



Come in from the cold and catch a great flick at the

LEXINGTON

VENUE

By Elena Murphy



If you're thinking about getting out of the cold and catching a movie, look no further than the now fully lit sign for The Venue, formerly the Flick in Lexington Center. The theater not only has a new sign and name, but its owner Peter Siy is planning on making the theater a go-to spot for must-see movies as well as giving people more of an experience than they'd have at a big multiplex.

As soon as you step in, you'll see change. Recent renovations revealed a pressed tin ceiling in this building, which by best estimates was built before or around 1930. "It smells like vaudeville," says Bob Lewis, an artist who was repairing the lobby walls the day I visited. "Popcorn and mascara."

There does seem to be a story that this building hasn't told yet. Behind one screen is a stage with a switchboard that suggests it controlled stage curtains, says Siy, who's owned the theater since the summer of 2008. In the meantime, Siy is hoping to

have a lot more stories unfold at the theater in coming years. Though never an "aspiring actor" himself, Siy has already arranged a cinematic brush with fame for the theater last summer when director David O. Russell filmed

...PEOPLE WANT AN EXPERIENCE THAT'S DIFFERENT, AND CLOSER, THAN GOING TO THE BIG THEATERS.

some scenes for the movie "The Fighter," about a Lowell boxer in the 1990s. The movie stars Amy Adams and Mark Wahlberg, and created quite a stir when the crew took over the Center for a day of filming last August.

Building on the momentum of that experience, Siy envisions The Venue as a creative hub in Lexington. His long-term plan is to host film festivals. "That's the real reason I bought the place," says Siy, who says he looks forward to bringing in actors, directors and producers so local moviegoers can get

insight into current films. He's going to pursue his dream first by hosting a film festival for Lexington High School in May. And he'd like to have a screening of "The Fighter" when it's ready for release.

Siy seems to relish the idea of bringing a little piece of Hollywood to Lexington. For instance, he was contacted recently about a movie whose stars are traveling to promote their film, and he'd like to arrange a screening with them present. The Venue also will host a screenwriter's group in coming months.

Siy became interested in movies, especially independent ones, after seeing 1995's "Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead" starring Andy Garcia. "It was outlandish and poignant," he says. Over the next several

years, Siy liked going to the movies at Kendall Square's theater. While working in high-tech in Bedford, he spent time in Lexington, and saw "a lot of potential not being realized" for a theater to capitalize on a local audience who



appreciates good films, as well as becoming a mainstay for screenings and other events. When the opportunity presented itself, he and his wife Erica Carr decided to acquire the Flick.

That's when Siy says he started to look at "re-branding" the theater. He approached director David O. Russell ("I Heart Huckabees" and "Three Kings") to film a few scenes of "The Fighter" at the theater, with Lexington High School acting as the home base for the over 100 members of the cast and crew who used the school for make-up, wardrobe and meals. PBS also has filmed part of a documentary about a local scientist in the theater because she has long enjoyed seeing movies there, Siy says.

Re-branding itself has been an experimental process. For instance, Siy says he started playing movie soundtracks throughout the theater, but that became somewhat "limiting." So, his wife Erica Carr, who is a Davis scholar at Wellesley, created a playlist of 70s R&B music, including Marvin Gaye, Bill Withers and B.B. King to play throughout the theater, even in the stylish new restrooms. "They're great songs to listen to while you're waiting for a movie - they really set the tone," Siy says.

The whole theater has been undergoing a redesign under Mark Bombara, Mark Bombara

Interiors, and partner, Boston restaurant/lounge 28 Degrees. In December, The Venue's walls were being repainted and new chairs with cup holders had been placed in the two-screen theater. Seating capacity is up, and new carpet has been rolled out.

Siy pays a great deal of attention to detail. He's had the restrooms completely redone with Italian tile and recessed lighting, which will make patrons feel ready for that close up. Custom gapless stalls in the women's restrooms provide extra privacy, but anyone can try out their red carpet walk in front of the full-length mirror.

work was done by George Shaw, Harmony Woodworking, Cambridge. Most of the renovations will complete by this summer, though Siy says, "there's always something to improve upon."

If going from high tech to focusing on redesigning a local theater seems like a leap, that's what Peter Siy seems to enjoy doing. Early in his career, he went back to school for a master's in computer science. He began working, before deciding to join the FBI. He says



Refinished concessions and entry-way

With all the digging he's been doing around the theater, Siy has taken advantage of some of the surprises he's encountered during the renovations. For instance, Siy found carrarra marble slabs, which match those at the front entrance. He says he's having them cut to form the counter for the concession stand, and that "reclaimed" marble will also replace the wooden tabletops in the lobby. It's all part of highlighting what's unique about an independent theater.

Look up for more new details, says Siy. "We also 'mined' pressed tin crown molding that was missing in our stairwell from a storage closet," he notes. The restoration

company in the late 1990s, he thought about what he'd like to do, "an existential question," he says. Since then he's gone back to school at Bentley, where he still teaches corporate finance.

IT'S ALL PART OF HIGHLIGHTING WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT AN INDEPENDENT THEATER.



Vintage details revealed



Renovated bathrooms

Now, Siy regularly spends time at the theater. He says moviegoers come from all over the area

to see a movie at The Venue because people want an experience that's different, and closer, than going to the big theaters.

He emphasizes the value of going to the Venue. Prices are lower, both tickets and concession food, Siy notes. And the audience is getting quality films, often first run, such as the recent opening for "It's Complicated" with Meryl Streep and Alec Baldwin. Siy says that audiences also can expect during the winter award season to see all the "hopefuls" at The Venue as they could last year.

In addition to those commercially popular and high quality films, Siy says he also has taken some risks with film offerings. He says "The Hurt Locker," a movie about a bomb squad in Baghdad didn't fill a lot of seats, but he

Once you've savored a good flick at The Venue, what's next?

Grab a "very special hot chocolate" at Ranc's, made with homemade hot fudge sauce, and pair it with a micro scoop - perfect to discuss that movie ending.

Nourish has a Chocolate Raspberry martinis as well as herbal tea, for a drink that suits your mood.

Lexx has an extensive wine list, if the discussion about the movie is going to go on for a while.



New paint and more seating

If you want to catch the Oscar contenders and other good films, check out:

The Venue
1794 Mass Ave.
Lexington Center

Telephone: 781-861-6161

Check Lexingtonismore.com for specials

Wednesday nights are "Bargain Nights." All seats are \$7.00