

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## **An Artist's Sweet Soiree**

By MARSHALL HEYMAN

One of the ways to make a party in this town a must-attend is a site-specific venue your guests have never really experienced. It's not easy, one would guess, to go off the beaten path. It's much less time-consuming to simply rent out Cipriani or the Mandarin Oriental or the Waldorf-Astoria and throw your party there.



**CREATIVETIME**

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If there's one thing Creative Time, a local nonprofit that produces public art projects, knows, it's that just like in the real-estate business, it's about location, location, location.

For this year's gala, which honored the artist Julian Schnabel, the president of Creative Time, Anne Pasternak, "literally looked at dozens of sites," she said. "I wanted to find a place that was right for Julian."

Typically, when you're honoring an artist, she explained, "maybe you auction some of his art, and he gives a speech." But Creative Time has always been about more than that. "I always like to make the artist happy," she said, so she needed to find a place that was, as they say, "off the chain."

Just when she was about to throw in the towel, Jed Valentas, a real-estate developer and a Creative Time board member, suggested the Domino Sugar Factory, which he'd recently purchased. It hadn't been used in a decade, but the 55,000-square-foot space will soon, reportedly, become an urban farm and a bicycling course, among other things.

"Other people said, 'Ooh, ick,'" recalled Ms. Pasternak. "The floor was covered with between 4 and 6 inches of molasses. But I thought, No, we're doing it here. This place is going to be the answer to my dreams."

Mr. Valentas powerwashed the space between January and March; electricity had to be put in and a lot of other work had to be done to make it "suitable, comfortable and legal," Ms. Pasternak said. And on Tuesday, about 600 people—200 more than attended last year's gala—ventured to Williamsburg to raise nearly \$1.1 million. In contrast to the stark locale, which featured much of Mr. Schnabel's work, the evening had a rustic Italian theme.

You know, there were ripped pieces of bread on the table to complement the menu, which was developed by Mario Battali and included kale and lentil salads and several pasta courses. Alcohol was provided by Patron and Ruffino, which served wine during dinner and prosecco during the cocktail hour.

Mr. Schnabel brought much of his family in support and introduced a performance by Laurie Anderson, which was especially effective in this sparse starkness.

"I really hope you don't talk and you just listen to her play," said Mr. Schnabel, who had been bestowed with a crown of ivy. "If you listen, I'm sure you'll learn something."

Attendees ran the gamut from Marina Rust Connor to Theophilus London and Marisa Tomei. The wide swath of crowd suggested that the organization has reached a kind of tipping point, one Ms. Pasternak said was achieved by a better media awareness of Creative Time's projects in the last year or so, the honoring of Mr. Schnabel and the unusual venue.

"Every year they get a little bit better and people are excited about the initiative," she added. "But I think this year's set the bar on how to honor an artist. I'm the first person to say when we've done something wrong, but I think it was unforgettable."

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