

Branding LDV

An Interview with John Meadow,
Co-Founder and Principal, LDV Hospitality



American Cut in Tribeca, New York

EDITORS' NOTE John Meadow's LDV Hospitality is a New York City-based independent restaurant group that owns and operates its own restaurant brands, manages and develops hotel food and beverage operations, and partners with chefs and entrepreneurs to facilitate the development of new brands. After graduating from Cornell University School of Hotel Administration in 2002, Meadow's first job was as Food & Beverage Manager at the Plaza Hotel. After a year in that position, he partnered with entrepreneur and restaurateur Curt Huegel to open Local West in midtown Manhattan. Stemming from the success of this first spot, Meadow opened Gin Lane in 2006, which would become Scarpetta two years later when he teamed up with celebrity chef Scott Conant. LDV Hospitality would go on to open multiple other Scarpetta locations in Miami at the Fontainebleau Hotel, in Toronto within the Thompson Hotel, in Los Angeles within the Montage Beverly Hills Hotel, and in Las Vegas at The Cosmopolitan. Additionally, LDV opened wine bar D.O.C.G. in 2010. In 2009, Meadow opened Lugo Caffè. The next year, they opened Lucy's Cantina Royale in the same Madison Square Garden neighborhood. He then teamed with superstar chef Sam Hazen to relaunch the Michelin-starred Veritas. In January 2011, Meadow and Huegel merged all of their restaurants and subsidiaries to form one partnership as LDV Hospitality (ldvhospitality.com).



John Meadow

Since the official formation of LDV in 2011, the company opened three new restaurant properties in Revel Resort in Atlantic City in the Spring of 2012: American Cut with Iron Chef Marc Forgione, Azure with chef Alain Allegretti, and the first expansion of Lugo, opening Lugo Italian. Also in 2012, LDV Hospitality partnered with nightlife veteran Amy Sacco and launched the Bungalow- No.8 brand in New York's Meatpacking District. In January 2013, LDV opened three food and beverage properties in the Gale South Beach including Dolce Italian, Rec Room, and The Regent Cocktail Club. Soon after, in February 2013, LDV Hospitality opened Corso Coffee, an Italian style coffee bar with a New York ambiance in the Theater District of Manhattan. Along with the creation of Corso came the launch of LDV Imports, a wholesaler of Corso Coffee and the Italian imported Anéri Tricaffè espresso.

LDV Hospitality opened the flagship location of American Cut in the heart of Tribeca in September 2013, the group's biggest opening to date. At the beginning of 2014, LDV reopened the

Diamond Horseshoe at the Paramount Hotel in New York City and this Spring, the group will open Barchetta in partnership with Chef David Pasternack in Chelsea, New York.

What made you feel there was an opportunity for LDV and that you could differentiate in the space?

At the core, LDV is always about what happens in the four walls of a restaurant and creating great restaurant experiences. We own and operate each concept and are involved in every aspect from interior design to menu creation to execution.

The common theme is that every restaurant starts with a vision and a charming nostalgic notion of creating a specific type of dining experience; we try to bring that to life. We always look at this charming era of yesteryear's classics and make them relevant for contemporary living in the current time.

With American Cut, for instance, the premise was to take the original throwback of the American fine-dining restaurant model and enhance it, while being respectful of the classic and making it relevant for today. We ended up with something we call the New American Steak Restaurant as opposed to the old-school steakhouse.

This approach is the point of differentiation for LDV.

How much opportunity is there to expand within the American Cut brand?

In terms of growth, we have thankfully been able to foster a fantastic motivated culture of promotion whereby our line-level employees are becoming managers, general managers, or regional directors. The more we do that, the more it allows us to grow while ultimately offering our customers a feeling of a truly independent and soulful restaurant.

In terms of American Cut, there are certain core markets that can support a \$120 average check and others that can't. It's about maintaining the magic and unique feel of each – where architecture meets a more gritty, industrial, rock-and-roll feel. This is how we define the sensibility of the new American fine-dining restaurant for 2014. Provided we find the perfect set-up, we look forward to opening more of these restaurants.

Will the nightclub aspect continue to be a major focus, and are there other natural extensions for LDV?

At our core, we'll always be independent restaurateurs. But while most of the market's approach to nightlife is big electronic music DJs, we're playing vinyl rock-and-roll records from the '70s. So it's a parallel to American Cut in how that redefines the American fine-dining experience.

Is it important to build awareness of the LDV brand or is the focus more on the individual brands?

During the past few years, we have increased our focus to connect and market all of our brands under the LDV umbrella. Fundamentally, our approach is consistent across the board, and we want our guests to experience our world throughout the day. It's not about controlling their social or dining life – it's about offering them the opportunity to engage with us and allowing us the opportunity to do what we're passionate about.

We are now branding LDV from a business approach to a consumer one – before it was just business to business. Most developers knew what we owned, but the dining public was never marketed to. In the past few years, our marketing results have been astounding, as has the employee morale as they feel they are really part of something. This has, in turn, allowed us to retain good people.

Are metrics in place to track the service standards you set for yourself?

Training is the single most critical component to maintaining consistency and standards, and the notion of taking good people and turning them into great servers is everything. It's a simple enough concept, but it's also extraordinarily difficult. We compensate and reward our employees significantly; we have one of the best teams in hospitality, which is the only reason that we're able to grow.

We have rolled out a very successful shopping program with Coyle Hospitality, which allows us to set true quantitative benchmarks for the service experience. To communicate that across various venues to all of the general managers has been an extraordinary opportunity.

To apply a quantitative approach to the magic of hospitality is contradictory and challenging. At the end of the day, we're a human business with a human approach, which means those numbers only drive our decision-making so much. We go from the gut and the heart. We communicate with each other, and that is how we create our service experience. However, we have been able to apply certain structured processes to gauge the success of our execution of each step of service, which has been extremely productive for us. ●