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tucson  
**MEET OUR**  
*makers*

This month, we had the chance to sit down with Moniqua Lane and discuss all things related to her unlikely career as a hotelier. Keep reading for more of her story or click on the "What's New" link below for the latest and greatest updates from Tucson.

[What's New](#)



## **Meet Hotelier Moniqua Lane**

There's something about Tucson hotelier Moniqua Lane that makes her instantaneously likable.

Maybe it's her seemingly boundless energy, a trait that led to the one-time lawyer opening two boutique hotels within a decade despite having no formal background in the hospitality or real estate industries.

Maybe it's her irreverent humor and unabashed speech (she dropped a dozen quippy lines and an equal number of expletives during our chat).

Or maybe it's her sincerity; she both laughed and cried when describing the successes and failures she's been met with over the past few years while weathering COVID and opening a second, now defunct boutique hotel.

Whatever it is, Moniqua Lane's intrinsic nature is what one journalist once described to me as "magic."

The 46-year-old is the mastermind behind The Downtown Clifton, an independent boutique hotel she dreamed up in what used to be a parking lot bordered by 10 discreet bunkhouses. It's located in a prime artery of Tucson's downtown Armory Park neighborhood, bordering Barrio Viejo, where her former employer's law office was situated. Though she walked through the lot daily on her way to work, she says she didn't even notice the nondescript building.

That all changed in 2014, when she had the opportunity to purchase the property and, with the help of Tucson designer and musician Clif Taylor, transform it into what is today a 32-room hotel.

The reason for the dramatic job shift was simple, she said.

"The fourth time I left the practice of law, it stuck," Moniqua said. "I'm half black and half white. I always felt like Tucson is very much a place that allows me to be me. I wanted to do something for the community that has made me who I am ... Doing something in real estate felt like a very tangible way to contribute to my community."



Today, The Downtown Clifton is as much a community hub as it is a place for out-of-towners to rest their weary heads. The property's focal point is The Red Light Lounge, a bar and restaurant where there is live music many nights of the week and conversation is always on the menu.

While the rooms tell the story of Moniqua's personal tastes ("Design-wise, I am a fan of the late '60s and early '70s. My mom is really upset that I have avocado green appliances," she laughs.), it's the communal spaces that differentiate the Clifton from others because that's where her guests interact with her staff.

"Instead of highly curating our service model, I really let my employees speak for themselves," Moniqua said. "They are a really diverse group that showcases Tucson beautifully. I'm happy to have guests who say they fell in love with Tucson because of their experience at The Clifton or a conversation they had with an employee."

The Downtown Clifton is comprised of two sections – the aforementioned bunkhouse and the newer La Señorita rooms, which debuted in 2019.

The bunkhouse represents Tucson as Moniqua, who grew up in the nearby agricultural and rancher hub of Marana, sees it. Western and mid-century décor meld seamlessly in rooms boasting concrete floors, handmade wooden beds, and artwork by Tucson artists.

The newer La Señorita rooms harken back to the bunkhouse. However, they're slightly more upscale with larger square footage, elevated ceilings, and second-floor rooms boasting floor-to-ceiling windows that look out onto neighboring Barrio Viejo and the iconic A Mountain.

"One of my favorite reviews of The Clifton calls the hotel more of a motel than a Ritz Carlton. I fucking love that," Moniqua said. "Tucson is its own thing and respected as such. I'm very much not trying to import something from another place. Through my own eyes, I'm trying to showcase Tucson as it exists. I'm not trying to make Tucson or The Clifton all things to all people."



In 2022, Moniqua took a leap of faith and opened a second boutique property, the more elevated The Citizen Hotel, in a 1913 building once the locale of one of Tucson's daily newspapers. Though the 10-room wine hotel was touted as one of Tucson's top new properties in publications such as *The New York Times* and *Time Magazine*, it shut its doors less than a year-and-a-half after its debut because it was not economically feasible.

Moniqua has been grappling with disappointment ever since and says she's only recently been able to talk about it.

"Early on, I was like, 'I know that I can't be a successful entrepreneur unless I fail. What's it going to be? What's it going to feel like?' But when that failure happened, holy fuck did it hurt – does it hurt. It really takes away your confidence and your creativity," Moniqua said. "I do definitely want to get back on the horse, but it's really only recently that I felt like I could even look at a horse."

Moniqua has spent the past few months reflecting on why The Citizen was forced to shut its doors. She has come to realize she simply opened the hotel too quickly and too far over budget, lessons she'll take to heart in the future.

As for what's next for Moniqua on her professional front, nothing is concrete. She acknowledges she's a "restless person" and said she's begun to entertain future business opportunities in and around Tucson, though nothing she's considering seriously.

"This regional Sonoran area is unlike any other place in the world; it is so culturally special, geographically, ecologically special. I lose the words," Moniqua said. "The place means so much to me. It's a gift to share."



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