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Lights, Camera, Brooklyn!

By Glenn Collins



Hollywood on the Hudson, it is not.

In truth, the new \$118 million Steiner Studios overlooks the East River. But the movie factory's growing presence on the Brooklyn waterfront is starting to produce ripples far beyond that borough.

Angel Franco/The New York Times

Steiner Studios even has palm trees. Soon, it will have Spike Lee, shooting "Inside Man."

The 280,000-square-foot studio with its five stages will not even be finished until the winter. But already there is a measure of pride in blasé, forget-about-it Brooklyn, which, despite its rocketing condo prices and feisty, Manhattan-is-Satan esprit, still smarts from being relegated to a laugh line in so many Hollywood movies.



After all, when the movie version of "The Producers: The Movie Musical" started production at Steiner last November, Nathan Lane, Matthew Broderick, Uma Thurman, Will Ferrell and Mel Brooks traversed local streets - though invisible behind smoked limo glass. And even Brooklynites who would rather be banished to the Bronx than be caught gawking at marquee names were peering over the walls of the studio's home in the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Angel Franco/The New York Times

A sound stage at the new Steiner Studios at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, which is the latest addition to the city's studios catering to film and TV producers. "Fur," starring Robert Downey Jr. and Nicole Kidman, is being shot there now.

Now the cameras are whirring for "Fur," a film about the early life of the photographer Diane Arbus, with Robert Downey Jr. and Nicole Kidman in the lead roles. And since Spike Lee has finally signed a deal to direct "Inside Man" there, Denzel Washington, Clive Owen and Jodie Foster will also be toiling in Brooklyn.

Steiner has joined Kaufman Astoria Studios in Astoria and Silvercup Studios in Long Island City and a collection of smaller studio spaces to form the backbone of New York's thriving film and television-production industry, which pumps billions of dollars a year into the city's economy and provides tens of thousands of jobs.

Steiner's arrival comes at a time when the industry has been blessed "with some very happy coincidences," said Harold L. Vogel of Vogel Capital Management, an independent media analyst. Most important, he said, in January the city began an incentive program to induce more film and television producers to shoot in the city. One provision offers a 15 percent city and state tax credit for films that complete 75 percent of their studio work in New York.

"Without the tax benefits, the horrible truth is, this movie would probably be made in Kabul, or you know, wherever it's the cheapest place in the world for us to shoot," said Mr. Brooks, the creator of "The Producers," a hugely successful musical and now a \$50 million movie, which was shot entirely in the city.

Steiner has also benefited from a weakened dollar, Mr. Vogel said, which makes it cheaper now to shoot foreign productions in New York. And a strong Canadian dollar could reduce the number of so-called runaway productions, which use New York for exterior scenes, but shoot the bulk of a film more cheaply in Toronto or Vancouver.

"It's amazing to see this up and running, considering that recently it was just dirt," said Douglas C. Steiner, the chairman of Steiner Studios, referring to the weed-choked, rubble-strewn lot that preceded Hollywood East.

Steiner is 90 percent complete. Still under construction are a 100-seat screening room, a 200-seat cafe for workers and visitors (to be named Cafe Isabel, after Mr. Steiner's 9-year-old daughter) and Stage Six, a third-floor special-events space for wrap parties, weddings and bar mitzvahs that can accommodate 500 people. An open-air fourth-floor rooftop space with an enclosed glass pavilion is also planned.

So far, the city's craft unions like what they see. "Steiner has been a home run for us, and it's made New York more competitive," said John R. Ford, president of Local 52 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, which represents more than 2,000 electricians, sound technicians and other craft workers in the New York metropolitan region. "Often, producers with big films had no place to go, and through the years we lost a lot of that type of work."

Steiner also has something that, while unglamorous, is vital to making movies in New York - a 1,000-vehicle parking lot. On peak production days, 500 to 800 vehicles belonging to carpenters, actors, dancers, caterers and technical workers have been parked at Steiner.