



## "Room" with a view

Jersey filmmaker focuses on characters instead of action

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It's not that Gibbsboro native Michael Knowles has anything against the kind of action-packed shoot-'em-ups that moviegoers adore. It's just that he's more interested in making films on a more intimate scale.

"I'd rather focus on the inner conflicts of characters. That's how I think life really is. The external is a reflection of what's going on internally," says Knowles, 38, whose "Room 314" is scheduled to screen tonight through Sunday at the New Jersey Film Festival at Rutgers University in New Brunswick.

Knowles' entry is a drama that takes place in a nondescript New Jersey hotel room occupied, at various times, by five couples. The movie, which Knowles wrote, directed, produced, photographed, edited and co-stars in, already has made some noise on the festival circuit: It was named best feature at the 2007 Landlocked Film Festival and nominated for best acting ensemble at the Ashland Independent Film Festival.

Not bad for someone who never even thought about show business until he was a senior at Eastern Regional High School.

"It actually started with acting," recalls Knowles, a 1987 graduate of the Voorhees school. "In my senior year, I was talked into auditioning for the senior play, 'Our Town,' by Thornton Wilder. I got the part of Howie Newsome, and really enjoyed the feeling of people paying attention to me onstage."

That led him to New York, where he studied acting and writing for five years with actor Tom Noonan. He ultimately landed roles on such prime-time series as "Law & Order: SVU" and "Sex & The City," and daytime dramas "The Guiding Light" and "As the World Turns."

But filmmaking was, and is, Knowles' first love. In addition to "Room 314," he wrote and directed the 2005 short, "Nick and Stacey," and also did double duty on 2006's "One Night."

As for "Room 314," Knowles cautions against assuming the script is autobiographical.

"All the characters are, in some way (reflections) of how I feel about different things in life," he says. "But the actual details, no."

"I can't say I ever entered a hotel room and wanted to commit suicide. And I'm sure I never entered a hotel room to meet a co-worker and have an affair. But I have had an affair."

Mostly, Knowles views "Room 314" as a "calling card" for the film industry.

"It's (a way) to show people I can write and direct and shoot and edit," he offers. "It's a good way to show people I can tell stories."