

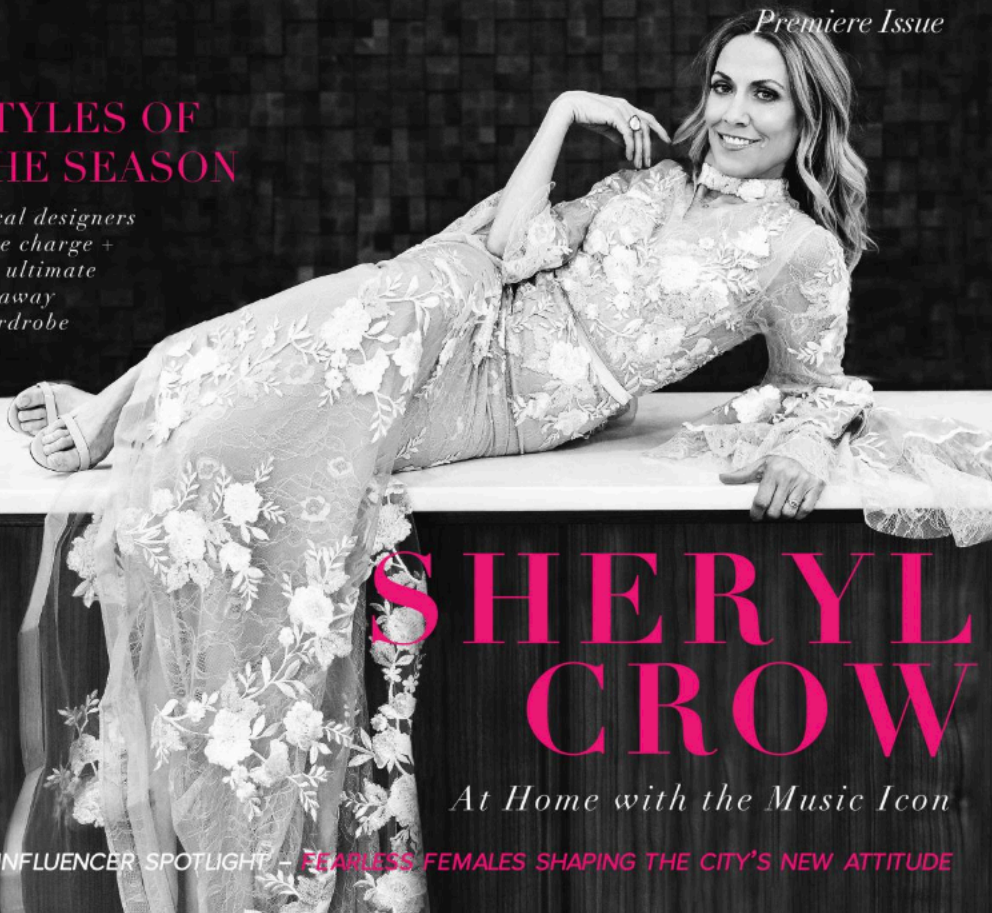
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| people

trajectory of greatness

How one man's love for the heart of downtown Nashville is raising the bar for urban living in Music City

BY STACIE STANDIFER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALAINA MULLIN

There aren't many places where you'll find a group of tough competitors gathering around the dinner table sharing secrets on their latest projects, but that is exactly what happened just before I got a chance to sit down with Tony Giarratana for a visit. He'd just finished hosting a dozen of the area's most successful and influential developers—think trailblazers like Jim Caden and John Eakin—for an unstructured meeting of the minds in his recently completed penthouse at the top of the 505 Building. With sweeping views of downtown, the river and beyond, they swapped stories, offered insights and discussed ongoing issues. Being open-minded and forward-thinking, the host has no qualms about what might seem atypical to others. “A rising tide truly does lift all ships,” he says. “I’ve always been entirely open to anyone and everyone doing quality work in the city and believe in the importance of supporting each other.”

There's no doubt that even his secretly envious contemporaries are grateful for his efforts in uniting those with similar goals. Of course, when I say similar, I don't mean exactly the same. When I first met Tony years ago while starting my previous city magazine company, it was evident there was something intriguing and unique about him. I was quite young and unfamiliar with the mover-and-shaker landscape downtown, showing up for our meeting at the Nashville City Club in well-worn jeans (a big no-no, as I found out). Instead of

causing me to feel uncomfortable, he used his accepting persona and charm to make me feel welcome and at ease, making our visit one of the most memorable of my early career. Fast-forward 17-plus years and his demeanor hasn't changed. Well-dressed but approachable, he's still just as authentic and hospitable when we sit down to catch up in his sprawling home in the sky. The views are captivating, and so is our conversation.

If you haven't heard of Tony, either you abstain from keeping up with local news or you're a complete newcomer to the market. It's hard to pick up a paper or browse a news site without seeing something about his latest projects. There has been ongoing reporting about the unwarranted opposition concerning what he has planned next, which he seems to take in stride. With complete faith in his vision based on experience, consumer feedback and official input—not to mention his naturally forward-looking personality—he's sure that every hurdle is worth it. “Each project we work through raises the bar for what's next. We're learning from what we did yesterday and constantly improving on it,” he tells me. There's a twinkle in his eye as he reveals details on his next adventure as well as when we take a stroll down memory lane to reveal how he came to this point.

Not unlike other self-made success stories, Tony's background starts with humble beginnings. Raised in Clearwater, FL, where his father was a barber, the family didn't have



Tony Giarratana at the table in the wine room, used by 505 owners inside the common entertainment space.



One of the intimate seating areas designed by Frank Postlerio.

the money for adventures or travel. That meant making the five-mile trek to the beach an almost daily occurrence for entertainment. Here, he discovered a love for sailing and charting a course. After high school he worked nights at a grocery store while studying at the University of South Florida. "I was in class one day when the professor asked us what our career plans were," he recalls. "It seemed like nearly all of the students wanted to be in banking. I kept thinking about it, and later that day when at the beach, I was looking up at the high-rise condominiums and thought it would be fun to be involved, so I got my real estate license. Six months passed and I didn't sell a single thing. Not even a house. Then by a fluke I sold an office building and made more money than I'd ever seen in my life. So I decided that from that point on, I was going to focus on commercial buildings." Soon after, he read about the downtown boom in Denver, CO, and connected with a friend and former schoolmate who worked at the top leasing firm there. An open position for head of leasing was what prompted him to head west. "I had zero experience in leasing, but of course I said that I did during the job interviews, and it worked," he remembers. "Two weeks later I was living at the Fairmont Hotel in downtown Denver before eventually buying an apartment in a high-rise." That's when he fell instantly in love with the urban living concept. "Those two years changed my life. I never had a car and literally walked everywhere. So, when I relocated to Nashville, I naturally gravitated toward the high-rise living that was available." But, of course, at that time there wasn't much. That's when Giarratana saw a void that needed to be filled.

His development of the Cumberland Apartments high-rise was the start of a long run of notable residential projects and it was his constant communication with so many loyal renters that led to his next venture, The Viridian. "We had so many professionals that loved the location and convenience of living downtown but who also wanted to invest in their own home as an investment for the future, so we gave them just that," he recalls. "We considered every comment, suggestion and movement in the way that these people lived in crafting The Viridian's design. It's a practice our team will never stop, because it's these thousands of conversations over the years that help us to build offerings that suit the needs of the residents, which has proven to be a solid model in planning."

Going above and beyond individual residences, he raised the bar on common spaces and amenities and sought out innovative ways to create a vibrant urban lifestyle. After continually hearing comments about the lack of grocery options nearby, he solicited H.G. Hill to open a location on the ground floor paying for the build-out and offering free rent for an extended period of time. "There's something truly funny about that," he says, chuckling at the memory. "We're doing this multi-million-dollar project and once Hill was on board, the newspaper published an article with a huge headline that read 'FIRST DOWNTOWN GROCERY SINCE 1967,' with a small tagline below stating simply, 'condos to be built above store.'"

This pattern of filling voids continued to build upon itself, resulting in bigger, better and more customized spaces as the years passed and the city grew. But while the structures are constantly evolving, one thing has remained constant, and that is Tony's love for Church Street. "It truly is the heart of Nashville," he says. "There's no place like it. You can walk to any of the professional sports facilities, venues such as TPAC, and the dozens of shopping and dining destinations that now take up most of the retail space in the area."



View from the top, Giarratana in his 505 Penthouse space, which serves as a model for the units planned at The Paramount. Design by Frank Postorino.