

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

DTLAB: First Week Recap

Chiwan Choi · Wednesday, July 2nd, 2014

One week and 7 events of our 90 days/90 events DTLAB project is wrapping up at Les Noces du Figaro. We're still standing! I want to tell you how things have been going and some of the details.



BUT FIRST! Must thank some people before anything else.

Brady Westwater. Patti Berman. Jessica Wethington McLean. Jose Huizar. The family of Les Noces du Figaro. Through the course of a desperate and stressful hour or so the day before DTLAB was scheduled to open, these people, in this sequence, helped us navigate the entire project (all 90 nights of it!) to a new, gorgeous venue. And now we have become part of the Bringing Back Broadway initiative.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Now on to some sharing of experiences and such!

WHAT HAPPENED?!?

Well...

We hit an unforeseen last minute snag at Kitchen Table, the original space we'd planned and scheduled our events for. By unforeseen, I mean the day before opening night.

As mention above, various people got involved and helped us find a new home for DTLAB #90for90. What it felt like was – it felt like we'd built a 90-story skyscraper...*then had to move it a few blocks.*

I was having lunch with one of my favorite people/writers, Steph Cha (author of the upcoming *Beware Beware*), when I had to take a conference call, trying to lock down the new venue. I can't even remembering eating that burger. Hopefully Steph will have lunch with me again in a more relaxed situation.

WHAT WE GAINED



The space that is [Les Noces du Figaro](#) is nothing that we'd have expected for DTLAB. Whereas Kitchen Table was a tiny bar downstairs, with a 60-seat rooftop that we were going to use as our event space, Figaro is a majestic, historic, and opulent restaurant that could conceivably fit a few hundred, if not a thousand, people. The upstairs area that we are using for many of our events is an amazing ballroom with a stunning view of Broadway Ave.

Unlike Kitchen Table, It allows live music, dancing, and there's enough space and walls to put on art exhibits. For the more intimate smaller events, we can use the lounge area by the bar downstairs.

By being in Figaro, we also don't have to worry about stocking the bar, staffing the place, closing up or opening up.

WHAT WE LOST

One of the biggest issue so far has been trying to refocus our brains. Everything we scheduled and the series we designed were [so site specific to Kitchen Table](#) and we just haven't been able to wrap our heads around this new location. We are not doing well so far in utilizing everything Figaro has to offer in the most effective way. But we are just one week into a 3 month journey and I am confident that we'll get into the groove.

The second big struggle for us has been engaging with locals. One of the key components of Kitchen Table was the bartending team we'd put together, a group of our favorite bartenders from various downtown bars, all beloved by locals and all of whom truly appreciate the arts. Being at Kitchen Table would have allowed local foot traffic and bar regulars to come and hang out and drink, even if an event was not going on yet, and create an energy and atmosphere around it.

Right now, because Figaro opens from early morning, it is hard to say what time DTLAB "opens." Our original plan was to open DTLAB @ Kitchen Table at 5, both bar and bookstore, with events scheduled to start at 7 or 8. The thinking was that when each event was ready to begin, there would already be a crowd of people eating and drinking on the rooftop.

Without a concrete open and close time, we are having a hard time concentrating the energy into the space.

Which leads to our biggest loss: control. Originally, anybody involved would have been invested in the #90for90 project, everyone from the bar runner to the presenters. Right now, there are too many parts that we have no say over.

But, like I said earlier, it is early in our journey. We will figure it out.

WHAT NEXT



None of the struggles I mentioned above take away from what has been an amazing first week of DTLAB. Opening night was full and full of love, with our speech-to-text transcribing bar conversations. The INT/EXT schedule on Saturday was arguably one of the greatest panel and readings I've ever experienced, with Luis J. Rodriguez, Jessica Ceballos, Chris Anthony, Douglas Kearney, Jen Hofer, Amarnath Ravva, Stalina Villarreal, and Wendy C. Ortiz. And on Sunday, the

HOME/SPACE reading was raucous fun, curated by Shana Nys Dambrot and featuring Eames Demetrios, Heidi Johnson, Shannon Constantine Logan, Mike Sonksen, and Milo Martin. We then continued with PUBLISH!, with making books, with introducing ourselves a little, and books have been sold at a good clip. And the premiere of our Drunken Masters series was a beautiful success, with Jervey Tervalon and Gary Phillips giving great feedback and telling crazy stories.

We *are*, however, looking forward to our one day break on 4th of July.



But what *really* is next, I mean, after the **#90for90** has wrapped?

I don't know. But one thing that has been buzzing around inside my head again is that old dream, that *big* dream, of having our own bookstore/office/think tank/performance/bar space where not just Writ Large Press, but many of our artist, activist, organizer, educator, neighborhood friends can share and develop a better future together.

That would be what's next.

DTLAB #90for90 Calendar

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