

# The Boston Globe

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## At the Sinclair: musician as muse

Justin Townes Earle inspired the design of the club. So what does he think of it?

By Rachel Raczka  
GLOBE STAFF

Just a few hours before he took the stage Sunday at the Sinclair nightclub, Justin Townes Earle was backstage with designer Stephen Martyak. Both were born in Nashville and share an affinity for Kiehl's skincare products and a dislike for shirts without collars. Both men are well-versed in some of the best antique shops in the country.

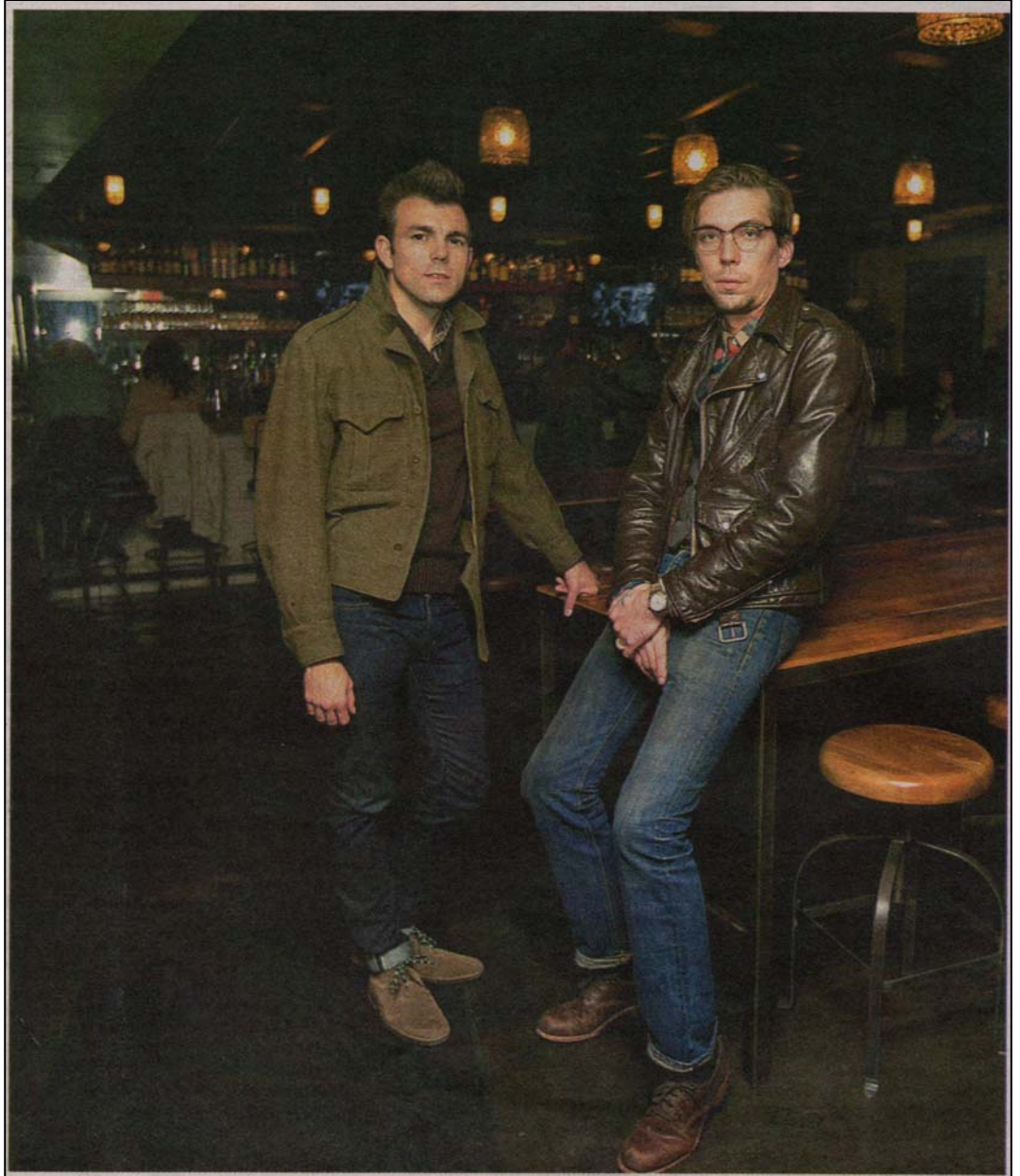
For all their similarities, the two had never met face-to-face. Nevertheless, Martyak has, well, a perspective on Earle — the musician son of singer-songwriter Steve Earle — that goes beyond that of the average fan. The Fenway-based designer was brought onto the Sinclair's team in 2011 to create a space that bridged music and dining, hold the clichés. A promotional headshot of Earle, wearing a pair of thick red German-made specs and layers of flannel and leather, was dropped into Martyak's hands and almost instantly a muse was declared.

"That photograph captured everything," said Martyak, 29. "It was American yet not in a hokey way. The muted reds, blues, and neutral tones felt lived-in and real. That was the goal. As I started to develop the design, I wanted all the materials to be authentic. Reclaimed wood that was not heavily lacquered over, raw steel wherever we could."

Martyak tacked the phrase "What Would Justin Townes Earle Do?" on his planning board, loosely interpreting the musician's persona, both onstage and off, into his design. As the space evolved, Earle played a valuable part, as did the ongoing list of indie artists the booker, The Bowery Presents Boston, planned to bring to town.

The photo of Earle hangs between the bathroom doors, in the hallway connecting the restaurant to the venue. The placement came at the cheeky suggestion of Earle's manager.

Earle, 31, took a good look at the photograph — and the club, in Harvard Square — and told us what he thought.



YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Boston designer Stephen Martyak (left) with musician Justin Townes Earle at the Sinclair.

**Q.** This space was designed as a reflection of your style. Do you think it does that?  
**A.** Yeah, definitely. The colors have kind of an industrial look with the ceilings and I always said my dream house would be a shut-down warehouse instead of an actual house that looks like any other.

**Q.** You said you're good friends with designer Billy Reid, how did that come to be?

**A.** He's one of my best friends. We met because I wanted a suit made for the Americana Awards about four years ago . . . I was just like, "I was thinking about a real suit, like a suit suit . . . maybe a tuxedo." And Billy got really excited because he's made clothes that bands will wear but they'll wear a shirt and maybe a jacket or a pair of his boots but I was really the first musician he had that would wear everything.

**Q.** Are you wearing his stuff now?

**A.** No. I'm wearing Wallace & Barnes, Rag & Bone, and Imogene + Willie.

**Q.** All good names.

**A.** And Wolverine. [Points to shoes.]

**Q.** And you're a fit model for Billy Reid?

**A.** Yeah, I am skinny and tall and I do fill out clothes a little better than your average male model, but I'm still like a clothes hanger. He said me and Gillian Welch were his inspirations for making clothing.

**Q.** What do you have on the road with you?

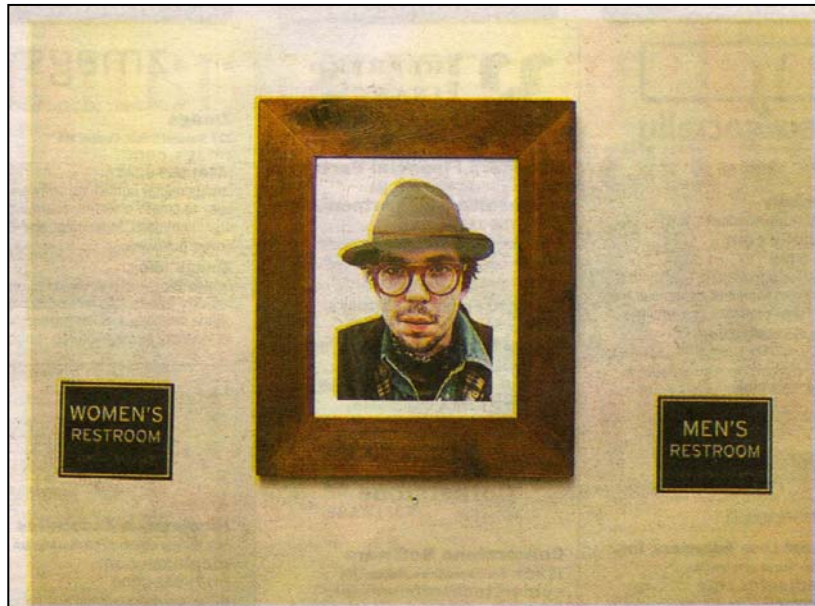
**A.** Gotta have a baseball glove for entertainment. I use Kiehl's stuff exclusively. They have one called Facial Fuel for men and this retexturing face scrub made from white clay from the Dead Sea.

**Q.** In the photo Stephen has hanging by the bathrooms, you're wearing a pair of red specs. You don't have them on today. Do you still have them?

**A.** I have them in pieces. I took the arms off of them. I'm trying to find a pair of the old-fashioned arms where they wrap around the ear. They're great for stage. Those would not stay on my face . . . they sat awkward on top of your nose. After a while they're not very pleasurable to wear but I imagine with some adjustments they'll be fine. I wore them for a long time despite the way they hurt because I liked them.

**Q.** The things we do for fashion.

**A.** Well, I'm glad that I don't have to walk in heels.



YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

The picture of Justin Townes Earle that inspired the Sinclair's look now hangs at the nightclub.

## Tunes by design

Josh Bhatti of The Bowery Presents Boston created a playlist for Stephen Martyak to jam to during the Sinclair design process:

**The Perfect Space** Avett Brothers  
**Occupy Spotlight** Milkman  
**Shake It Out** Florence and the Machine  
**Heavy Cross** Gossip  
**The Love You Love** The Walkmen  
**Midnight at the Movies** Justin Townes Earle  
**The Sweet Part of the City** The Hold Steady  
**I and Love and You** Avett Brothers  
**Kick Drum Heart** Avett Brothers  
**Revelry** Milkman

RACHEL RACZKA

**Q.** You know a lot about clothing construction and fashion; is that something you ever thought of going into?

**A.** I've kind of been toying with the idea of opening some kind of lifestyle store. I'm really tired of [merchandise] and people don't want to pay \$20 for another American Apparel shirt. I'm going to attempt to put out fairly high-end merch, nothing that has names scrawled across it, nothing written on the front of it. I have a symbol similar to Ralph Lauren's Polo guy that I'm going to put on T-shirts.

**Q.** What does it look like?

**A.** It's the seal of Davidson County, Tenn. It's a Native American male standing in a field, holding a skull.

**Q.** What else do you think you'll sell?

**A.** Me and Dan Auerbach [of the Black Keys] talk antiques a good bit. His father's an antique collector and so is he so it might be good in the future for us to get involved in some kind of antique trade. Antiques are like gold. People love old furniture and things in their houses and it's always been that way.

**Q.** Where do you shop?

**A.** I mapped out hundreds, possibly thousands, of antiques stores all across the country. I go down to Florence, Alabama, where they dump ancient hotel furniture.

**Q.** You were one of GQ's best dressed men in the world a couple years back.

**A.** Yeah, crazy.

**Q.** Did you have to step up your style after that or do you think you plateaued?

**A.** My style is just like my music. It's not ever changing but always bringing new things in. I don't dress like I did when I was in the top 25 men.

**Q.** Have you gotten to shop at all since you've been here?

**A.** I only went to that [CambridgeSide] Galleria Mall place and I ended up saying

"Get out of my way, kid" a bunch. But I got a Bose speaker yesterday and had to go back today because I thought I packed enough underwear and socks but evidently I miscounted and had to go to J.Crew. But my favorite store in the world and absolutely favorite designer is Ralph Lauren and the RRL store. I own so much of that line and it will put a dent in your pocket-book.

**Q.** But you'll never find it anywhere else.

**A.** You won't and I have several pieces of RRL, old ones from the early '90s. I go in that store and there's not a thing I wouldn't wear . . . except for some reason he makes a lot of skinny jeans and I don't understand that.

**Q.** You like a straight cut?

**A.** I do, and I don't like seeing guys in skinny jeans because they need to realize that the waist and crotch was cut for a woman which hopefully you're not hung like a woman. I [also] don't like shirts without collars and I don't really wear T-shirts. My grandfather always said to wear long-sleeve shirts and if you get hot, roll the sleeves up. . . . My wife is pretty well "sleeved" in the right arm and has pieced together tattoos diagonal across her body. When she was 11, she was the national US water-skiing champion and then she did freestyle half-pipe snowboarding when she was a teenager and then started racing Super-G. Her form is absolutely stunning. Now she's a gyrotonics teacher so she's 6'3" with an amazing body and those tattoos. And I'm 6'4".

**Q.** Tall couple.

**A.** It was kind of an immediate thing. We met four months before we spent one week together in Texas and two weeks together in Salt Lake. We got married in Tahoe about 2½ weeks ago.

**Q.** What did you wear?

**A.** We were both wearing blue jeans and flannel shirts. We just decided to do it because our families tend to complicate our lives, and we thought this is our day and has nothing to do with anybody else and we shouldn't have to run around on our wedding day and take care of people, which is exactly what would have happened. I believe it's not about the other people. I think a lot of women want weddings . . . but it gets completely out of control. People are spending ridiculous amounts of money on weddings. Go buy a house. Take a vacation.

Rachel Raczka can be reached at [rachel.raczka@globe.com](mailto:rachel.raczka@globe.com).