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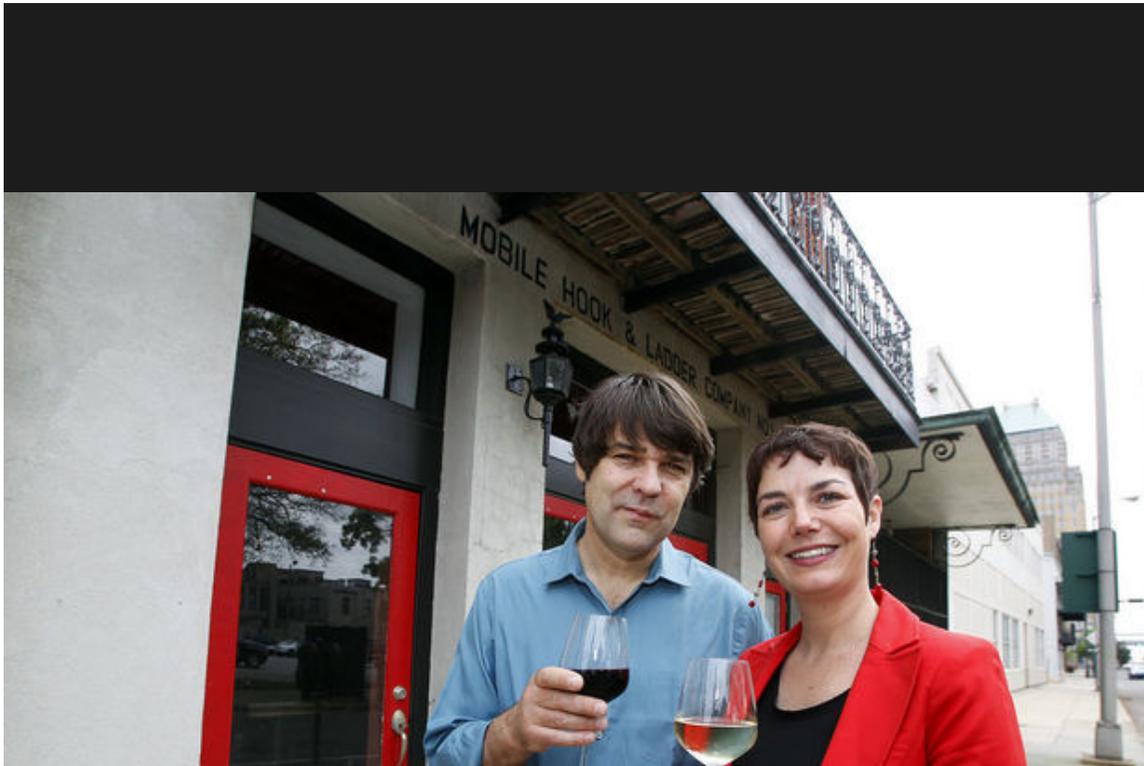
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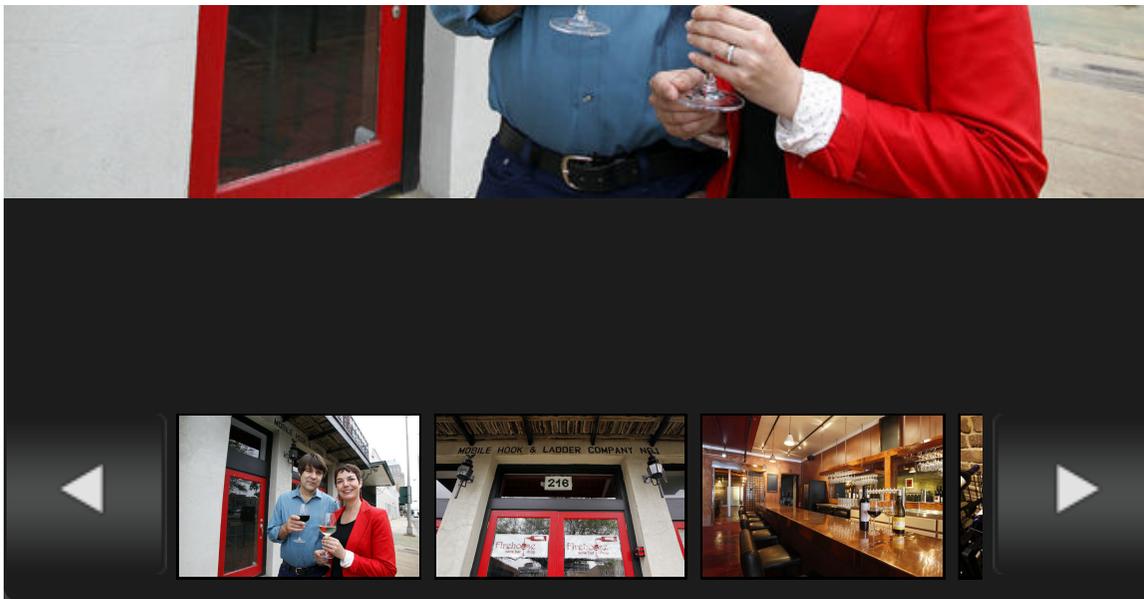


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Former New Yorkers Margo Alderton and Andre Lotz are opening Firehouse Wine Bar & Shop in the historic Mobile Hook and Ladder Co. building on St. Francis Street, just west of Conception Street and a stone's throw from Bienville Square. Photo taken Thursday, April 17, 2014, in downtown Mobile, Ala. (Mike Kittrell/mkittrell@al.com)

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By [Michelle Matthews | mmatthews@al.com](#)

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MOBILE, Alabama – Since they moved their belongings from New York City to Mobile in a U-Haul truck last July,

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Margo Alderton and Andre Lotz have been initiated into everything Mobile, from BayFest to Mardi Gras.

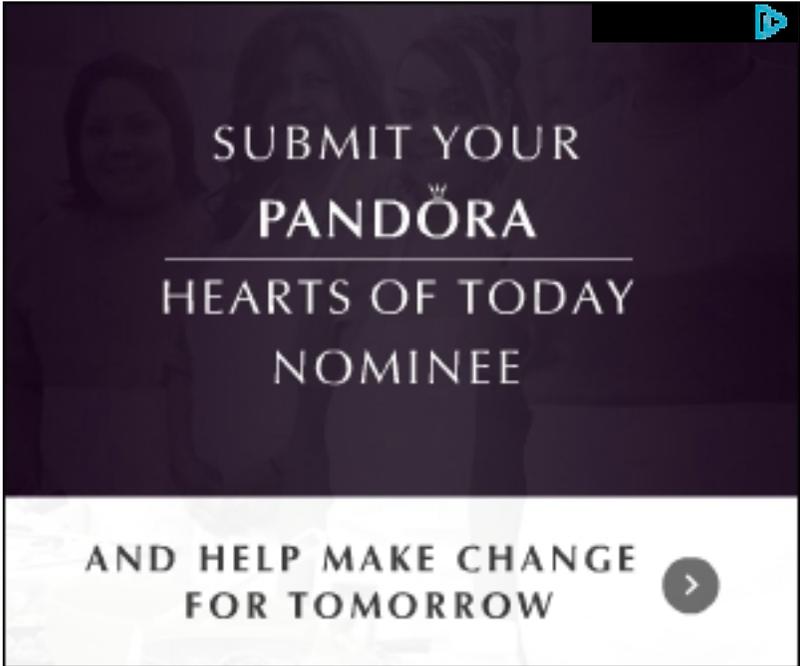
Andre, who is originally from Cape Town, South Africa, has even gone “mud crawling,” as he puts it. His wife, Margo, is puzzled, not sure what he’s talking about for a moment.

“Oh, you mean mud *riding!*” said Jacob Wright, whom the couple has hired to help tend bar at their new venture on St. Francis Street in downtown Mobile.

Firehouse Wine Bar & Shop will officially open next Friday, April 25, in the former Mobile Hook and Ladder Co. building on St. Francis Street, just west of Conception Street and a stone’s throw from Bienville Square.

Firehouse will offer wine and beer “to go or to stay,” said

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The advertisement features a dark background with a faint image of a couple. The text is centered and uses a serif font. A small blue play button icon is in the top right corner. A white bar at the bottom contains the text and a right-pointing arrow icon.

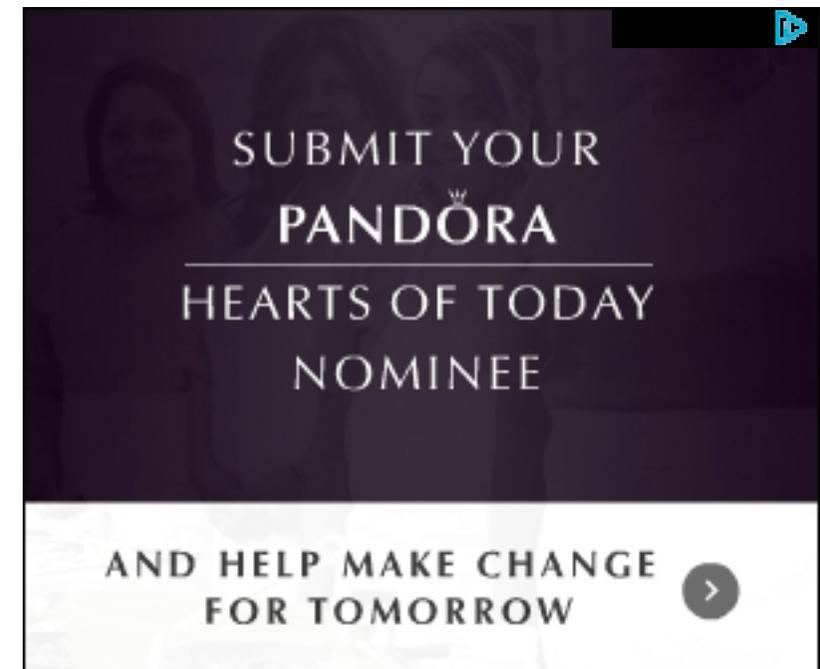
Margo—but with a space as inviting as the one she and her husband have created, who would want to go?

The building is deep and narrow, with an original brick wall along one side as the backdrop for the raised area with racks Andre built to display wines for sale. Here, customers will be able to choose from up to 120 wines, though Margo plans to start off with about half that many labels.

For now, they've hung some pieces from their own collection of artwork above the wine racks, but they hope to add some work by local artists soon, they say. The décor, said Andre, has an industrial edge, yet it manages to be cozy at the same time.

On the opposite wall is a 24-foot, copper-topped bar (Andre spent a week wrapping it himself) and lined with barstools. Light made out of upside-down terra cotta pots cast a soft glow over the bar. Tabletops, sofas and chairs also provide flexible seating options for those who want to relax and enjoy a glass of wine or a beer.

Firehouse will offer some 20 wines by the glass, as well as 12 beers on tap and another 12 to 20 beers for non-wine drinkers.



After working on it for several months, the couple is ready to start serving wine. This summer, they hope to start offering flights of wine, wine tastings and even a tapas menu “with a South African flair,” Margo said.

She thinks Firehouse Wine Bar will provide “a little quieter, more mellow” alternative to the Dauphin Street bar scene, especially on weekends. And she looks forward to foot traffic from business people heading home after work, as well.

“We’ve spent a lot of time thinking about this,” Margo said of opening the wine bar. “We want to offer good wines at affordable prices. We’ll have high-end wines, but we also want to introduce people to regions and vineyards, at affordable prices.”

When the fire station was built in 1886, it was added on to the front of an even older home, which makes up the rear part of the building. The bar leads into the cozy “back room,” which will be available for small parties of up to 25 people or so, Margo said.

‘This is it’

While Andre and Margo aren't sommeliers, they do know and love wine. Andre grew up in South Africa's wine country and has a special interest in wines of the Southern hemisphere, from New Zealand to Chile. The couple married on a vineyard in South Africa six years ago.

They'd been living in New York, where he was as an engineer and she worked in publishing. For a while, they'd known they "wanted to leave New York and go somewhere warmer, somewhere Southern," said Margo.

They discovered Mobile a couple of years ago. Margo had gone to visit her mother in Montgomery, and she took a day trip down to Mobile.

"Margo called me and said, 'You need to come down to Mobile,'" Andre remembered. "The first time we drove down Government Street, I said, 'This is it.'"

They fell in love with the trees and the architecture, they said, and felt more at home than anywhere they'd been in years of traveling. Andre also liked the fact that Mobile is "a port city, an international city," he said. "I think the city has tremendous potential."

Margo had moved to Philadelphia in the early 1990s, “when they were starting to do similar things” with downtown redevelopment. “In six or seven years, I saw it get completely revitalized, which attracted people downtown,” she said.

In Mobile, she said, “It seems like there’s a lot of energy downtown. People are excited about revitalizing the downtown area, and that energy is important.”

“The people are wonderful,” said Andre. “Some of the warmest people in the world, really.”

After that initial visit, Andre and Margo started looking at buildings in downtown Mobile to house a wine shop, with living space upstairs. The former fire station fit the bill. “I thought it had a lot of potential,” said Andre. “I like old things. It had that speakeasy feel.”

And Margo loved the fire pole, which is still intact. “Every kid wants a fire pole,” she said. “And we’re kids at heart.”

The building was last used as a fire station in the early 1900s, says Andre, when the fire company switched to fire engines and outgrew the space. For a while, it was Mobile Beauty

College, he says, showing a black-and-white photo with the sign out front. When they first looked at the building, it had been partially renovated and was filled with cubicles.

They gutted the downstairs area, which left them with “a nice blank slate to look at,” said Andre.

They’re still working on renovating their own, light-filled apartment upstairs, where their cat naps in a chair near the window overlooking St. Francis Street. “We have the shortest commute possible,” joked Margo. “If the fire pole extended all the way up, we could just slide down.”

Since moving to Mobile, they’ve made new friends with their downtown neighbors even before opening their business. “We have a better social life than we did in New York!” Margo said. “We’ve been thrilled and surprised at how many interesting people we’ve met.”

New York had lost some of its luster for Andre, who said it “changed a lot after the oil spill and the financial crisis. I preferred it when it was more gritty.”

“I loved New York,” said Margo, adding: “It’s a great place to visit.”

*Firehouse Wine Bar & Shop is located at 216 St. Francis St.
The phone number is (251) 421-2022. The website is
www.firehousewinebar.com.*



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mmobilet

Apr 18, 2014

Excellent! Welcome to Mobile! My wife and I think this is a terrific idea, and we look forward to many lovely evenings downtown made even lovelier by this bar. Congratulations on the realization of your dream.

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Nicole Emmett | nemmett@a1.com

Apr 17, 2014

Love bringing diversity through businesses run by people from other states. It will give Mobile a taste of NY.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



sher_graham

Apr 17, 2014

I love to drink wine. I hope that you will consider organic wines and some wines from South Africa, Australia and China. Great to see you in Mobile. Welcome. I will be there.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Pete Dranka

Apr 17, 2014

Hope you will have some of the great new york state wines also

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Milton Zelman

Apr 17, 2014

Hi Guys,
You had a smart idea and jumped on it. Good for you! Miss you, but leaving the city was the best thing you could have done. Am headed for S.C. myself and look forward to taking a little stroll down to Mobile. Wanna see how your grand new life is coming along.

Meanwhile, best of luck, -Milton

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



nosuchthingasgod

Apr 17, 2014



Good luck. I love wine and cheese bars.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



el chupacabra

Apr 17, 2014

In all seriousness, It's nice that these folks have restored a historic downtown building and provided another option for beer within walking distance of my office. Best of luck to Margo and Andre, glad to have them in town.

4     [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Gertrude M. Bell

Apr 17, 2014

Nothing prettier than a wrapped copper top bar. Maybe zinc:)

1  [Like](#) [Reply](#)



AfricanQueen2

Apr 17, 2014

ANOTHER BUSINESS opening in Mobile! Good for them. I know quite a few folks that like to drink wine, exclusively. They should be a success! Best of luck to Margo and Andre.

3    [Like](#) [Reply](#)



el chupacabra

Apr 17, 2014

This story is about a wine bar, Mr Anderson. Stay on topic.

1  [Like](#) [Reply](#)



bdexrerun

Apr 17, 2014

No Thunderbird, snob.

But seriously, I hope they can showcase some of the local wine from Perdido. I know it may not seem to have the legs of a good South African wine, but they do put out some nice product. And, how can you lose with local.

1  [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Gertrude M. Bell

Apr 17, 2014

Hopefully the will showcase local product and have vintners nights.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



bdexrerun

Apr 17, 2014

If there is one thing folks from Cape Town know about, it's wine (and rugby of course). Can't wait to swing by for a couple glasses next time I'm in town.

2   [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Gertrude M. Bell

Apr 17, 2014

SoAfrican ruggers make this old dames heart go pittypat. Pair that with an oaky chardonnay and I'm in the game.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Michelle Matthews | mmatthews@al.com

Gertrude, sounds like you need to get over there ASAP! :) Apr 17, 2014

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



AfricanQueen2

Apr 17, 2014

Once you go to Africa, it's very difficult to leave. Well, it was for me.

[Like](#) [Reply](#)



Gertrude M. Bell

Apr 17, 2014

Heck I'm in the PNW Michelle. But I do have some frequent flyer miles...

1  [Like](#) [Reply](#)



Michelle Matthews | mmatthews@al.com

Apr 17, 2014

Maybe, by the time you get here, the new Hilton Garden Inn will be open across the street on St. Francis!

[Like](#) [Reply](#)

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