



# Stephen Martyak

## Interior designer and founder, studioTYAK

He's a Southern boy with a winning smile that brightens a room—one, quite possibly, he's already made pretty as a picture. Martyak's three year-old design firm has already been responsible for some of the most striking restaurant interiors in Boston and beyond: from gay restaurateur Brian Piccini's sexy South End steakhouse, Boston Chops, to Fenway's country roadhouse-inspired Loretta's Last Call. Armed with a master's in architecture from Savannah College of Art and Design, a top-tier university in the industry, his inimitable style and serious expertise keep him in high demand—whether he's transforming Downtown Boston's Battery Park from a bro-heavy sports bar to something sleeker, or working with the Equinox brand of high-end health clubs to juice up their juice bars.

Martyak's Southern charm also makes him a friendly face on the social scene, and you'll often find him out and about in support of Fenway Health. He sits on the steering committee of Fenway's Young Leaders Council and co-chaired March's Men's Event, which raised over \$630,000 for the non-profit LGBT health-care institution.

### *What was your first design project?*

When I was in high school my parents were kind of debating whether to sell the house and move to another neighborhood, or renovate. And that was my first project: a full-scale renovation of the first floor! Eight years later, when I graduated from grad school, their Christmas gift was to design the second floor. So my parents' entire house has been touched by my design!

### *Where do you get your inspiration?*

It comes from all over. For Loretta's, it was my childhood growing up in Nashville. I tapped into six-year old Stephen, listening to Reba

McEntire. I used my knowledge of country music. It's crazy to think country music from the '80s is slightly vintage at this point, but I used all that knowledge and channeled it into the space. As for Boston Chops, Brian and I had been acquainted through mutual friends. He had identified a very clear concept. He's quite a visionary, and in that situation it was really about taking his vision and making it come together in a cohesive way. He wanted that sexy steakhouse that was going to appeal to the gayborhood, but we've also found it's very appealing to the suburbanites too.

*Are there ways in which being gay affects your work?*

I don't really think about it. As a designer, me being gay is probably

more of an asset than a negative. Don't get me wrong. Depending on the client, you can still get into an old boys' club kind of situation. I think if I was still living in the South it might be more of an issue. But in Massachusetts, I feel like we get extra style points. There's that whole assumption that we have taste and know what's hot.

*What was your coming out experience like?*

I didn't come out until I was 20. I have the greatest parents in the world, but that said, when I first came out to my dad, he hugged me and the first words out of his mouth were "we love you, but we're going to fix you." That wasn't the easiest thing to hear. At the same time, it gave me extra fire: I wasn't going to let this part of me slow

me down. Anyway, after a comedy of errors with a Christian therapist they forced me to go to, and hearing the things he said, they just kind of said, "this is a bunch of baloney." Eleven years later, they're totally supportive. They were even at the Men's Event with me.

*Why are you so committed to Fenway Health?*

Fenway is such an important organization for our community. There's so much amazing research and advocacy going on, much of which people don't even really know about. I grew up in the church, and giving back was really important to me. As an adult I wanted to find an organization that I really wanted to support, and I'm thrilled to help in any way that I can. ☐

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