

# A Conversation With...

## Robert De Niro

Actor and hotelier

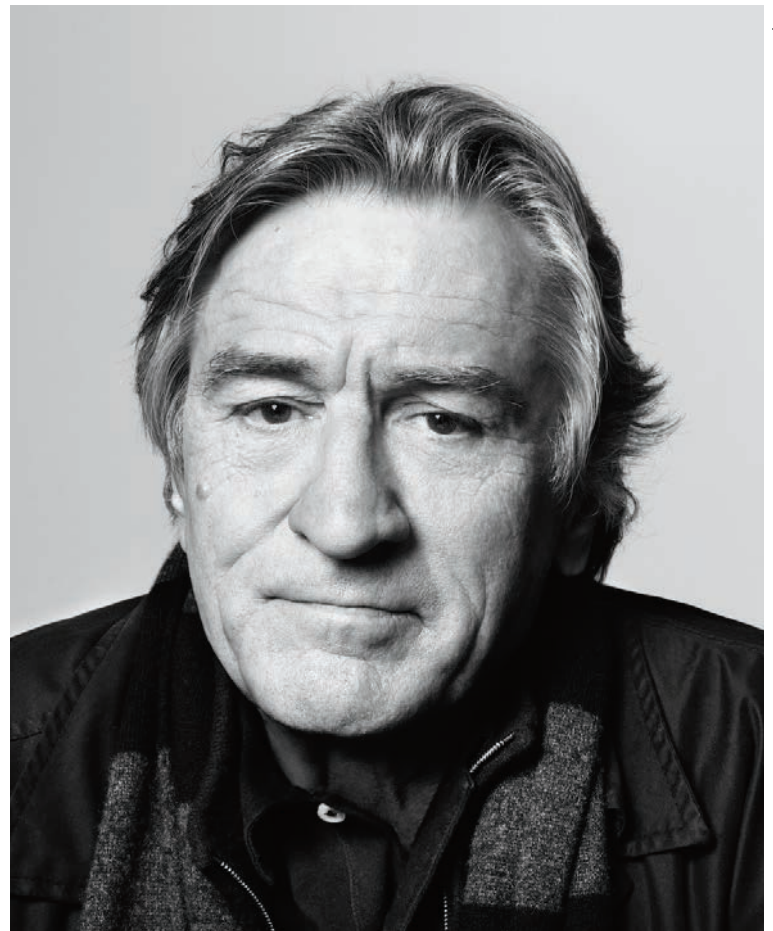
BY ROBIN ROCKEY

**R**obert De Niro built his reputation portraying a range of intense and passionate characters, from a paranoid war veteran in *Taxi Driver*, to an explosive boxer in *Raging Bull*, to a loving father consumed by gambling in *Silver Linings Playbook*. In his latest true-life role as hotelier and restaurateur, the actor channels his personal passions for travel and food. Enamored with chef Nobu Matsuhisa's eponymous Beverly Hills restaurant, De Niro partnered with the Japanese chef and with film producer Meir Teper to build a network of 27 Nobu Restaurants over the past decade, pausing to launch the Greenwich Hotel in New York in 2008. A line of Nobu Hotels is next, planned for destinations around the globe. The first, Nobu Hotel Caesars Palace, a sleek yet comfortable East-meets-West-style sanctuary designed to evoke feelings of home, debuted in Las Vegas in February 2013 and now serves as a beacon of tranquility in the frenzied center of the Strip. Nobu Hotel Riyadh in Saudi Arabia is set to open in April. *Westways* caught up with De Niro in the penthouse of the Vegas property, where he revealed the source of his inspiration, as well as his secrets for keeping it real.

**What sparked your interest in hospitality?** I've stayed in so many hotels around the world, and I always thought it would be fun to establish hotels in different locations, different climates, and so on. I spent 10 years of my life going around in each one and developing an idea of what I would do if I could do anything I wanted. Obviously, that's hard. That's not easy to do at all. But I owned the land next to the [Tribeca] Film Center and I thought, well, if I can't get an addition to the film center, then

I'll establish a small hotel [the Greenwich Hotel]. And that's what happened.

**What was the impetus for Nobu Hotels?** A lot of hotels were asking to put in Nobu Restaurants. My business partners and I started thinking, if we're getting all these requests, why don't we just do hotels ourselves? So then every time we got an offer like that, we would say, "No, we plan to open our own hotels." We just put it out there. And then Meir [Teper] ran into the people he



knows at Caesars Palace, and they had a conversation, and that's how it started.

**Have the skills you've developed while acting, like being sensitive to others, translated well to the hotel business?** To be sensitive, empathetic, yeah, you have to be. All I do is this: I look at something. I feel something. I experience something. I say, "Well, this is right" or "This is not right." And if I don't like something, I know other people aren't going to like it either. It's in the details—you have to try to make everything as nice, comfortable, and aesthetically pleasing as possible. It's also about money—the balance and the economics of it. In the long run, it will pay off to have something nice, instead of taking a shortcut, which people will notice. Whether they notice it consciously, in their periphery, or unconsciously, they'll notice something that is cheesy. People do tend to notice

the little things and they appreciate them.

**When traveling, is there anything special you always carry with you?** [Points to his wedding ring] This.

**Fame seems difficult for many folks to navigate. How do you stay grounded?** You know, I watch some people that have just become well known, and some that are getting more famous, and I just wish 'em luck. The worst thing is that it doesn't last forever. Whether you're an actor, a singer, someone that becomes famous in business, or whatever, you have to stop and think for a minute. Some people think they're the only thing that's happening, and you have to be very careful when you think you're the best. Because there's no such thing. Everybody's dispensable. You've got to remind yourself of that. Be decent with people and try and do the right thing. **W**

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