

LODGING

STRAIGHT TALK

AH&LA Chairman *Ron Vlasic*
SEES BIG THINGS AHEAD
FOR THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

HOW WASHINGTON WILL
HELP OR HINDER
YOUR BUSINESS IN 2013



60-SECOND PROFILE

HOUSE MUSIC

DJ Bijal Panwala is the visionary behind the music-centric Hotel BPM

At 29 years old, Bijal Panwala, also known as DJ Bijal, already has an impressive resume under his belt. In 2005, he was named a "Next Big DJ" by MTV and quickly shot to fame as a mixtape artist and radio host with shows on AOL Radio and Sirius Satellite Radio. Panwala, who was born in Gujarat, India, developed a cult following in the hip-hop world and has worked with artists such as Akon, Ne-Yo, and Bone Crusher. But now, the music mogul has a different job title to add to his list of accomplishments—hotel owner.

Last September, Panwala opened the Hotel BPM, a 76-room boutique hotel in Brooklyn's Sunset Park neighborhood. The BPM—the name stands for "Beats Per Minute"—is a unique, lifestyle property where the guest experience is controlled by the music and entertainment offerings at the hotel. When booking, a guest can make a song request that will be played over the building's sound system during his or her stay. Each room is equipped with speakers so guests can tune into the hotel's playlist, which is personally selected by Bijal, or listen to the live DJ events that often take place in the hotel's lobby lounge. For the risk-taking entrepreneur, opening the hotel was a career progression that made sense.

"I was trying to figure out what my next move was," says Panwala. "I didn't really think that clothing or something like that would be an option for me. I just said, 'I'm going to give this a shot and put together a hotel that celebrates my passion for music and see what happens.'"

So, Panwala gathered a group of investors and decided to take the plunge and build the hotel from the ground up. The project was not without its challenges, and the opening of the boutique property, which was originally scheduled for May 2012, was delayed for several

months due to design changes and permit issues.

"There was definitely a learning curve," says Panwala. "As the hotel was being built, I was learning and creating. Like a writer or producer I was putting together the song, and tweaked things as I went along. I tried to work with a lot of experienced people."

"By DJing and traveling and spending so much time in so

(CLOSE UP)

looking in Brooklyn

favorites: nu-metal; Jay-Z

POSITION: Founder, Hotel BPM RESIDENCE: New Jersey, currently

ACTIVITIES: Playing Xbox LAST MOVIE SEEN: *The Avengers*

HOTEL MUST-HAVES: Good TV channel lineup; Home to play music

many different hotels, I knew what I was looking for as a guest," Panwala adds. "There wasn't really a hotel that was made for people like me—where I could be casual and be myself." He made sure guests could plug in their personal devices and stream their own music in their rooms and each guest receives copies of music-industry magazines such as *Rolling Stone* and *Vibe* so they can keep up-to-date on groundbreaking artists and events.

Panwala says that since opening, the reaction from guests has been remarkably positive, and he sees the hotel reaching a larger demographic than he originally anticipated.

"We get music-lovers, DJs, and artists, but we also get families that come and enjoy the hotel," he says. "It's very cool to see that we're getting a wide range of guests and that everyone is really loving it."

And although Hotel BPM and Panwala are both relatively new to the lodging industry, Panwala says that he has plans to grow the brand in select urban markets that have strong music scenes and several concert and event venues, such as Miami and Los Angeles.

"My ultimate goal is to have at least a few more BPMs," says Panwala. "I think we're on the right track because everyone is really embracing the culture of the hotel." •



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