

October 29, 2010

EBAY FIND: OWN LITTLE ITALY INN FOR A DAY

New Year's Eve at Porto Vista
—VIP treatment and parties

LORI WEISBERG • U-T

The owner of a boutique hotel in downtown's Little Italy is banking on a high roller or just someone with money to burn to buy his property for New Year's Eve — on eBay.

If you're willing to ante up as much as \$160,000 (the hotel's "buy it now" price), you can throw the New Year's party of your dreams, complete with a VIP shindig for 50, rooftop gathering for 300 that includes a DJ and open bar, and overnight stays in the hotel's 189 rooms and suites.

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The 189-room Porto Vista Hotel in San Diego's Little Italy neighborhood has a rooftop deck that can be used for a party of 300 guests. PORTO VISTA HOTEL

HOTEL • Experts say auction is unique marketing idea

FROM C1

The management team for the Porto Vista Hotel came up with the novel auction idea while brainstorming plans for New Year's Eve. Owner Moe Siry quickly embraced the promotion.

"Our hotel is owned by

one person, and as we were brainstorming about what New Year's Eve is all about and what it feels like to be an owner and to have your own VIP area and to have everybody know your name and be treated like an owner, we thought, 'What if we allowed someone else to own our ho-

tel on New Year's?'" said Debi Besmer, principal strategist with Above 30,000 Feet, a hospitality firm that manages the Porto Vista.

"The new owner would have a large banner sign with their name on it, and we'd actually have custom-designed uniforms tailored for that period, and they'd have their own website."

Hospitality experts say kudos to whomever came up with the idea, which they say is a savvy promotional scheme, regardless of whether the auction proves to be successful.

"It's a clever marketing ploy, one I've not heard being done before," said Carl Winston, director of the hospitality and tourism management program at San Diego State University. "They got their name out there, and you know what they say, 'any publicity is good publicity.' This certainly is not bad publicity. I'm impressed."

No question, the auction is an innovative tool for widely publicizing a boutique property that does not have a high-profile chain brand behind it, said San Diego hotel consultant Jerry Morrison.

"Personally, I think whoever came up with the idea is brilliant," he said. "They'll have a lot of people looking at the site and the property. They could sell out the house

on New Year's Eve to someone who can have their own private party, and I suspect there are people who really would be interested in doing that. I've never heard of this before."

Besmer says the hotel has received a few phone and e-mail inquires about the auction, with some individuals asking about the possibility of selling rooms or tickets to their own event on New Year's Eve if they were to become the owner.

Of course, there's a real possibility no one will come up with the big bucks to own the Porto Vista for a day, though the ownership is willing to part with the place for less than \$160,000. Besmer, though, won't reveal that magic number.

While there have been a number of hits on the auction link, there were no bidders who had yet posted a minimum opening bid of \$1,000 when Besmer last checked Thursday afternoon, she said. The hotel auction will remain online through Nov. 26.

"We do have a plan B," Besmer acknowledged. "If it doesn't sell, we'll have our own concept and have our New Year's Eve party. But it would be my goal to just have someone take this off us."

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