



## Hotel New Jersey

'Sex and the City's Michael Knowles film screened in a hotel room will be featured at the New Jersey Film Festival.

By Adam Grybowski

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Filmmaker Michael Knowles will appear at the New Jersey Film Festival to talk about *Room 314*.

A three-week spell of writing propelled actor Michael Knowles, best known for a one-time part on the television show *Sex and the City*, into producing, editing and directing his own independent films. His script for *Room 314* first became a play, then a short film and finally a feature. He's toured the country on the festival circuit for the better part of two years promoting it.

Mr. Knowles, a New Jersey native, will appear Oct. 19 at the New Jersey Film Festival in New Brunswick to discuss *Room 314* after a screening.

The movie tells five self-contained stories that take place in one hotel room. Mr. Knowles wrote each story during one sitting, with no initial thought of characters or plot. The stories poured out of him in the time it takes to have a conversation, he says.

Mr. Knowles writes as a way to understand his own thoughts and emotions, drawing material from personal experience. Although *Room 314* is personally revealing, he says it's not autobiographical.

While he was writing the script for *Room 314*, Mr. Knowles was preparing to propose to his girlfriend. In the movie's opening story, "Nick and Stacey," the two characters wake in *Room 314* after a drunken night together. Stacey doesn't even remember Nick's name. A connection forms while she tries to recollect her memories and Nick reveals his insecurities over his upcoming marriage.

"In hindsight I realize that a lot of the underlying tension and insecurities in the film stem from my own uncertainties and feelings about marriage and relationships," Mr. Knowles said in a press release.

Mr. Knowles studied acting and writing with Tom Noonan, an actor and filmmaker best known for his portrayal of Francis Dollarhyde in *Manhunter*. Mr. Noonan turned traditional writing advice — "write what you know" — on its head, encouraging his students to examine their feelings and write about what they are trying to figure out, like a diarist.

"He was very encouraging to let those feelings be the spark that created your characters," Mr. Knowles says. After spending four years writing scenes as exercises, Mr.

Knowles wanted to write something he could put in front of an audience. He chose to set his script in a single place because it would be easier to produce, deciding on a hotel room.

Room 314 was shot on location in a Freehold hotel room, using digital video, no crew and no external light sources except what the room's lamps provided.

Mr. Knowles and his cast took one day to rehearse each segment of Room 314 and then another to shoot it. He was unsure if the production would work, but felt assured once shooting began, sensing that the actors understood his material. He says the performances are not theatrical and convey natural, honest and real emotions.

The story of Nick and Stacey was first produced as a short film. Mr. Knowles showed it to his friend John Ramos, a former business journalist and options trader. The two met at Crunch Fitness, in New York's West Village, where Mr. Knowles was working as a personal trainer. The pair started a production company, 7A Productions, in 2004, which has produced six short films, two features and one documentary. Mr. Ramos serves as an executive producer and Mr. Knowles generates nearly all of the material.

Room 314 leaves an open door to the fate of Nick and Stacey's relationship, and Mr. Knowles felt compelled to return to their story because he was curious how it would end. He's completed a feature-length script.

Production is on hold while 7A waits for Room 314 and its second feature, One Night, to generate buzz among fans and investors. Room 314, which played limited runs at the Pioneer Theater in New York City and The Living Room Theater in Portland, Ore., has no major distribution deal in the U.S., although the foreign rights were recently sold.