-Star Game. The infrastructure, the facilities, the hospitality; it was flawless. I think one of the best they've had.

What's next?

We're really excited about our new steakhouse opening up in Casa Loma. It's been an arduous process to make sure it's done properly. We'll be open by February 2017.



Private lounge at Chase Hospitality Group's Kasa Moto, conceived by Toronto's II BY IV Design.

Elevate your Experience

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Style Setters

Hospitality leaders shaping Toronto's entertainment landscape

Liberty Group's flagship banquet hall, Liberty Grand.

Distillery Events serves private groups in unique, industrial-era venues.



Origins

Notable Spaces

Buzzing

Oliver & Bonacini Events

Opened Jump, on Bay Street, in 1993. Today's events division focuses on large-scale facilities with chef-driven cuisine.

Manages meeting spaces at the Toronto Region Board of Trade and the Arcadian Loft. Also: Malaparte at TIFF Lightbox.

New restaurant for Saks Fifth Avenue's downtown location.

Liberty Entertainment

Since 1986, has developed and operated restaurants appealing to A-listers and business leaders.

The Liberty Grand's ballrooms evoke glamour of the early 1900s, with space for 3,000 guests.

Restoration of Toronto's castle, Casa Loma.

INK Entertainment

Scene-setter since 1982, trail-blazing trendy nightclubs and VIP event production.

Reno of waterfront Sound Academy into mega club unveiled for National Ballet's Mad Hot Ballet gala.

Plans to open boutique Bisha Hotel and Residences.

Chase Hospitality Group

Started in 2012. Name stands for: culinary, hospitality, atmosphere, service, entertainment.

Each of five restaurants has private dining and event space.

Award-winning design of Japanese restaurant Kasa Moto in Yorkville.

Distillery Events

Manages unique venues in the Distillery District, a Victorian industrial village under restoration since 2001.

The Fermenting Cellar's industrial chic space can host 600 for a reception.

French bistro atmosphere in Cluny's private dining room that can seat 80.

Artscape

Operates spaces as social enterprises, generating income through rentals.

Daniels Spectrum in Regent Park, Artscape Wychwood and Artscape Youngplace.

Creative teambuilding at Artscape Sandbox in the Entertainment District.

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