

Staying High-End

An Interview with John Terzian and Brian Toll, The h.wood Group



John Terzian and Brian Toll at Delilah, Montauk

EDITORS' NOTE *The creative arm of The h.wood operation, Los Angeles native John Terzian brings a breadth of experience, networks and vision to The h.wood Group. His close-knit industry relationships have stemmed from his professional background and entrepreneurial business affairs in a career of almost twenty years. Today, Terzian is responsible for the creative development and concept design of each project as well as strategic, collaborative partnerships. A fine arts major in college and arbiter of taste, he has a distinct aesthetic that brings a sophistication and nostalgic design to each venue. Terzian has a deep understanding of how to cater to an elite clientele. His ability to anticipate needs and wants of guests cements The h.wood Group as a provider of world-class service. Terzian also plays an active role in philanthropy. He serves as a board member for Imagine LA, the nonprofit mentorship program for the homeless, as well as for the Children's Hospital Sports & Entertainment Board.*

A passionate connector and Los Angeles native, seasoned entrepreneur Brian Toll is the Co-Founder and Co-President of The h.wood Group. Toll oversees operations, finance and

business strategy as The h.wood Group expands globally. With a track record spanning almost two decades, he brings a wealth of knowledge and established industry relationships to his work. His diligent approach has garnered a reputation for trust, integrity and professionalism, and his business acumen is driving The h.wood Group's growth.

COMPANY BRIEF *The h.wood Group (hwoodgroup.com) is a Los Angeles-based, hospitality and lifestyle marketing company with an iconic portfolio of luxury nightlife and restaurant venues. The vision of longtime friends and Los Angeles natives John Terzian and Brian Toll, The h.wood Group was founded in 2008 as a way for the consummate hosts and entrepreneurs to bring their high-end, thoughtful concepts and passion for service to life. From Delilah and The Nice Guy, to Keys and Harriet's, The h.wood Group is responsible for some of the most iconic brands in the world. With seven venues in Los Angeles, five across the country, four new concepts slated to open within the next year and more planned on the horizon, The h.wood Group is rapidly expanding thanks to its multi-concept*

portfolio uniquely positioned to cater to different markets. This growth is guided by the brand's core values – distinct design, exceptional service, and palpable atmosphere – which combine to create extraordinary moments for every guest. The h.wood Group experience is known well beyond the walls of their brick-and-mortar locations, through its work as one of the most reputable event producers in the world. With passions for art, fashion, sports, and entertainment, The h.wood Group's signature approach to service and storytelling unites brands, consumers, and talent at some of the world's most iconic cultural events including Coachella; F1 Las Vegas, Miami and Austin; amfAR Cannes; Art Basel and more. The h.wood Group offers corporate branding, catering, event production and marketing services at both private events and international pop-ups, reflecting and shaping popular culture on both local and global scales.

Will you discuss your career journeys?

We started our career journey in hospitality together more or less. We both grew up in Los Angeles and became friends at USC. After each dabbling in throwing our own parties and other side gigs, we joined forces to start hosting parties in a big way. In 2007, we opened our first real venue called The Stork in Los Angeles, a take-over of an old Burger King, where guests had to recite a poem to enter. This became a hit and loved by guests who were seeking fun and privacy. We reopened the space in 2008 as h.wood, which became the start of The h.wood Group's journey.

Some of our biggest highlights since starting The h.wood Group have been the launch of Delilah and its subsequent expansion to the Wynn in Las Vegas, Miami, recently opened Dallas and New York City coming soon, and the launch of Bootsie Bellows at SoFi Stadium, which was the first of its kind in terms of offering a more premium game day experience and elevating sports hospitality overall.

What was your vision for creating The h.wood Group, and how do you define its mission?

As longtime friends and Angelenos, we founded The h.wood Group as a way for us to bring our passion for hosting events, service and high-end creative concepts to life. It's been exciting to create places like Delilah, The Nice Guy, The Bird Streets Club and more and see them grow into beloved institutions, both in

LA and beyond. Our company's mission is guided by our core values – distinct design, exceptional service, and palpable atmosphere – which combine to create extraordinary moments for every guest. Our mantra for The h.wood Group is to always stay high-end in whatever we do. No matter the partner or brand, we are creating an elevated experience that aims to be as unique and one of a kind as possible.

Will you provide an overview of The h.wood Group's venues?

The h.wood Group is a Los Angeles-based, hospitality and lifestyle marketing company with an iconic portfolio of luxury nightlife and restaurant venues including Delilah (a roaring 1920s style supper club), The Nice Guy (an intimate Italian restaurant), Harriet's (a rooftop bar), the Keys and Poppy nightclubs, The Bird Streets Club (members club), plus Bootsy Bellows at SoFi Stadium and HIPP at Rocket Arena in partnership with the Cleveland Cavaliers, which have both set a new benchmark in premium sports hospitality.

Beyond our brick-and-mortar locations, we are also known for our work as a reputable event producer around the globe. With passions for art, fashion, sports and entertainment, The h.wood Group's signature approach to service and storytelling unites brands, consumers and talent at some of the world's most iconic cultural events including Super Bowl, Coachella, F1 Las Vegas and Miami, amfAR Cannes, Art Basel and more.

How do you describe the Delilah experience?

Delilah is a modern-day supper club. From the moment you walk through the doors, you're transported to another era, with lavish interiors, dim lighting and chandeliers. We serve refined American fare and cocktails. Delilah is designed to be a place where you can linger in style as the



HIPP at Rocket Arena in partnership with the Cleveland Cavaliers

evening unfolds, where dining turns to dancing as a troupe of female entertainers move to the sounds of a live jazz band. Guests can enjoy lounge style bottle service.

Each Delilah location is created with its own personality. Originating in Los Angeles, Delilah now also lives in Miami, Las Vegas and we just opened Delilah Dallas – our biggest location yet. We also have another exciting Delilah opening in New York City on the way.

How critical has it been to build The h.wood Group team?

Building a team of specialists who are passionate about The h.wood Group's mission and everything we do has been critical to build

our business. We are in anything we do for the long run. At the end of the day, we are in the people business. You need to have the same set of values and ethics for a working relationship to begin and last the distance. So, the key is to know and have as many people aligned with us as possible – both internally and through our trusted partners.

What has made the working relationship between the two of you work so well?

While we both wear several hats overall, for the most part Brian focuses on the business side of The h.wood Group and I focus on the design and creative. Then collectively, we tackle most of the big picture pieces together. We also have a great team of executives who are partners in The h.wood Group now and I think this combination helps us grow the right way.

By each having a specific focus, this helps John and I work so well together – we balance each other out – and the business – by ensuring we cover all bases of the business and creative sides the best we can. Obviously, the bottom line is most important, but if we sacrifice too much on the creative and the overall experience, we end up hurting ourselves in the long run.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the hospitality industry?

I think a lot of people fail to recognize the amount of hard work and drive it takes to build a company, especially in hospitality. It took many years of throwing events and inviting people to all sorts of things before these brands started to take notice and to want to work with us. You have to be willing to put the hours in to build your vision.

Overall, our biggest pieces of advice are to always play the long game, be more resilient than you could ever imagine, and stay true to a specific vision. ●



Delilah Dallas