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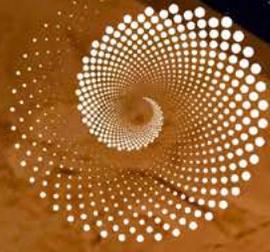
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VOLUME 7 | EDITION 3

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SOFT POWER,
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MEDIA & MARKETING

Publisher Chic Compass LLC

Editor Chanelle Hayes-Sessions

Fashion & Creative Director David Tupaz

Design & Layout Jake Naylor

Contributing Artist Photographers Joseph Donato, Cashman Photo, Sheryl Aronson & Sherman Alford (Sasaphotos), Jaime Lim (Liquid Star Photography), Studio J Inc., Bob Burchess, Elaine & Scott Harris, John Stiles, Montano, Diamond, Nancy Munoz, Javon Chambers, Sean Jones, Dragon Dreams Photography, Vanessa Preziose, Paulina Gwaltney, Lance Ozier, Jonathan Collins

ART

Contributing Writers Laura Henkel, Brian G. Thornton

DESIGN

Contributing Writer Stacey Gualandi

BEAUTY & FASHION

Contributing Writers Laura Henkel, Janet Susan R. Nepales, David Tupaz

LIVING

Contributing Writers Stacey Gualandi, Debbie Hall, Kendall Hardin

TRAVEL & DINING

Contributing Writers Elaine & Scott Harris

ENTERTAINMENT

Contributing Writers Sheryl Aronson, Debbie Hall, Kendall Hardin, Janet Susan R. Nepales, Heather Turk

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Contributing Writer Erika Luren

GROUP PUBLISHING DIRECTORS

Ann Parenti, President; Robert Dolan, Senior Vice President; Joseph Amato, Vice President, Sales & Marketing Strategy

ADVERTISING INQUIRIES

ann@chiccompass.com | 6295 S Pioneer Way, Las Vegas, NV 89113

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Contributing Writers



Sheryl Aronson



Stacey Gualandi



Debbie Hall



Kendall Hardin



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From the Editor

Welcome to the summer 2025 edition of *Chic Compass*.

This one feels extra special because, as of this season, we're officially entering our eighth year. And that's a milestone that makes us stop and take a breath.

When Ann Parenti, publisher, and Carolyn Muse Grant, then editor-in-chief, launched *Chic Compass* in August 2018, there wasn't a detailed plan. It was just a small team with a big dream. The two, along with the writers and others who contributed to its success—from graphic designer Jake Naylor to fashion and creative director David Tupaz—all shared a belief in the power of meaningful storytelling. They wanted to create something beautiful and soulful, with a strong focus on art, fashion, food, design, travel, culture and, most of all, the people who bring those things to life.

That original spirit—from the very first cover featuring Cristina Pajara Clarke, a nurse practitioner here in Las Vegas whose compassion and quiet strength have made a lasting impact on so many families, to this edition's cover star, Tiffany Chang, a thoughtful, trailblazing leader who's using empathy, innovation and service to redefine what leadership looks like—still lives on today.

Between those covers are hundreds of stories we hope you'll never forget. From soulful jazz legends and bold visual artists to entrepreneurs and changemakers, *Chic Compass* has had the honor of spotlighting people who live with passion, purpose and creativity. With each issue, we've also aimed to take you on a journey into inspiring spaces, meaningful moments and new ways of seeing the world—whether just down the street or across the globe.

There have been many milestones over the years—including launching the "Chic Compass Connection" podcast (which you can find at chiccompass.com), expanding into digital storytelling, evolving through the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and forming Chic Compass LLC in January 2023 with the help of the magazine's group publishing directors:



Chanelle Hayes-Sessions EDITOR

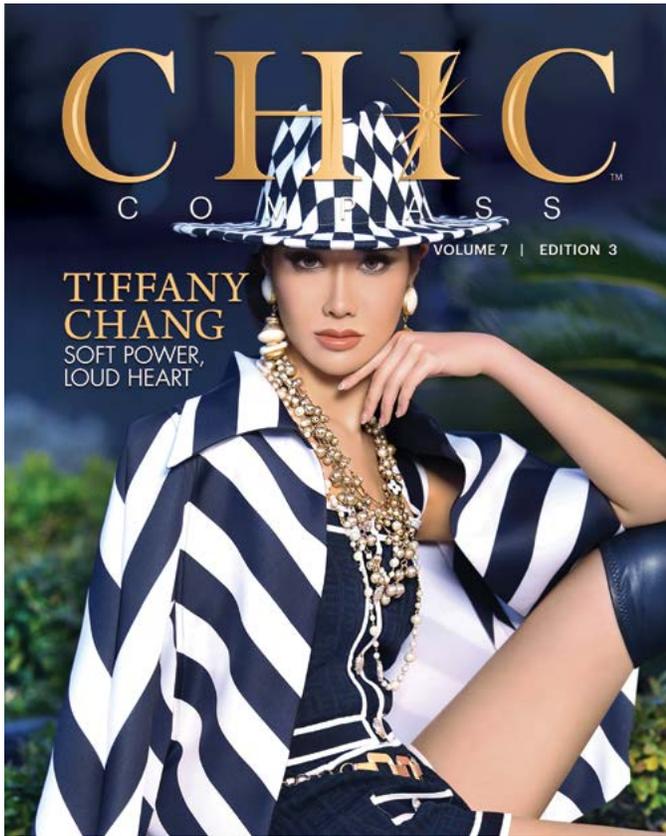
Robert Dolan, who serves as senior vice president, and Joseph Amato, vice president of sales and marketing strategy. Not to mention our quarterly luxury launch parties, where individuals featured in each issue gather to be celebrated and recognized beyond our glossy pages.

As we turn the page into a new season, we're more grateful than ever. This issue is full of everything you've come to love about *Chic Compass*.

Whether you've been a day-one supporter or just now discovered *Chic Compass*, thank you for being part of this journey. We wouldn't be here without you.

Here's to eight years of storytelling, style and soul—and to whatever beautiful moments come next.

Chanelle Hayes-Sessions



ON THE COVER

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Jaime Lim (Liquid Star Photography)

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SOFT POWER, LOUD HEART: TIFFANY CHANG ON IDENTITY, RESILIENCE AND REDEFINING LEADERSHIP

By Laura Henkel

Tiffany Chang is not your typical change-maker. She is something far rarer. A Stanford student, nonprofit founder and crowned Miss Asia USA, Chang is the kind of leader who navigates high-pressure spaces with both poise and purpose. But beyond the accolades lies a story of quiet grit, cultural duality and a deep commitment to creating meaningful impact.

In this wide-ranging, intimate Q&A, Chang opens up about what it costs to live between worlds and what it takes to lead from them. She speaks candidly about moments of doubt, the unseen labor behind her successes and the power of softness in spaces that often demand perfection. Through her words, we see not just a role model, but a real person: someone who is still becoming, still questioning and still choosing to show up fully, even when it's hard.

For anyone who has ever felt like they had to split themselves to fit in, Chang offers a different model: one built on wholeness, empathy and redefining success on your own terms.

ORIGIN & INFLUENCE

Chic Compass: Who did you look up to as a child, and what parts of them do you now see in yourself?

Tiffany Chang: Growing up, I looked up to two incredible women: my mom and my ama (grandma). My mom is like superwoman. She runs her own business, works full time and yet somehow never misses a moment, whether it's a school event, a late-night pageant rehearsal or just being there when I need her most. She's the most selfless person I know, and I've inherited her drive and deep sense of responsibility to show up fully for the people I care about.

My ama is the matriarch of our family. Every day after school, I'd go to her house, and she became my moral compass. She taught me the values I carry with me today—kindness, perseverance, humility and resilience—often through the simplest moments: playing puzzles, teaching me how to read or just talking about life. She gave me the heart behind everything I do.



*Designer: David Tupaz
Photography: Jaime Lim
Model: Tiffany Chang*



*Designer: David Tupaz
Photography: Jaime Lim
Model: Tiffany Chang*

Chic Compass: When did you first realize you were living in two worlds, and what did it cost you to exist between them?

Tiffany Chang: I realized I was living in two worlds the moment something I treasured—my culture—became a source of shame in someone else's eyes. After I proudly played the Chinese zither, a classmate scoffed, "Are you going to wear that embarrassing oriental costume and play that weird instrument again?" I remember feeling a rush of humiliation, anger and confusion, but mostly, I felt small. I couldn't find the voice to defend myself. That silence echoed the same feeling I had in English class, where I felt like every discussion was a test of worth, not a place to be heard. I wanted to speak, but self-doubt kept pulling me back, like pressing the gas and brake at the same time.

These experiences made me question: Would I ever be enough? Living in between meant constantly translating not just language but value. It cost me my voice for a while. But reclaiming that voice, through public speaking, advocacy and redefining what it means to be both Asian and American, has been the most powerful part of my journey.

Even in the spaces they didn't fully grasp, they believed in me. And that belief became my foundation.

TRANSFORMATION & RESILIENCE

Chic Compass: What's a moment you wanted to quit but didn't? What did it teach you about grit, grace or even surrender?

Tiffany Chang: There was a moment during the Miss Asia USA competition when I seriously questioned if I belonged. Behind the glamour, I was battling imposter syndrome, comparing myself to women who seemed so effortlessly confident, polished and perfect. I remember standing backstage, crown slipping, lashes half-off, thinking—what am I doing here? I felt small, messy and not enough.

But instead of quitting, I paused. I reminded myself that I wasn't there to be perfect—I was there to be real. To show the little girls watching, especially Asian girls, that representation doesn't require perfection. I walked back onstage, heart pounding but grounded in something deeper than nerves: purpose.

That moment taught me that grit isn't always loud. Sometimes it's quiet. It's continuing to show up when every part of you wants to shrink. It's grace, allowing yourself to feel the fear and do it anyway. And it's surrender, not to failure, but to the truth that you're allowed to take up space even before you feel "ready."

Chic Compass: You navigate extreme expectations across cultural, academic, visual and emotional realms. Where do you go to feel fully human?

Tiffany Chang: I feel most fully human in the quiet in-betweens, like coming back home from school, spending time with my family and laughing over inside jokes with my sister. It's not on the stage or in the spotlight, but in the small, ordinary moments where no one's watching and I'm not performing. That's where I can exhale.

I also find grounding in the places that raised me, especially my grandma's home. I find the most zen in the presence of my grandma. There's something about the way she moves through the world—slow, intentional, steady—that reminds me to breathe. In that space, I don't have to excel or impress, I just have to be present.

When the expectations feel loud, when I'm balancing academic pressure, cultural identity, pageant presentation and everything in between, I go back to those roots. The moments that remind me that before the crown, the resume or the title, I was already enough.

Chic Compass: If perfection was no longer the price of admission, how would you show up differently in pageantry, at Stanford or in life?

Tiffany Chang: I'd let people see the messy middle more often—the part where I don't have it all figured out, where the crown tilts or I trip over my words in class. I think so much of my life has been shaped by the pressure to prove I'm worthy: the perfect student, the perfect spokesperson, the perfect daughter balancing two cultures. But in chasing perfection, I sometimes left little room for grace.

Without that pressure, I'd show up with more softness. I'd ask more questions instead of always trying to have the right answers. I'd be less afraid to raise my hand in a lecture or walk onstage without every detail being polished. I'd let myself take up space as I am, not just when I feel like I've "earned" it.

Because at the end of the day, the most powerful version of me isn't the perfect one—it's the honest one.

VALUES, PURPOSE & UNSEEN LABOR

Chic Compass: Your résumé is impressive. But what's the hardest thing you do that no one claps for?

Tiffany Chang: The hardest thing I do, the thing no one sees or claps for, is learning how to be kind to myself when I fall short. It's picking myself up after a rejection, a bad day or a quiet breakdown, and choosing to keep showing up anyway. It's rewriting the voice in my head that says I'm not doing enough, not being enough.

There's no applause for the nights I sit with self-doubt and still choose to believe in the bigger picture. No trophies for staying grounded when comparison creeps in. No spotlight on the quiet work of healing generational expectations or navigating spaces that weren't built with people like me in mind.

But that inner work—the work of unlearning, softening and forgiving—is what makes everything else possible. It's what lets me lead with empathy, perform with heart and pursue big dreams without losing myself in the process.

Chic Compass: When you think about success, whose definition are you using, and how has that evolved?

Tiffany Chang: For a long time, I chased a definition of success that wasn't mine. It was a mosaic built from my family's sacrifices, cultural expectations and society's highlight reels—good grades, prestigious schools, picture-perfect achievements. I thought success meant being chosen: winning the award, getting the title, being told I was enough.

But over time, especially through moments of burnout, self-doubt and quiet victories, I've started rewriting that definition. Success, to me now, is about alignment. It's not about how many people clap for you, it's about whether you're proud of who you are when no one's watching. It's the courage to build a life that reflects your values, even if it doesn't look like anyone else's blueprint.

Today, I define success as living with integrity, showing up with heart and leaving spaces more inclusive and inspired than I found them. And that version feels a lot more like me.

Chic Compass: Share a belief you hold that might make others uncomfortable, yet remains undeniably true for you.

Tiffany Chang: I believe that softness is a form of strength and that femininity and leadership are not opposites. In a world that often celebrates loudness, dominance and hustle, I've found that my greatest impact comes from empathy, vulnerability and emotional intelligence.

Some people see compassion as weakness or pageantry as superficial. But I've seen firsthand how storytelling, cultural pride and even a crown can be powerful tools for change. I don't believe I need to shed my softness to be taken seriously—I believe I can lead with it.

It might make some people uncomfortable to rethink what power looks like.

But for me, it looks like using my voice to make space for others. And it feels like knowing that being fully, unapologetically myself is the most powerful thing I can do.

Chic Compass: What are you currently unlearning?

Tiffany Chang: I'm currently unlearning the idea that I have to earn rest. For so long, I equated productivity with worth, like every minute not spent achieving was a minute wasted. Especially as a woman of color in high-achieving spaces, I felt this constant pressure to prove myself, to justify every opportunity I received.

But I'm learning that rest isn't a reward, it's a requirement. That I don't have to hustle to deserve peace or dim my needs to stay palatable. I'm unlearning the myth that vulnerability makes me less capable and instead realizing it makes me more human, more grounded, more whole.

And maybe most importantly, I'm unlearning the belief that I need to fit into existing definitions of leadership, success or womanhood. I'm building new ones on my own terms.

Chic Compass: What problem in the world keeps you up at night, not because you're expected to care but because you genuinely do?

Tiffany Chang: The problem that keeps me up at night is how many people feel unseen in their pain. Especially in a world that's constantly online, we've become good at curating highlight reels—showing the picture-perfect parts of our lives—and bad at checking in with what's underneath. I think about the quiet battles people face: the student who looks put together but is falling apart inside, the immigrant parent who never talks about their stress, the teen who jokes to mask anxiety.

I care about mental health not because it's trendy to talk about it, but because I've lived it. I've seen what it's like to push through panic attacks in silence, to

feel like you have to be "on" even when you're unraveling. And I care deeply about building a world where people don't feel like they have to earn their pain or hide it.

It keeps me up at night that so many people feel like they're suffering alone. And it drives me to keep creating spaces—online, in my nonprofit, through storytelling—where being vulnerable is not only allowed but honored.

CREATION & INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

Chic Compass: Stanford is known for innovation. What's one idea or experiment you're obsessed with right now?

Tiffany Chang: I'm currently obsessed with reimagining innovation through the lens of human-centered design. So much of the tech world is driven by what's technically possible, but I'm far more interested in what's personally meaningful. At Stanford, I've been exploring how we can design solutions that don't just work, but truly work for people, especially those who are often overlooked.

One idea I'm exploring is how we can integrate principles of human-centered design into AI and sustainability. For example, how might we create edge AI tools that support elder care not just efficiently but empathetically? Or rethink product design for accessibility not just as an afterthought but from the very beginning?

To me, innovation isn't just about inventing new things. It's about deeply listening, noticing what people need and building with heart. I want to create tools, systems and experiences that don't just impress users but empower them.

CULTURE, COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Chic Compass: How do you stay connected to your culture in a world

that often tries to flatten it into a buzzword or trend?

Tiffany Chang: I stay connected to my culture by returning to the people, rituals and stories that shaped me, not the polished version you see on social media, but the lived, everyday beauty of it. It's in the way my ama (grandma) arms wrap around me whenever I come back home, the smell of lu rou fan simmering on the stove and the moments when we speak Taiwanese at home in between generations. It's in the small decisions, offering food before taking it, choosing humility over recognition, that carry the values I grew up with. Culture lives in those details, not in grand gestures, and that's where I find my deepest sense of belonging.

I also stay grounded by always showing up for and supporting my community, attending Taiwanese and Asian cultural events, creating content for awareness, volunteering, supporting local organizers and uplifting others who share pieces of my story. These aren't just events, they're living threads that keep our heritage alive and evolving.

In a world that often reduces culture to an aesthetic or hashtag, I remind myself that culture is not content. It's not something to perform, it's something to protect, to live, to pass on. I stay rooted by researching my heritage and using my platforms, whether in pageantry, tech or storytelling, to celebrate it with depth, not decoration.

Representation isn't just about being seen. It's about being understood. And staying connected to my culture means choosing depth over display every time.

Chic Compass: What does sisterhood mean to you, and where have you found it most unexpectedly?

Tiffany Chang: To me, sisterhood is about showing up, not just when it's convenient, but when it's hard. It's the kind of bond that says, I see you, even when the world doesn't. It means holding space for someone else's growth, cheering loudly for their wins and sitting



Designer: David Tupaz
Photography: Jaime Lim
Model: Tiffany Chang

quietly with them through their lows. Sisterhood is not just shared identity, it's shared intention.

I've found sisterhood most unexpectedly in pageantry. From the outside, it might seem competitive or surface-level, but behind the scenes, I've met some of the most generous, vulnerable and supportive women. Women who help zip up your dress before going onstage, fix your lashes when you're too nervous to breathe, and remind you who you are when self-doubt creeps in. That solidarity, among women who are often judged or underestimated, has been one of the most powerful reminders that sisterhood can thrive even in the most unexpected spaces.

PHILANTHROPY & MISSION-DRIVEN WORK

Chic Compass: What was the moment that inspired Madhatter Knits, and how has that mission changed you as much as it's helped others?

Tiffany Chang: Madhatter Knits began when I was in the 6th grade and I knitted a small hat. At the time, my cousin was volunteering at the San Gabriel Valley Medical Center and had just visited the NICU. We realized these beanies were the perfect size for a preemie's head, fighting for their very first breath, especially since a lot of their warmth escapes through their head, making it

difficult for them to keep their body temperatures stable. We started with our first donation of 160 knit hats during Christmas of 2014 to the Children's Hospital Los Angeles. With the mission to give preemies and their families love, warmth and support, Madhatter Knits was born.

What started as a simple gesture grew into a global movement. We've now donated millions of handmade hats around the world and grown immensely with international chapters, but what's changed me most isn't the scale; it's the stories. It's the moms who write to us saying the beanie helped her feel like her baby wasn't just a patient, but a person. It's the volunteers who found healing in creating something with their hands.

Madhatter Knits taught me that impact doesn't always start with strategy, it starts with heart. It showed me that leadership isn't about having all the answers; it's about inviting others into the solution. And it reminded me that care is a powerful form of resistance, especially in a world that often moves too fast to notice the smallest ones among us.

Chic Compass: What do you hope Madhatter Knits, or any future project you start, represents in the bigger picture of how young people can make a meaningful impact?

Tiffany Chang: I hope Madhatter Knits shows that you don't need to have a title, a budget or years of experience to start something that matters. You just need heart, a clear "why" and the courage to begin. We started with four people and an idea that felt too small to be world-changing...until it wasn't.

In the bigger picture, I want Madhatter Knits to represent what's possible when young people stop waiting for permission and start building from empathy. I hope it reminds others that "impact" isn't reserved for people in boardrooms or on big stages. It starts in everyday decisions, small acts of care and the willingness to solve problems you care about.

Whether it's a beanie, a business or a movement, I want young people to know that their lived experiences are valid blueprints for change. If our work can empower others to believe that they, too, are capable of meaningful impact, then we've done more than knit hats. We've stitched together a ripple effect of possibility.

MOMENTUM & VISION

Chic Compass: What does power look like to you when no one is watching?

Tiffany Chang: Power, when no one is watching, looks like integrity. It's how you treat people who can't do anything for you. It's the choice to do the right thing, even when it's inconvenient, unrecognized or uncomfortable.

To me, real power is quiet. It's found in the discipline of showing up for your commitments when no one's holding you accountable. It's in the care you give to your community without expecting applause. It's in staying grounded in your values when the spotlight's gone and the crown is off.

It also looks like self-compassion, the ability to be kind to yourself on the days you don't feel strong. Because if you can lead yourself with grace, you can lead others with empathy. Power isn't just about influence, it's about consistency, character and choosing love over ego.

Chic Compass: What's something you've never said in an interview before, but feel safe enough to share now?

Tiffany Chang: Sometimes I feel lonely in the rooms I once dreamed of being in. From pageant stages to Stanford classrooms to boardrooms full of opportunity, I've found myself surrounded by people, applause and momentum...yet still feeling like I'm carrying something no one else sees. The pressure to keep achieving, to keep representing, to keep holding it all together, it doesn't always leave space to just be.

I think there's a version of me that people see, polished, high-performing, always "on." But the truth is, I still have to remind myself it's okay to rest. It's okay to not always be strong. And it's okay to say "I'm struggling" without feeling like I'm letting someone down.

What I've learned is that vulnerability isn't something to outgrow. It's something to grow into. And I'm learning to find power not just in what I accomplish, but in being honest about what it takes to get there.

Chic Compass: If your story was a manifesto, what would the title be, and what's the first line?

Tiffany Chang: Title: "Soft Power, Loud Heart"

First line: They tried to measure me by how well I fit, but I was never meant to fit; I was meant to reshape the space.

Chic Compass: Imagine this article becomes a time capsule. What would you want 80-year-old Tiffany to remember about the version of you today?

Tiffany Chang: I'd want 80-year-old me to remember how hard I tried, not just to succeed, but to stay true. That even when I was unsure, I kept showing up with heart. That I was learning how to be bold without being hardened, ambitious without losing softness, and proud without letting ego take the wheel.

I'd want her to remember the late nights filled with self-doubt, the small wins no one saw, the courage it took to speak up even when my voice shook. And most of all, I'd want her to remember that this version of me loved deeply, my family, my community, my culture—and built from that love, not in spite of it.

Because at the end of the day, titles fade, applause quiets, but the why behind it all, that's what I hope she never forgets.

*Designer: David Tupaz
Photography: Jaime Lim
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CHASE R. MCCURDY: LEGACY, ABSTRACTION AND THE FUTURE OF ART IN LAS VEGAS

By Laura Henkel

*I*n the hush of early morning, Chase R. McCurdy moves through his home studio like a monk tending an altar. No notifications interrupt him. A biography of Paul Robeson lies open beside a teacup, not far from the studio notebooks of Jack Whitten and a well-worn Alice Coltrane vinyl sleeve. The soft hum of Coltrane glides through the light like a whispered mantra—slow, sacred and deliberate. A canvas rests silently under soft light, waiting. This is not a place of urgency. It is a chamber of patience, of intention. McCurdy doesn't conquer the page. He listens until it speaks.

McCurdy's home studio is lined with books—well-worn volumes on philosophy, history, revolutionary theory and art. These aren't decorative objects. They're lenses, like the ones he once looked through as a photographer—tools that sharpen perception, reveal what's often missed and invite deeper focus. Each volume informs not just his visual work but the rhythm of his thoughts: how he composes a line of verse, assembles a sculpture or paints with spiritual resolve. He doesn't just



Chase R. McCurdy self-portrait, 2021

Photo of Historic Westside Legacy Park courtesy of Studio J Inc.



read them—he absorbs them. Pages are turned slowly, purposefully, as if each word might guide the next photograph, reconfigure the curve of a brushstroke or echo through the cadence of a manifesto yet to be shared.

ThirtyThree Gallery: A Threshold, Not a Venue

ThirtyThree Gallery (33.G), McCurdy's intimate art space in the Historic Westside of Las Vegas, is a commercial gallery, one with deep cultural purpose. While it operates in the art market, it transcends typical conventions. It is not transactional at its core. It is a convener of artists, ideas and ancestors. When visiting the gallery, in the micro view, one cannot help but admire the precise use of space: thoughtful, restrained, quietly radiant. In the macro view, each exhibition unfolds like a movement in a symphony, layering memory, philosophy and community into something greater than the sum of its parts.

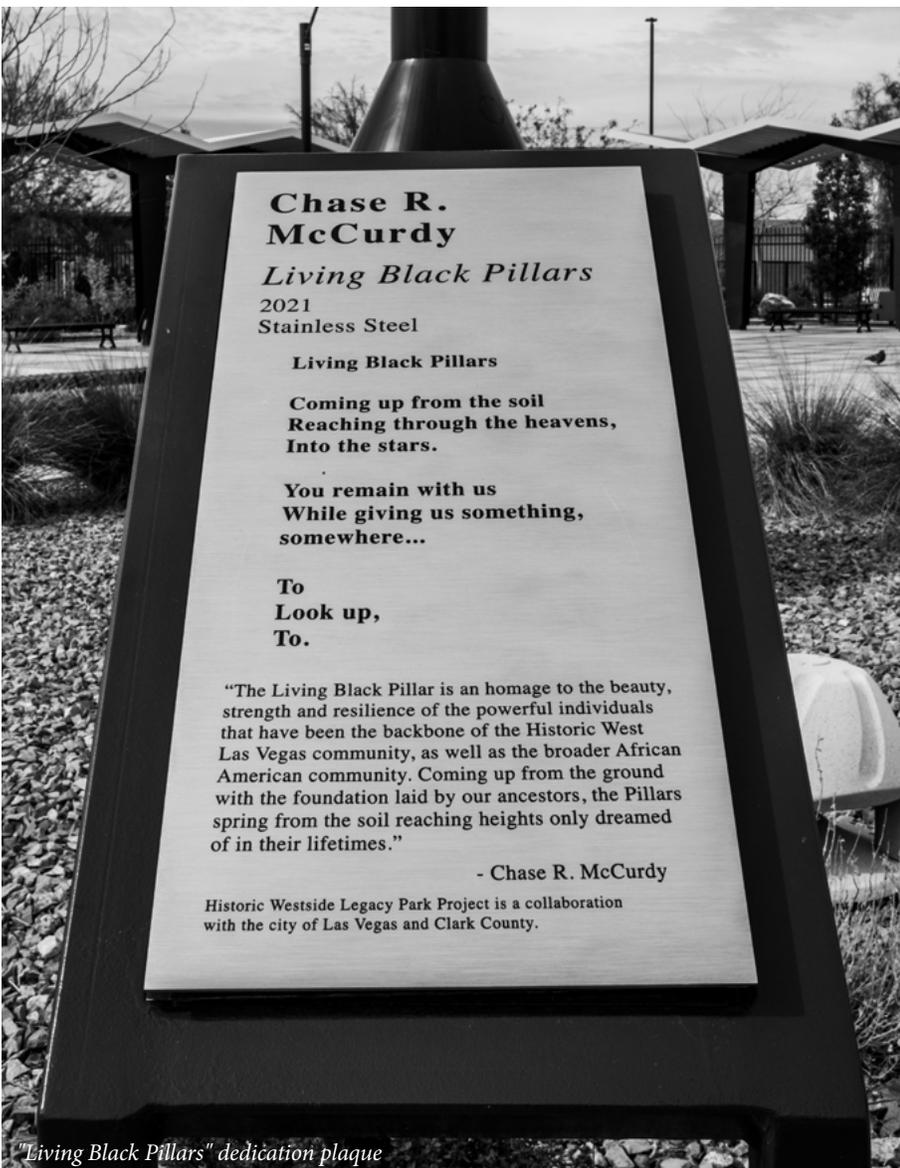
Public Art with Purpose: Reimagining Las Vegas Spaces

McCurdy's work extends beyond gallery walls into the public sphere. Through mural projects, installations and collaborations with organizations such as the Mayor's Fund for Las Vegas LIFE, his art intersects with city planning and civic imagination. One of the most notable examples is "Living Black Pillars" (2021), a stainless-steel installation at the Historic Westside Legacy Park.

Accompanied by a poem and dedication, the sculpture pays homage to the strength and resilience of the Historic Westside and the broader African American community. The text reads in part:

"Coming up from the soil / Reaching through the heavens, / Into the stars. / You remain with us / While giving us something, / somewhere... To look up, To."

"Living Black Pillars" stands as both



"Living Black Pillars" dedication plaque

a spiritual offering and a communal beacon, reminding viewers of those who came before and the futures they helped make possible.

Rather than simply beautifying a space, his public artworks reclaim narrative, assert dignity and bring ancestral memory into contemporary environments. They are designed not just to be seen, but to be felt, remembered and carried forward. His vision for art in public spaces is about more than aesthetics. It's about access, ownership and presence. Through his practice, he invites the community not only to witness art but to inhabit it—to see themselves reflected in it and empowered by it.

A Day in the Life: Analog Spirit, Digital Distance

McCurdy has been known to go completely offline for extended stretches, not as a retreat, but as a form of resistance. In a world constantly calling for performance and speed, he chooses stillness. These digital sabbaticals are how he returns to himself: to his thoughts, his practice and his responsibility as an artist. He speaks of protecting the conditions under which meaningful work arises—not just guarding time, but energy. "The work comes when I make space for it," he says. "I protect that space."

This clarity shows in his every gesture. His mornings are deliberately unhurried: reading, sketching or listening to music only when it matches the day's internal rhythm. His discipline is not about routine—it's about reverence. His creative compass points inward, not toward algorithms but toward authenticity.

Spiritual Abstraction: The Art Behind the Art

Before picking up a paintbrush, McCurdy was a photographer. It was behind the lens that his artistic instincts first found form—observing light, capturing contrast, framing emotion. One of his most poignant images—titled "Y'all Got It, We Tired"—captures three Black women in motion, their uniforms



Above: Detail of "Y'all Got It... We Tired" original photograph, 2017

marking them as hotel workers. Shot in high-contrast black and white, the photo blurs at the edges, as if time itself were speeding past them. In the background, the Trump Tower looms in soft focus, a silent witness to the labor that keeps the city running. The image hums with quiet resistance and dignity. It honors.

That image, much like his paintings and assemblages today, holds space for reflection. It doesn't scream. It listens. Years passed before he transitioned into mixed media and painting. But for McCurdy, it wasn't a pivot. It was a continuum. Photography taught him to see with precision. Painting allowed him to interpret with soul. Assemblage helped him hold the multiplicity. And his written work—what some might call a manifesto of liberation and legacy—offers yet another expression of his inward life made outward.

He describes his practice as a "physical manifestation of the spiritual." It is not conceptual or performative; it is lived. Rooted in what he calls "spiritual abstraction," his work arises from meditation, study and silence—not in pursuit

of content, but in alignment with calling.

His creative lineage draws from artists and thinkers who made art inseparable from inner life: Jack Whitten, Norman Lewis, Alma Thomas, Romare Bearden, Gordon Parks. His artistic philosophy also resonates with the musical and spiritual legacy of Alice Coltrane—though her name, like his, stands not for genre but for transcendence. Rather than chase audiences, he cultivates intention. Rather than perform identity, he distills essence. "I don't try to make art," he has said. "If it doesn't arrive naturally, I leave it."

This commitment to inner clarity and spiritual presence was powerfully captured by Heather Harmon, executive director of the forthcoming Nevada Museum of Art, Las Vegas, and one of the state's leading voices in contemporary arts and cultural development. In her essay "Spiritual Realignment," published in "Threads in Time"—the exhibition catalog accompanying McCurdy's 2021 solo show "Threads" at the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art—Harmon reflects:

"When I consider McCurdy's practice, I think of how it celebrates solace. In a world of chaos, he is a stoic reminder that you are the product of what you create. He shows us how to operate with purpose, to build with meaning. In being considerate viewers, we can face the same direction, soak in the work, bask in its generosity and feel the possibilities. Only then do you recompose and accept the spiritual realignment offered."

As a desert-born artist, he often describes himself as a creature of terrain—hard on the exterior, soft within. That duality—resilience protecting the sacred—is at the heart of his work. He doesn't posture. He doesn't rush. He moves through the world with clarity and quiet strength.

"McCurdy is the positive injection Las Vegas has needed to progress fine arts in Las Vegas. He has a real prowess in learning about communities and audiences, and tailoring projects to meet their needs. During my time working with him on intergenerational art classes at the Neon Museum, I saw him move easily from talking about art with seniors to teens, always pushing them to learn more while providing a level of support they needed to be successful. His gallery, 33.G, and his own gifted practice have reinvigorated and brought meaningful attention to the Historic Westside; he is intentional in everything he does. Las Vegas and Southern Nevada are fortunate that he calls this place home. I continue to be awed by his art and his curatorial endeavors." —Jennifer Kleven, deputy director of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Affairs for the City of Las Vegas

Landmark Exhibitions and Artistic Evolution

McCurdy's 2021 exhibition "Threads in Time" at the Marjorie Barrick Museum of Art marked a significant evolution in his practice. Each artwork in the show was paired with a QR code, allowing visitors to access McCurdy's own reflections, writings and insights connected to the piece. This fusion of text and image

deepened the interpretive experience, inviting audiences to not only view the art but to enter into conversation with it. "Threads" exemplified McCurdy's belief that art is not static—it's living, layered and meant to be read as much as it is seen.

Among McCurdy's most expansive undertakings to date is "Neo: The Birth," exhibited at Left of Center Gallery in 2022. A retrospective of more than 60 drawings, paintings, writings and sculptural works, the exhibition brought together years of quiet labor and study. "This body of work was born from a desire for discovery," he shared during the exhibition. "Discovery of the reality of both our physical and spiritual universe, and articulation of a philosophy of life for the human being of the future—one that draws from ancestral knowledge while staying awake to the world as it is."

It was not only a visual testament but also a philosophical one—an invitation into a lifetime of thought, evolution and becoming. "Neo: The Birth" affirmed the arrival of an artist of enduring value. While rooted in community and legacy, these works possess the formal sophistication, spiritual resonance and philosophical clarity that serious collectors seek. Those who acquire them now are not only investing in beauty—they are preserving a voice that will echo for generations.

Past Exhibitions: Curating the Westside Narrative

McCurdy's early curatorial work at 33.G has produced a vital timeline of Westside creativity. "Black Kings," the gallery's first contemporary show, featured McCurdy alongside two other artists with deep connections to the Historic Westside. This powerful opening was followed by "War at Home" and "Blue Magik," each building on a shared vision of community, introspection and aesthetic rigor. These exhibitions, available for viewing at thirtythreegallery.com, underscore his belief that art is a form of social architecture, designed to uplift, challenge and unite.

Rooted in Legacy: The McCurdy-Moody Family's Lasting Cultural Influence

McCurdy's story is intimately entwined with the land on which he creates. He is a third-generation Las Vegan. His grandfather, Herman "Big Herm" Moody, moved to Las Vegas in 1939. In 1946, while the city was still deeply segregated, Moody became the first Black police officer. He served in that role for more than three decades, continuing to mentor officers long after retiring in 1977.

Since then, each generation of matriarchs and patriarchs of the McCurdy-Moody family has been a steady, quiet force in the city—educators, civic leaders, cultural contributors. Among them is his grandmother, Magnolia Moody, whose oral history is preserved in the UNLV Special Collections. A lifelong public servant and probation officer, Magnolia's voice recounts not just the triumphs of a pioneering family, but the nuanced rhythms of raising a family in a segregated city, of nourishing community through wisdom, care and accountability.

They were never part of the glitz or flash of the Strip. They were the infrastructure of integrity beneath it: transcending barriers, opening doors, building a future by remaining grounded in truth. They walked with grace and purpose, not for the spotlight but for the community.

McCurdy walks in that lineage. His work does not demand attention. It commands respect. The dignity, vision and perseverance embedded in his family history are not only legible in his artistic output but innate to his character. He moves with intention, humility and clarity—qualities imparted by the legacy of his grandparents and shaped daily by the integrity of his parents, both of whom have also dedicated their lives to public service, education and cultural advocacy in Las Vegas.

In many ways, McCurdy's creative expression is not a departure from that

lineage but a continuation—his own offering in a foundation of service, truth and beauty.

A Reluctant Artist, A Committed Practitioner

He spent years resisting the idea of being an artist. For him, "artist" wasn't a title to flaunt—it was a responsibility to live up to. "I never wanted to be an artist," he says. "It's a great responsibility, the potential impact on others. I didn't want to take that lightly."

Even before revealing his own work, he taught. He shared his skills with youth and elders alike—from photography and writing to design and digital media. Teaching became his first form of artmaking, a way of contributing before ever exhibiting. He taught at the Doolittle Senior Center, MLK Senior Center, West Las Vegas Arts Center and Marble Manor. "I'm just bringing what I can," he says. "Not trying to

build the whole thing—just making sure my contribution is strong enough to be useful."

A Journey Through Elsewhere

Before returning to Las Vegas to teach and share his work publicly, McCurdy's creative journey took him across states and continents. After early career experiences working in corporate strategy at MGM Resorts and briefly considering law enforcement, he realized those paths didn't align with his deeper calling. He relocated to Los Angeles at age 23, with no formal training, and found refuge in photography, capturing fashion and music as a form of emotional and cultural inquiry.

From there, he spent time in Paris, studying art and theory, reflecting on legacy and confronting the responsibilities of voice and vision. Those years abroad were not about self-promotion but

self-examination. It was in that stillness, far from home, that he began to crystallize the path he now walks. "You learn something, you go out and experience things," he says. "But then it's your duty to take that home and do something positive with it."

The Legacy Continues

His journey—at once personal and collective, internal and expansive—stands as a testament to what's possible when art, community and conviction move in unison. Through silence, presence and patient creation, McCurdy reveals that legacy is not what we leave behind. It's what we live forward. It's quiet. It's powerful. And it's still growing.

Below: Photo of "Reconciliation of Man and Nature," "Threads in Time" installation view courtesy of UNLV Barrick Museum



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THE REIGNING KING OF PROPS

CARROT TOP GETS SERIOUS ABOUT HIS REMARKABLE CAREER

By Heather Turk / Photography by Bob Burchess

Carrot Top has been the butt of many jokes over the years, but the longtime Las Vegas headliner doesn't mind.

"I always say I love when people rip on me," the humble comedian, whose real name is Scott Thompson, said. "I don't think I've ever been hurt by someone's remarks, and people talk about me all the time. It's always usually funny."

A staple at Luxor Hotel and Casino since 2005, Carrot Top celebrated 40 years in comedy this past February—the same month he turned 60 years old. Best known for his trunks full of hilarious props, the comedian puts on one of the Entertainment Capital of the World's funniest shows. A manic mix of stand-up and prop comedy, the fast-paced production always leaves audience members breathless from laughing so hard.

Chic Compass recently caught up with the legendary comedian to talk about his career and his hit Las Vegas residency, which thanks to a recent five-year contract extension, shows no signs of ending anytime soon.

Chic Compass: First off, congratulations on celebrating 40 years in comedy. Looking back at when you first started off as a comedian to people seeing you



Above: It's impossible to leave Carrot Top's show without a smile on your face

in Las Vegas at Luxor Hotel and Casino today, how would you say your act has evolved over the past four decades?

Carrot Top: That's a good word—the show really has evolved so exponentially. Even the aspect of the digital screen behind us has added so much to the show. Sometimes I don't have to make a certain prop, I can just show it. It's a

great new way to get a joke across.

Some friends of mine came to the show recently and said, "Man, your show has changed so much." Not only does the content change—it's very current-event stuff—but there's a lot more stand-up in the show. There's a lot more storytelling that I never used to do, and I'm guessing it came about in two ways. One



Above: Carrot Top loves that his style of comedy is appreciated by fans from the 1980s as well as younger audiences

was during COVID, we had the restrictions on how many people could be in the audience and the distance between people. I was thinking, "My God, I am holding up props and they can't really see them or my facial expressions so well." So, I started telling more stories that didn't necessarily involve a prop, but the video wall would help emphasize the joke. Then, the other part was when I broke my leg snowboarding [in 2019], and I was stuck on a knee scooter for five months. That made the whole show change drastically. I couldn't run around and grab props, so really most of the show ended up being me on a

scooter telling stories. When I got back on all twos, it just worked so well that the show stayed that way. Now that I've been in the business 40 years, people are enjoying learning my story.

Chic Compass: *During your show, you always share with audiences the clip of you competing on "Star Search" back in the day. Obviously, losing that did not hurt your career at all. Do you think things would have been any different had you won?*

Carrot Top: That's a great question. I have no idea. It was an honor just to be

on that show. I was supposedly the sure winner before it even started—that was the talk around the comedy clubs—so I love showing the clip because I love the self-deprecation part of comedy. I think that's one reason why it is in the show. In fact, just the other day someone said, "You put that in the show, it's so funny, but had you won, would you put it in the show?" No, because it wouldn't be funny if I showed me winning "Star Search." The funny part is that I'm willing to show that I lost.

Chic Compass: *I know you don't joke about politics too much during your show, but as I'm sure you are aware, the world is very divided today and people are very sensitive about politics in comedy. Does that affect your act at all? Or, if you think something is funny, do you just throw it in the show and hope for the best?*

Carrot Top: I'm pretty good about knowing if something is not going to go over well with everybody. I'm not one of those people who feed off of making someone uncomfortable. That's never been my style. I want everyone to have fun, so if I do anything political, it's usually something that revolves around an impression of something; I'm not making fun of the person. I did a joke the other night about the tariffs. I give out a shot of Crown Royal to someone in the audience every night—a little teeny bottle of Crown—and the other night I said, "This is what I used to give out," and it was this big jumbo-sized bottle of Crown. Then I held up the little one. That got a great laugh because it's pointing out a fact that with the tariffs, the Canadian whisky that we get will be slightly smaller and more expensive. It wasn't really a political joke, it was more observational—reading the newspaper and understanding what topics are out there and what people are talking about.

Chic Compass: *While your show features a mix of stand-up and prop comedy, you are still best known for your props. I'm guessing you've made thousands of props over the past four decades. Do you have a favorite?*

Carrot Top: There are a lot of jokes in the show that are go-tos that always work, and it's good to have those in your arsenal. The one prop that I'm the proudest of, though, isn't in the show anymore. It was the paper cups and string telephone. If I was going to go into the Smithsonian and they gave me one thing to put in there, that's what I would put in. It was very inventive and clever at the time I thought of it. The joke was that we needed a new version of the paper cups and string telephone that had a second cup for call waiting, a third cup for call conference calling and a clear cup for caller ID. George Carlin told me, "That is the funniest, most clever thing I've ever seen in my life."

Chic Compass: You recently extended your contract at Luxor Hotel and Casino through 2030. What is your favorite thing about performing in Las Vegas? Is it the audience coming to you? Is it having a steady place to work on things every day?

Carrot Top: It's a combination of those things. We still do some road shows, but I think having the residency here makes the road a lot easier. You know you're coming back to this gig, so you're not stuck on the road for a year straight.

Plus, Las Vegas is the Entertainment Capital of the World. It's pretty cool to get to play Las Vegas and be surrounded by some of the biggest names in the business. On any given night you can have the Eagles, Lady Gaga, the Rolling Stones and Elton John performing. Las Vegas is the place to be, and the fact that I get to be part of it full time is amazing. And I get to go home every night. I get to get into a rhythm and have somewhat of a normal life and sleep in my own bed.

Being in Las Vegas, it's a wonderful thing. There's nothing better than this town and it's a beautiful city. I mean, right now I'm looking at the mountains. People don't realize there are mountains here and they're beautiful. I've just been beyond blessed to have a residency that's lasted this long.



Above Top: Carrot Top is constantly making new props for his show, giving repeat ticket holders something different to enjoy

Above: Carrot Top's Wendy's joke is always an audience favorite



Above: Carrot Top said the most fun he has each day is when he's onstage performing—and it shows

Chic Compass: You always look like you're genuinely having so much fun onstage. What is it about your job that gets you excited to come to work each night?

Carrot Top: Because I've done this so long, I get a lot of fan mail. I get incredible letters from people who have come to the show because their mom just died and they needed an outlet [to laugh]. Their dog just died. Something tragic just happened. During my meet and greet, I get people who say, "I've got about a week to live and my bucket list is to see you." So, that's the kind of stuff that goes through your brain and you just enjoy the moment for them.

Chic Compass: Mark Twain once said, "Find a job you enjoy doing and you will never have to work a day in your life." Given your love for what you do, how much of your Las Vegas residency do you actually consider work at this point?

Carrot Top: Well, I mean it's always work in a sense because every night is different. You can't live off of last night's crowd. We do new jokes every day almost and that's where the work part comes in because you got to really work at it. Otherwise, I would be doing the same show for the rest of my life. You've got to grow as an entertainer. You've got to give people new stuff and show them that you're working. There are some old jokes that I keep doing that feel like my classics that people expect to see, but then there are new things. The show is always a work in progress. We're never satisfied with it, so it always continues to grow.

Chic Compass: Having been in this business for 40 years, is there any advice you would like to pass on to comedians just starting out?

Carrot Top: The key thing would be to find out what it is exactly that's going to be your story when you're up onstage—what's your whole gimmick going to

be? Is it going to be silly? Is it going to be observational? Is it going to be props, is it going to be relationship material, or will it be a variety of things? The first time you get onstage, you want to kind of figure it out and then you can grow from there. Mine was props when I first got into it, and then I grew from there and started doing more stand-up.

I think the only advice I would give to people is to enjoy the ride and enjoy the process. In the last 10 years, I've just sat back and said, "Gosh, enjoy this journey." Enjoy every second of it. Enjoy each show and each moment and soak it in.

Chic Compass: Finally, you appeared on an episode of "Hacks" last year. Do you have any other upcoming projects that fans can look forward to?

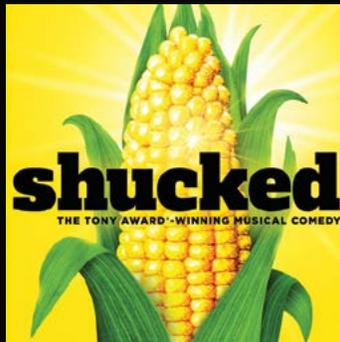
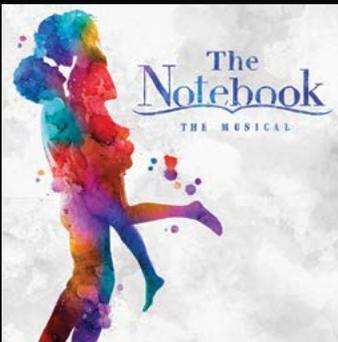
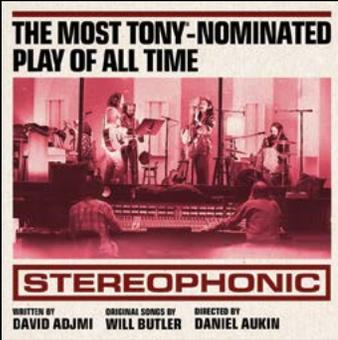
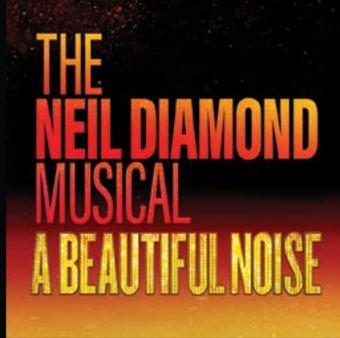
Carrot Top: It's always hard to announce things right away, but there's always things happening. That's what's fun about this job, too. I mean, when that "Hacks" thing happened, I was watching an episode of it and they mentioned me. I called my agency and I said, "I think it would be pretty funny if I went on the show since they're talking about me." So, my agency called them and they were ecstatic.

I'm pretty happy, though, with everything I've gotten to do. In this town, you see a lot of down, and I've always felt blessed that I'm healthy and in a career that I want to do and have been successful at. I've got a show every night at the Luxor, I get to make people laugh and I have a roof over my head—I've got it good.

Carrot Top performs Monday through Saturday at 8 p.m. inside Luxor Hotel and Casino, with additional 8 p.m. performances on Sept. 7 and Oct. 12. The show will be dark Sept. 8-13, Oct. 13-18 and on Oct. 31. In celebration of Carrot Top's 40 years in comedy milestone, tickets start at only \$40 on select dates. For tickets, visit carrottop.com.



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CRANS-MONTANA

SWITZERLAND'S ULTIMATE
LUXURY WINTER ESCAPE

ARTICLE & PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELAINE & SCOTT HARRIS

As famed skier Alberto Tomba once said, "Skiing is an art, and the mountain is my canvas." In Crans-Montana, that canvas is nothing short of spectacular.

Having visited Switzerland many times, we find the winter months magically magnetic, drawing thousands to some of the world's best ski regions. As we settled into our comfortable first-class train seats, we passed snow-covered, chalet-lined villages straight out of a storybook—our destination: Crans-Montana, Switzerland.

Historic Charm and Contemporary Allure in the Swiss Alps

Designed for discerning travelers seeking comfort, exclusivity, personalized service and outdoor adventure, Crans-Montana embodies the charm, sophistication and natural beauty of the Swiss Alps. The area blends world-class ski slopes, luxury accommodations and gourmet cuisine to captivate even the most refined traveler.

Before exploring modern-day Crans-Montana, it's worth considering the region's rich and layered past. Archaeological discoveries—including tools and burial sites—suggest that the plateau and surrounding Valais region have been inhabited since ancient times, with evidence of early Celtic settlements. During the Roman era, the area lay near the empire's frontier, and remnants of trade routes and small settlements highlight its strategic importance in alpine transit and administration.

After the fall of Rome, the region came under the control of feudal lords and monastic authorities. For centuries, alpine agriculture, livestock farming and seasonal grazing sustained the local economy. Life on the plateau remained largely rural and isolated well into the 17th and 18th centuries.

That began to change in the late 19th



Above: The village of Crans-Montana, Switzerland

century with the rise of health tourism and the expansion of railway networks, which opened access to the high plateau and attracted visitors seeking fresh mountain air and restorative landscapes.

By the early 20th century, the neighboring villages of Crans and Montana were developing side by side as resort destinations, and the name "Crans-Montana" became widely adopted to describe the growing alpine retreat. In 2017, four surrounding communes—Mollens, Randogne, Montana and Chermignon—merged to form the official municipality of Crans-Montana.

Today, the area is a world-renowned luxury destination and alpine sports hub, hosting prestigious events such as the Omega European Masters golf tournament, the UCI Mountain Bike World Championships, the Audi FIS Ski World Cup and cultural highlights like the Caprices Festival, which features leading electronic music artists.

From Slope-Side Suites to Starred Swiss Cuisine

Crans-Montana offers exclusive experiences that make it an ideal winter escape, with a wide array of luxury hotels and resorts to indulge in.

Our winter base was Hotel Valaisia Crans-Montana, a Faern Collection Resort. Walking into the lobby, we immediately felt the warm, welcoming atmosphere suited to both relaxation and adventure. The family-run establishment is renowned for its personalized service, offering comfort and convenience that make it ideal for families, couples and solo travelers. Our standard room was cozy and comfortable, featuring down-filled duvets, modern furnishings and a private patio that opened onto a winter wonderland. For families, the suites are much larger, with separate living areas perfect for longer stays any time of year.

The social lounge is ideal for unwinding after a long day on the slopes—and you may even meet fellow travelers from around the world. Spoil and pamper yourself with Alpine views from the sauna and steam room, or relax in the professional indoor swimming and workout facility. A massage is well deserved after a day on the mountain.

Hotel Valaisia Crans-Montana is a year-round destination. Winter guests can walk to many of the 140 kilometers of ski slopes accessible from the hotel, while in summer, hiking, mountain biking, golf and lakeside activities are just minutes away.



Above: School Swiss Ski Crans-Montana

Right: Charcuterie at Merbé

Even non-skiers can enjoy a gondola ride up to Merbé, famous for panoramic views and traditional Alpine fare. Fondue, raclette and sausages headline the menu, followed by apple strudel and Swiss chocolate fondue for dessert. Pair your meal with local wines for an authentic taste.

Crans-Montana is a gastronomic haven. Le Chalet de Flore features gourmet regional cuisine in an intimate mountain setting, while The Capra's restaurant blends Swiss tradition with inventive techniques. For a Michelin-starred evening, LeMontBlanc—led by Chef Yannick Crepau, who trained with French chefs Guy Martin and Christian Constant—delivers a culinary tour de force. Our five-hour experience included brioche French toast with shaved truffles, steak frites, raclette and a finale





Above Left: Black truffles at Michelin-starred restaurant LeMontBlanc at LeCrans

Above Right: Côte de bœuf maturée at Gueuleton Crans-Montana

Left: (L-R) Scott Harris, Chef Yannick Crepaux of LeMontBlanc, and Elaine Harris

of crème brûlée and Swiss chocolate fondue. A sommelier-guided wine tasting further elevated the meal.

Trail to Table: An Alpine Snowshoeing Adventure

The Swiss love the outdoors, no matter the season. When it comes to winter activities, many are practically born into it—starting as young children on skis, skates and snowshoes, continuing into their 70s and beyond.

When offered the opportunity to

snowshoe for lunch, we eagerly accepted the chance to experience this popular Alpine tradition under the guidance of a wilderness expert. To reach our dining destination high in the Alps, we were told we'd need to embark on a 2.5-hour uphill trek through stunning mountain terrain.

Our journey, completely uphill at altitude, was physically demanding but visually rewarding, offering breathtaking views. "Just a little further, and lunch will be brilliant," our guide promised in a thick French accent.

Out of breath and hungry, we finally reached Colombire, a historic Alpine village featuring a shared mayen, a traditional mountain lodge offering rustic cabin-style comfort. In winter, the only way to get there is by cross-country skiing or snowshoeing.

Grateful to have arrived, we were ready to satisfy our worked-up appetites. The lodge's interior artfully blended modern mountain chic with cozy elements: wooden beams, warm lighting and contemporary furniture. The atmosphere buzzed with stylish locals, their skis neatly stacked outside. In good weather, the outdoor terrace is a highlight, offering the grandeur that is ubiquitous at high altitudes.

The menu delivered a creative take on traditional mountain cuisine. We dove into raclette and fondue to warm up, followed by tapas-style sharing plates, a gourmet burger and a fresh salad. To drink: a curated list of local wines, craft

beers, inventive cocktails and Alpine-inspired beverages.

As our meal wound down, we hesitantly asked, "How do we get back down?"

"We sled, of course! We'll be back in no time," our guide said with a grin. Minutes later, we were zipping downhill with childlike glee, riding sleds small enough for kids but sturdy enough to get us to the bottom safely.

Exploring Local Life and Legendary Hospitality

During our stay, we also enjoyed a relaxing swim at the hotel pool, then strolled through the quaint streets of Crans-Montana to meet Bruno Huggler, director of Crans-Montana Tourism & Congress, for dinner at the acclaimed Gueuleton. Centrally located near the lifts, hotels and shops, the restaurant

was the perfect setting to learn about Chemin des Lanternes, a holiday event that transforms a nearby forest into a whimsical trail of light and art.

The cozy chalet-style décor featured warm wooden accents and soft lighting, setting the mood for a refined yet relaxed evening. Our dinner began with regional charcuterie and foie gras terrine, followed by a perfectly grilled, hand-cut steak. The convivial ambiance and friendly locals added to the charm.

The next morning, we explored Crans-Montana on foot. A stop at David l'Instant Chocolat introduced us to an artisan chocolatier who crafts elegant, vibrantly colored confections using ethically sourced Peruvian cocoa. At the tourism office, we gathered details on private art gallery tours, curated museum visits and cultural events.

On our final night, we dined at CaSy, a centrally located gem ideal for a post-shopping or post-skating meal. The cozy mountain lodge ambience—complete with rustic wood décor and a lively crowd—set the tone as we savored Swiss-style grilled sausages paired with several glasses of Valais-region Cabernet Franc. The menu also features grilled chicken, pork, pasta and vegetarian options.

It was the perfect way to cap off one last taste of Crans-Montana's warm hospitality and authentic Alpine spirit.



Left: Cross-country skiing in the Swiss Alps

Bottom Left: Scott & Elaine Harris at LeCrans



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PAUL AVGERINOS FOUR-TIME GRAMMY WINNER FOLLOWING HIS BLISS WITH GRATITUDE AND JOY

By Sheryl Aronson / Photography courtesy of Paul Avgerinos

Tucked away in the woods of Redding, Connecticut, is Studio Unicorn, a magical hideaway where four-time Grammy winner Paul Avgerinos daily alchemizes his diverse forms of musical composition. While his passion and focus center on composing and playing New Age music, his talent is expansive: a multi-instrumentalist, engineer and producer composing and licensing music for film and TV, with a catalog of more than 9,000 tracks and over 300 million streaming listeners.

Avgerinos achieved such accolades by following his bliss and being true to himself, which meant no touring, something unheard of in the world of music. So, if the public wants to experience his angelic music, they must go online and float away to the heavens.

"I found that touring didn't suit my personality because I'm very sensitive and need to be surrounded by nature. I need peace and quiet—I'm kind of high maintenance in that way," Avgerinos revealed.

Here's an artist who seems completely at peace and extraordinarily humble when speaking about his incredible



Above: Four-time Grammy winner Paul Avgerinos

Right: Paul Avgerinos

journey in the genre of New Age music. Called "one of the giants of ambient music" by *AllMusic Guide*, this maestro continuously approaches his artistry with joy and playfulness.

"I followed my bliss with the New Age music and never expected to make a dollar. I think it's very important for artists to faithfully follow their bliss—granted, I followed mine through because I love doing it."

Chic Compass: You graduated from the Peabody Conservatory of Music. What got you interested in music? How did attending Peabody affect your career as a musician?

Paul Avgerinos: I started playing bass in a rock band around the age of 12. Then, while playing jazz, I started studying the upright bass because my jazz player/piano friend thought it would be great to have an upright bass in our jazz band. I also performed with the local Symphony Youth Orchestra to further my learning.

I was 18 when I got a full scholarship to Peabody Conservatory on the upright bass. It was awesome to be surrounded by such great musicians and to grow as a musician in just a few years' time.

Chic Compass: At Peabody, you studied classical music; you also have a jazz background and played rock 'n' roll. Then you decided to perform New Age/spiritual music. What caused that change in musical genres?

Paul Avgerinos: When I was around 15 or 16, I started having some beautiful spiritual awakenings. I was doing a lot of yoga—like three hours a day—and meditating. I then discovered John McLaughlin's heavenly music. His sound set me on a new path of music, and I realized music was a connection. If it was approached in a deep meditative way, it could bring you closer to the divine. Seeing John McLaughlin do that with his music and studying with his guru, Sri Chinmoy, inspired me to participate



in Sri Chinmoy's meditation groups when he offered them in Norwalk, Connecticut. Sri Chinmoy came to my hometown area once a week to give meditation classes. That was about five or six miles from where I was growing up. I even got to see Carlos Santana there one day, who was also a devotee. A very magical time. I was clear that music was not just my life, but that God could also be at the heart of my spiritual musical life—my spiritual awakening—and spiritual growth.

Chic Compass: Sounds very exciting and inspiring. Besides John McLaughlin, were there any other musicians influencing you?

Paul Avgerinos: Chick Corea's *Return to Forever*, Stanley Clarke, Wayne Shorter's *Weather Report*, Gary Burton—all the great jazz-rock masters of the early '70s. Back then, it was a vibrant time in music. Jazz had never been combined with rock energy before, and they were even bringing in some New

Age elements with an impressionistic flavor, like Ravel's influence—a blessed time to be coming up as a young person in the music scene.

Chic Compass: You also created your own recording studio, as well as being an artist. Talk about how you established it.

Paul Avgerinos: After five to six years performing as a musician, I realized I wanted to do this ambient, New Age music as an artist. To accomplish this goal, I needed a little studio to produce the recordings. I built a small basement studio in '87, and we started making recordings. Fortunately, one of my clients had a New Age label—New World Productions—and they were in the UK as well as the U.S. I was making masters for them, and one day I said, "Hey, could I make some of these recordings?" and he said, "Sure. Go ahead and do whatever you'd like." I took advantage of the opportunity and began creating my own albums for release on that

label. I made four or five albums for them, and that was my beginning as a New Age artist.

My studio had modest beginnings, but there were many synchronistic events that helped me along. I began to feel that this was what I was meant to do. After a good 10 to 15 years, I had picked up steam, and my career as a New Age artist and studio producer/engineer took off.

Chic Compass: You were making a career for yourself in this genre of music, even though you had decided not to tour as a musician.

Paul Avgerinos: My career suffered a bit because I didn't tour or do live concerts, so my career evolved more slowly. Also, there were very few outlets that broadcast New Age music. When streaming came online, my career picked up. I now had more accessibility and availability to an audience of New Age folks.

Because I wasn't doing concerts and tours, a lot of my friends pulled ahead and did much better commercially. Also, my version of New Age is very subtle and multi-layered. Performing the music live isn't entertaining to watch since the sound is cerebral and spiritual. I could bring in dancers and videos and make a nice show, but I've never really been drawn to the performance aspect of the music.

I'm grateful that the Goddess has allowed me to reach a large audience without doing concerts. I've done a few here and there; when people ask me, I'll usually comply.

Chic Compass: How many years did it take for you to feel your music was gaining popularity?

Paul Avgerinos: I think it took 15 years. Before or around the turn of the century, things really started to click together—it was a bit of a slow burn. There weren't many outlets. You sold your CDs at concerts. Sales do much better when people see you in person when touring.



I'm a slow-burning kind of person. I'm the quintessential late bloomer—except for my orchestral career, which took off like a rocket. I didn't even realize what was happening, and I turned around one day and said, "Wow, I can't believe I got this far this quickly." I'm a firm believer that everything is about karma, dharma and the grace of God. I give thanks to God all the time for these amazing blessings.

Chic Compass: Is one of your main goals as an artist to help people incorporate the music and have a connective, spiritual experience through music?

Paul Avgerinos: My interest in New Age music was to heal and soothe myself.

When I got good at that experience, I realized it could be useful for a much larger group of people I've never met. All humans deal with the same issues, such as sadness, isolation, loneliness, lack of connection and fear. What humans are longing for is real, unconditional love and bliss. I realized my spiritual music was a beautiful form of service that not only could help people with their own healing and spiritual growth, but also help them feel more peaceful, sleep better, be happier and worry less. If you focus on helping someone else or serving in some simple way, your happiness comes from knowing you're involved in that service. I have a lovely life here, very full of blessings and abundance.

Chic Compass: How do you feel when you get a message from a listener that your music has really moved them or helped heal them in their life?

Paul Avgerinos: My listeners have shared stories of how they were uplifted by my music. Maybe a relative was dying while listening to my music or a baby was being born as the mother was listening to my music. These sacred moments—passages into this life and out of this life—are very special and dear to me.

Chic Compass: You're also a four-time Grammy winner. Can you talk about your experiences receiving those Grammys?

Paul Avgerinos: It's been a wonderfully magical process: three regular Grammys and one Latin Grammy. The first one was probably the most special in some ways because it was for my New Age album, "Grace," in 2015. I started releasing New Age music in '87, which was also the year the first New Age Grammy was awarded to Andreas Vollenweider, the Swiss harpist. Then Enya won a few years later. Being among these iconic artists in the genre, I never imagined I could get a nomination. The morning of the day that I won, I burst into tears. I cried for like five minutes. I kept asking myself, "Why are you crying?" I heard a little voice answer, "You're going to win, and you'd better cry now because onstage you won't be able to make a good presentation." That was such a beautiful experience.

Then there was a Latin Grammy in 2020 for "Puertos: Music From International Waters" by Emilio Solla Tango Jazz Orchestra (producer Paul Avgerinos), and in 2022 with Arturo O'Farrill for engineering "Fandango at the Wall." This past February was for the best audiobook, "Last Sundays in Plains: A Centennial Celebration With President Jimmy Carter." His grandson gave the presentation at the Grammys. I've always admired President Carter. He was such a bright light, a true beacon of goodness.

Chic Compass: It sounds like this Grammy

fits perfectly with your life philosophy and what you strive for creatively and spiritually. You're more than a musician—you're a composer, producer, recording engineer and you own Studio Unicorn. Talk about what you do in the music world that's most important to you.

Paul Avgerinos: The craft has changed a lot since I began my career. Back then, things were much more delegated. You'd be either an artist, a bass player, an engineer or a producer—but you wouldn't be all those things at the same time. Now you must do all these things, plus you also must know Excel spreadsheets, social media and marketing. I kind of bumble along and do the best I can.

Besides creating New Age music, I also make catalog music for TV. I have about 8,000 tracks in my ASCAP catalog and 5,000 cue sheets. Each cue sheet is a separate TV show that has my music in it. Recently, I composed music for the Winter Olympics, which is going to be in Italy, and did about 15 tracks of classic old Italian melodies with modern beats. This morning, I finished

a Southern rock track with slide guitar that's aggressive and rocking. Playing like this expresses other parts of my creative energy—more male aggressive—kind of having fun with the boys kind of energy. Then I can switch it up and be very feminine and goddess-driven. If you do one thing all the time, it can get a little stale.

When you've had a long career, you have to be careful about getting into a rut, doing the same thing repeatedly. Diversity is the spice of life. I'd say the old maxim of following your bliss is still very true. I followed my bliss with New Age music and never expected to make a dollar off it. I think it's very important for artists to follow their bliss—granted, I followed mine for 15 years because I love doing it. If I didn't have that hopeful energy mentally, I might have quit, and I would've missed all this fun stuff. What I tell young artists is they've got to have a five-to-10-year plan and really must devote themselves and sacrifice for that plan—and not expect quick results.

Below: Grammy winner Paul Avgerinos





Photograph of Jonathan Karrant
by Joseph Donato (Cashman Photo)



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DIANE CHRISTIANSEN AND LOU ANNE H. CHESSIK LIVING THE LIFE OF RHINESTONES, FEATHERS, SEQUINS ... AND BEYOND

By Debbie Hall

The iconic showgirl in Las Vegas remains an integral aspect of the city's past, as the present honors the women (and men) of this timeless art form. Recently, Circa Resort & Casino welcomed the legendary Crazy Girls statue to the resort after shining for 24 years at the Riviera. Diane Christiansen and Lou Anne H. Chessik both embodied the showgirl persona while living that life before transitioning to different careers.

Christiansen parlayed her experiences as a showgirl into becoming an actress, dancer, author, director, producer, writer, costume designer and studio owner. Today, she is the owner, CEO and master coach at the Christiansen Acting Academy and the author of the recently released "The Last Real Showgirl: My Sequined '70s Onstage."

Chessik is the founder and president of the Showgirl Legacy Foundation, host of the broadcast show "The Showgirl Connection" and founder and producer of Cast and Crew Reunions.

The two women met during a cast and crew reunion for the Stardust Resort & Casino.

"I loved meeting Diane because we've



Lou Anne H. Chessik posing with other cast members in "Enter the Night." Photo courtesy of UNLV Libraries Special Collections and Archives

been talking about how we just missed each other at the 'Lido de Paris' show since we both danced in the show," Chessik said. "We also went to the Lido reunion in Paris, and our lives became more intertwined, really bonded over, and became good friends. Part of it is our love of keeping the iconic showgirl alive."

The path to becoming a showgirl was very diverse for both women.

Christiansen grew up in Rock Island, Illinois, part of the Quad Cities area.

She spent her childhood performing, acting and singing, but became serious about dancing at the age of 13. She began training with a husband-and-wife team who had been performers in New York. Christiansen was a talented tap dancer and was determined to be ready for the audition with the Rockettes. In fact, her book opens with her audition with Russell Markert and Emilia Sherman, the original creator, choreographer and company manager of the Radio City Music Hall Rockettes.

While her heart was in acting, and she even won an acting scholarship, Christiansen decided to remain on call to be a summer replacement for the Rockettes. Eventually, she auditioned for the Rudas Dancers and performed in shows in Montreal, Paradise Island in the Bahamas and "Folies Bergère" at the Tropicana in Las Vegas. She danced in "Lido de Paris" from 1979 to 1981.

Chessik began ballet training at age 6 and joined Tacoma City Ballet as a teenager. However, she grew to be 6 feet tall and was advised to train in another style of dance. She studied modern dance at the Martha Graham Studios and jazz at the Alvin Ailey Dance Studios in New York City.

After college, she drove to Las Vegas with her friend, and her mom got them tickets to see "Hallelujah Hollywood," which was at the original MGM Grand. She went backstage and introduced herself to the company manager, Fluff LeCoque. The night before, producer



Donn Arden had been in to see the show and fired a showgirl on the spot. Chessik auditioned for LeCoque and started dancing in "Hallelujah Hollywood" her second day in Las Vegas.

"We were dancing six nights a week, two shows a night and three on Saturday, and then during the disco days, we'd be all wound up from doing the shows. We would go out to Paul Anka's Jubilations, The Brewery or Gipsy until the sun came up," Christiansen said. "We had built-in entertainment backstage at the 'Lido de Paris' because we had the most talented cast, and the boys in our show entertained us between shows like it was their job."

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Strip was home to fabulous female

Above Top: Diane Christiansen and Lou Anne H. Chessik on the set of "The Showgirl Connection" on WWDB-TV. Photo by John Stiles

Above Left: Photo of Diane Christiansen courtesy of Diane Christiansen

Above Right: Lou Anne H. Chessik

impersonators, such as Kenny Kerr, whom many considered beautiful, feminine and funny. Both women admitted it was a nonstop party.

"I had really accomplished a lot as an actor in those three years in Las Vegas, including three major feature films and three commercials that were all broadcast. The casting director from CBS for 'The Young and the Restless' was in Las Vegas, and I was one of three actors selected for a general interview," Christiansen said. "A general interview

is like gold. The next day, my agent called me for a callback. I drove to Los Angeles, where my first role was as a nurse."

She moved to Los Angeles to continue her acting career, was signed by an agent and worked in two lead roles on a Canadian series on the Playboy Channel, similar to the American TV series "Love, American Style." While appearing on the show, Christiansen met the love of her life and married him.

Chessik's life changed while she was in rehearsals for "Jubilee" after "Hallelujah Hollywood" closed at the MGM Grand. About three weeks before the show was set to open, a major fire struck the MGM Grand.

"I never went back to dance in 'Jubilee' since it was delayed and opened eight months later. Over the next 10 years, I danced in the 'Lido de Paris' and 'Enter the Night' at the Stardust Hotel, 'Hello Hollywood, Hello!' at the MGM Grand Hotel in Reno, Nevada and 'Las Vegas by Night' at the Mikado Theatre in Tokyo. 'Enter the Night' was my last show, and I was in the original cast," Chessik explained. "I knew it would be my last show because I was 36 years old and because I became pregnant with my son. I like to say my son danced with me onstage for five months until I couldn't hold my stomach in any longer."

For more than 33 years, Christiansen has operated her acting studio, with her daughter teaching for the past 15 years, following her own career as an actress from childhood into her early 30s. Students include those who perform in shows such as "Euphoria," "This Is Us" and "Stranger Things."

"We've been lucky; we have worked hard and won awards over the years as the best studio in Los Angeles. We've had the good fortune to train some of the hottest talent in Hollywood, including Chloe Cherry on 'Euphoria.' We trained Rhenzy Feliz on the new show 'The Penguin' with Colin Farrell, who won an Emmy and a Golden Globe



for his role in that series. Rhenzy is a rising star," Christiansen said. "Rhenzy got his agent with us in our showcase and has come up. He was the voice of the teen boy in 'Encanto.' We've got a lot of new people coming up."

With the impending implosion of the Stardust Resort & Casino in 2006, Chessik created and organized a reunion, and over 650 people attended. Chessik created the website for the event (castandcrewreunion.com) and later the Showgirl Legacy Foundation (showgirllegacy.org).

"We didn't have a lot of photos back then, so I thought about holding an art competition that would combine the visual and performing arts. I spoke with my friend Linda Spinks about my idea. Both of her daughters were attending the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts, and she said to run it by their art instructor, Kelly Mabel. She immediately gained an understanding of the unique entertainment history of Las Vegas, which became part of her curriculum. The art students study the history of the showgirl

Above: Lou Anne H. Chessik posing with other showgirls in "Lido de Paris." Photo courtesy of Lou Anne H. Chessik

and the stage show spectaculars and create their own interpretation of the iconic showgirl in a painting," Chessik explained.

The Showgirl Legacy Foundation will present the 19th Annual Showgirl Art Competition, which showcases a historical perspective and presentation of the showgirl era by former performers. The presentation also features a showgirl modeling original costumes from the Las Vegas stage show spectaculars for photo references for the artists. The Las Vegas Academy of the Arts will host this program.

Another event led to Chessik hosting "The Showgirl Connection" on WWDB-TV (wwdbtv.com/shows/the-showgirl-connection). Stephen Sondheim's "Follies" ran for a limited engagement at Aliante Casino & Hotel in April 2024. It featured a 45-member cast, including 12 original Las Vegas showgirls and a 30-piece orchestra.

"I was one of the 12 legendary showgirls in Stephen Sondheim's 'Follies,' and I never thought I'd be back on stage again," Chessik said. "Diane's acting classes helped me tremendously as well for that role. I was a guest on the show 'The Gift of Giving' on WWDB-TV as the founder and president of the Showgirl Legacy Foundation. John Stiles, the owner and producer of WWDB-TV, asked me after the show if I would consider hosting a show about showgirls, and I said yes. Around that time, Diane and I went to see the movie 'The Last Showgirl' and started brainstorming about the film. We decided to have Diane as my guest and compare the movie to her new book, which shares a similar title. We discussed what they got right and what they got wrong. She was my guest on the first three episodes of 'The Showgirl Connection' and co-hosted the fourth one with me."

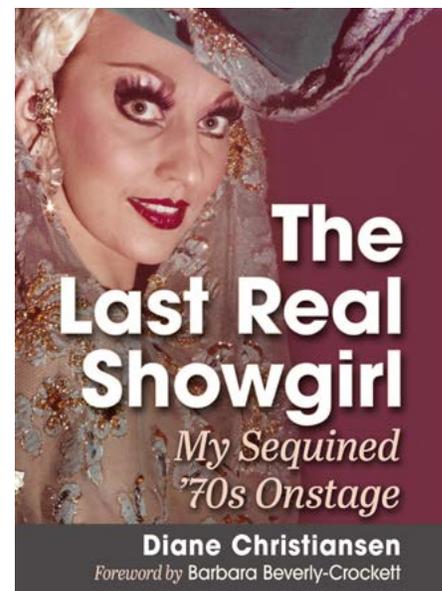
Speaking of books, Christiansen is thrilled with the impact of 'The Last Real Showgirl: My Sequined '70s Onstage.'

"I started writing after the Stardust reunion. I remember thinking about everyone who had graced the stages of those spectaculars over the past five decades, thinking this was the end of an era. I didn't even consider myself a writer, but I thought I'm going to start just writing the stories of the 1970s of my dance days," Christiansen said.

Another inspiration was the 1995 movie "Showgirls" by Joe Eszterhas. "The movie was unreal and wasn't true to our lives. I wanted so much for the lives of showgirls to be depicted realistically and show what our lives were like. I wanted to leave a legacy of truth," Christiansen said. "I decided to write for hours, and it all just spilled forth. I finished the book; I did a proposal, got a literary manager and a publisher."

Christiansen will hold a book signing at Barnes & Noble, 567 N. Stephanie St. in Henderson, from 1 to 3 p.m. on Sept. 6.

For more information, visit thelastrealshowgirl.com.



Above Top: Diane Christiansen on the "Lido de Paris" flyer

Above: "The Last Real Showgirl: My Sequined '70s Onstage"

Left: Diane Christiansen as a showgirl in the 1970s. Photo courtesy of Diane Christiansen



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VEGAS STRONGER: TRANSFORMING LIVES AND RESTORING HOPE

By Debbie Hall / Photography courtesy of Vegas Stronger

Beyond the glitter of the neon lights, incredible gourmet dining and extraordinary entertainment, Las Vegas has a different story. Addiction, homelessness and mental health struggles have impacted countless lives. Vegas Stronger, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is working to offer a different future where every individual, regardless of their past or circumstances, can heal, recover and reclaim their life.

Vegas Stronger provides compassionate, evidence-based behavioral health care to underserved populations in the community. Its goal is to reduce homelessness by addressing root causes such as substance use disorders and untreated mental health conditions. Vegas Stronger received its official documents from the Secretary of State more than 10 years ago and has been treating patients for eight years in Las Vegas.

"We're pulling the Las Vegas community together to help solve the homelessness crisis because none of us like having somebody suffering in our community," said David Marlon, founder and CEO of Vegas Stronger, who holds a doctorate in psychology. "I recognize that Las Vegas has a soul. After the Oct. 1 shooting, we saw many people in our community pull together, whether



Above: David Marlon, founder and CEO of Vegas Stronger



Above: A client receives counseling at Vegas Stronger

it was to donate blood, offer counseling services or help people grieve. Las Vegas pulled together, and we showed that we have a soul. Now, over 8,000 people are suffering on our streets, and we wanted to show that the community has a soul."

Today, Vegas Stronger has five locations, with its central facility at 916 N. Main St. and additional counseling offices in Las Vegas, Reno and Pahrump, Nevada.

"We offer all the levels of outpatient care, which we call PHP, partial hospitalization, which is 20 hours a week of counseling. IOP, which is an intensive outpatient program, is nine to 10 hours a week of counseling," Marlon said. "We also have four psychiatric prescribers who provide medicine. We offer peer support specialists who connect with each of our clients and have a peer relationship."

Ten case managers help clients obtain EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer), food

service, housing and medical support. The facility includes a large gym with personal trainers for every client and yogis who create individualized yoga and breathing programs.

"We have many amenities under what we call an integrative health care, behavioral health care solution," Marlon added.

Although family programming is available, it's usually not accessed by clients until much later in the program. "Most unhoused people have burned all the bridges with family," he said.

As for the population, "We have over 100 clients who are ordered by the courts to attend treatment," Marlon said. "We also do direct jail pickups, where we take 50 people a month directly from one of the three jails in Clark County and bring them [to Main Street] when they get out."

When someone walks in the door, they almost always say they need housing.

"We recognize that, in our experience, 94 percent of them have a substance

use disorder. Helping them stop using substances is actually a higher order of importance than getting them housed. We do get them into drug treatment, but for every client who walks in, we immediately get them housed."

Housing usually starts in a shelter, transitions to sober living, then to transitional housing and eventually to permanent housing.

"It's mostly men who are unhoused on our streets. I will tell you that 20 to 30 percent of the females we treat have gone through horrific traumas. No female should be out on the streets of Las Vegas ever," Marlon said. "We need to get services to them and help them get off the street. It's a mostly white population, with an average age in the mid-30s, along with people from BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and people of color] communities. We treat all ages, although there are very few children. I'm grateful that there are lots of resources to help children quickly get into the social safety net."

There's also a geriatric population, as hospitals sometimes discharge patients



to shelters because they have no place to go after a medical procedure. "That's a really challenging population to address, but we help any human who walks in our door," Marlon added.

That includes people with pets.

"If they need inpatient detox, we often facilitate pet boarding. They'll bring their pet to our outpatient groups and individual sessions. We'll even help dogs get little shoes."

Vegas Stronger also maintains a close relationship with the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe, which refers clients. For two years, the central facility offered a Native healing group.

As for faith-based organizations, "I believe in God and a connection to me is instrumental in helping people recover. We are a medical model facility and we're utilizing a medical model to help people get well. As part of that, our case managers will encourage people to reconnect or open a new connection to a spiritual system of the patient's choosing," Marlon said. "We've had support from the faith-based community in providing meals and other types of support. We've got one of the

congregations considering helping us with some funding to do some projects in the building that need to be done."

How can the community help? "Like any nonprofit, funding is a priority," said Stacey Lockhart, vice president of philanthropy. "We do receive some federal, state, county and city grant funding, but it never covers all the costs. We'll have 130 to 140 clients here at one time. It's bustling and noisy and our staff are working in cubbyholes. We need another building and expansion. We need to do some renovations to this building. Our vision is continuing to expand because the demand for what Vegas Stronger does is there from the community."

Lockhart wants to reach out to the community at large, including individuals who may have been affected by a friend, family member or loved one who has experienced mental health challenges, struggled with addiction or lost someone. "We provide transportation so clients can get here and back every day. We spend over \$600,000 a year transporting clients because we know it improves outcomes."

Small gifts matter too. Hygiene packs

Above: Vegas Stronger provides transportation for its clients

are always needed to give to the outreach team as they connect with those on the streets. Vegas Stronger also partners with Wendi Schweigart at Project Marilyn, picking up 100 sanitary kits monthly.

"We feed our clients every day while they're here. We're making protein shakes in the morning to help improve health," Lockhart said.

The Just One Project is another supporter and community members can sponsor a lunch or organize team building by providing meals.

"Even if you provide 150 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, every little bit helps. There are so many different ways for people to get involved," she added.

Vegas Stronger also provides a clothing closet, with a strong need for men's clothing, especially tennis shoes, pants and shorts. Laundry soap, cleaning supplies and even dirt for the community garden are appreciated.

One of the most meaningful gifts

someone can give is the Vegas Stronger "Golden Ticket"—an actual, physical ticket that offers shelter and treatment when presented.

"People in need will call other places and be told there's a three- to six-month wait. When somebody's ready, we really need to take advantage of that moment because that's where they're at right now," Marlon said.

"At Gobble Gobble Give [a community Thanksgiving event], I gave out 400 Golden Tickets. I walk along the line and visit with people," Lockhart added.

Vegas Stronger began when Marlon, then CEO of Solutions Recovery, and John Seeland, CEO of Las Vegas Recovery Center, came together to discuss how to better serve the most

vulnerable. They ran two of the largest drug treatment centers in Nevada and realized they could have a greater impact together.

"There were actually five of us who believed in the vision, and we began filing documents and opened what is now Vegas Stronger. We believe having immediate access to integrated behavioral health care, with longer treatment durations, is the secret sauce to solving addiction and homelessness," Marlon said.

A Las Vegas resident for more than 38 years, Marlon worked in the health care field, got sober and opened Solutions Recovery, which he sold 13 years later for a little more than \$20 million.

"I felt called back to Las Vegas not to

retire on the beach but to work hard to help the underserved. I often tell my partner we have our burial plots at Palm Mortuary in Las Vegas, so this is where I live now and will live forever," he said, laughing.

Vegas Stronger continues raising awareness and visibility. When visitors tour the facility and meet alumni, current clients and staff, they are often amazed.

Upcoming events include a luncheon in September, a community cleanup, a semiannual graduation and more.

For more information, visit vegasstronger.org, sign up for the newsletter and follow @VegasStrongerOfficial on Facebook and Instagram and @VegasStronger1 on X (formerly Twitter).



Above: Mural on exterior of Vegas Stronger

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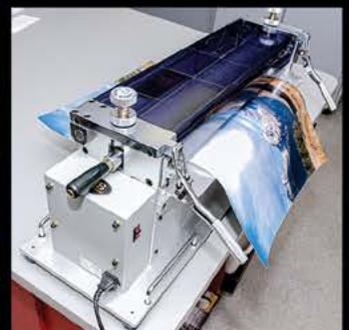
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HOLLYWOOD STARS, FILIPINO FILMMAKERS SHINE AT THE 2025 CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

By Janet Susan R. Nepales

One didn't need to go to Hollywood to see the stars—they all arrived at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival and took over the red carpet at the Promenade de la Croisette.

Beaming with his 24-karat smile was Tom Cruise, whose "Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning" was screened at the French Riviera festival.

Unlike three years ago, when the superstar premiered "Top Gun: Maverick" with jets flying overhead, this year, Cruise entered the red carpet without fanfare but was still met with a frenzy of fans.

Always the belle of the ball—or in this case, the red carpet—Angelina Jolie attended the "Eddington" premiere in a nude off-shoulder Brunello Cucinelli ballgown and a Chopard necklace.

She was set to present a trophy to rising stars Marie Colomb and Finn Bennett at a ceremony on Carlton Beach later in the week. In the meantime, she showed support for the Ari Aster-directed film, which stars her colleagues and friends Joaquin Phoenix, Pedro Pascal, Austin Butler and Emma Stone.

What was more glittering than the pairing of Jennifer Lawrence and Robert Pattinson, as they arrived for the premiere of their film, "Die, My Love," which earned a nine-minute standing ovation at the Grand Théâtre Lumière.

Scarlett Johansson debuted as a director at Cannes with "Eleanor the



Above: Janet Nepales at the Golden Globes Variety party during the 2025 Cannes Film Festival

Great," starring June Squibb. Fresh from hosting "Saturday Night Live," the actress-turned-director flew to the Riviera with her husband, longtime SNL cast member Colin Hanks.

Regal and poised, Cate Blanchett channeled old Hollywood glamour in a Louis Vuitton gown during the closing ceremony and stood out as she ascended the steps of the Palais in her black halter-neck gown.

Despite a heated encounter with a photographer, Denzel Washington

remained composed when he received his honorary Palme d'Or at the premiere of Spike Lee's film "Highest 2 Lowest."

Two years ago, Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert De Niro walked the Cannes carpet for Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon." This year they returned, with DiCaprio presenting the lifetime achievement Palme d'Or to De Niro at the opening ceremony.

One of the festival's highlights was the bombastic, politically charged acceptance speech by De Niro.



Above: Janet Nepales and Ruben Nepales with the cast and film makers of "The Road to Sydney" at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival

Right: Lav Diaz and Gael García Bernal at the screening of "Magellan" at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival

"In my country, we are fighting like hell for the democracy we once took for granted. That affects all of us here, because art is the crucible that brings people together, like tonight. Art looks for truth. Art embraces diversity. That's why art is a threat. That's why we are a threat to autocrats and fascists," he said.

"You can't put a price on creativity, but apparently you can put a tariff on it. Of course, this is unacceptable. All of these attacks are unacceptable," he added.



Opening the festival officially was award-winning director Quentin Tarantino, who even dropped the mic dramatically after his dialogue.

The jury of the 2025 Festival de Cannes, chaired by French actress Juliette Binoche, included American actress and filmmaker Halle Berry, Indian director and screenwriter Payal Kapadia, Italian actress Alba Rohrwacher, French-Moroccan writer Leïla Slimani, Congolese documentarian

and producer Dieudo Hamadi, Korean director Hong Sang-soo, Mexican filmmaker Carlos Reygadas and American actor Jeremy Strong. They selected winners among 22 films in competition.

The coveted Palme d'Or went to controversial Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi for "It Was Just an Accident," while Joachim Trier's comedy-drama "Sentimental Value," starring Stellan Skarsgård and Elle Fanning, earned the Grand Prix.

Other notable films included:

- "Alpha," a drama directed by Julia Ducournau and starring Mélissa Boros and Tahar Rahim
- "Highest 2 Lowest," directed by Spike Lee, starring Denzel Washington, Jeffrey Wright and ASAP Rocky, with cinematography by Filipino American Matthew Libatique
- Wes Anderson's star-studded "The Phoenician Scheme," featuring



Benicio del Toro, Scarlett Johansson and Benedict Cumberbatch

- "Die, My Love," starring Jennifer Lawrence and Robert Pattinson
- "Eddington," starring Joaquin Phoenix, Pedro Pascal, Austin Butler and Emma Stone
- "Father, Mother, Sister, Brother," starring Cate Blanchett and Adam Driver
- "The Chronology of Water," the directorial debut of Kristen Stewart

Filipino filmmakers also shared the spotlight.

Award-winning auteur Lav Diaz led the Philippine delegation with the world premiere of his historical film "Magellan," starring Gael García Bernal.

Young filmmakers Arvin Belarmino, Kyla Danelle Romero and Kristine De Leon brought two short films to Cannes as nominees: "Agapito" and "Ali." The latter, a Philippines-Bangladesh co-production directed by Adnan Al Rajeev, won the Special Mention award in the short film category.

At the press conference, Rajeev thanked the Philippine team—Belarmino and Romero, who scripted the film, and De Leon, who produced it.

Former supermodel and arts patron Tetta Agustin and her husband, Christian Baverey, graciously hosted a dinner for the young Filipino filmmakers at their Cannes residence.

This year was also personally significant, as our older daughter, Bianca Nicole Nepales, former vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion at Lionsgate, participated in three panels, including the China Film and Female Empowerment Forum; the Diversity & Inclusion Film Festival (DIFF) and the Fugitive Sister Productions (FSP) panel, "How to Continue to Support Impact & Inclusion in the Entertainment Industry" and AfroCannes.

Several Golden Globe voters and members, including my husband, Ruben, and I, also attended the *Variety* and Golden Globe annual gala, where awards were presented to outstanding talent and filmmakers.

We were proud to see producers Alemberg Ang and Sylvia Sanchez represent "Renoir," directed by Chie Hayakawa, which was shortlisted for the main competition.

Producers Sonia Delen, Wendy Pascual and Radi Calalang screened their documentary "The Road to Sydney," directed



Above Top: Janet Nepales and Ruben Nepales with the Golden Globes voters at the 2025 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France

Above: Janet, Ruben, and Bianca Nepales at the Golden Globes Variety party during the 2025 Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France

by Benito Bautista, which follows the emotional journey of Filipino master choreographer Sydney Loyola, a trans woman confronting discrimination and embracing her identity through dance while seeking reconciliation with her estranged father.

We look forward to next year's festival and hope to see more glitterati from both Hollywood and the Philippines.

OTONOMUS HOTEL: THE FIRST OPEN AI-POWERED HOTEL WITH A HUMAN TOUCH—E-BUTLERS AND O BRAINS AND APPS, OH MY!

By Stacey Gualandi / Photography courtesy of Otonomus





Imagine checking into a hotel that knows everything about you: how you like your coffee, when you want a massage, which wine you drink and what your preferred room temperature is while sleeping.

OK, stop dreaming. The future of hospitality is now with Otonomus Hotel, the first (open) AI-powered hotel in Las Vegas.

The Otonomus Hotel jumped to hospitality hyperspace where "personalization isn't just a luxury—it's the standard." In other words, artificial intelligence is reprogramming the concept of guest comfort and convenience.

The revolutionary behind this real estate renaissance is Philippe Ziade, or "disruptive visionary," as he hopes to be remembered by.

"Innovation is the heartbeat of the industry," Ziade says. "If you don't innovate every week, you die."

This Las Vegas-based developer, mechanical engineer and founder/CEO of Growth Holdings says he wants to keep raising real estate values through tech.

"The purpose of the AI is to be a hybrid between your typical Airbnb and a luxury hotel to really give you a true, personalized experience," Ziade says. "Without AI, personalization at that level is not possible."

Ziade was a big player during the Airbnb boom, transforming distressed homes into hot properties. He learned that the one-size-fits-all experience for guests is out; 100 percent personalized is in.

"Now you can have the flexibility of an Airbnb at the cost of an Airbnb," Ziade says. "Our aim is to combine that with a luxury level of service because we believe that today's modern traveler seeks that."

Left: Architect's rendering of the new Otonomus Hotel exterior in Las Vegas, Nevada

The \$160 million, 300-plus-suite project is just a short trip from the Strip and boasts two pools and multiple block chains of interconnected rooms, as well as one of the largest single accommodations, with the smallest one-bedroom suite measuring over 800 square feet.

The speakeasy-inspired cocktail lounge called L'Entouraj has a multimillion-dollar view, and "Top Chef" winner Charbel Hayek will oversee a new Lebanese culinary concept.

And Otonomus might just be your next home. Alongside its amenity-rich, AI-powered suites, this resort-meets-residence concept is now offering a limited number of long-term residential leases within its apartments.

So how does this autonomous, artificial intelligence algorithm actually work?

I haven't jumped on the ChatGPT bandwagon yet, so I needed some reinforcement learning. On a recent Ziade-led tour, I quickly realized Otonomus gives strong AI.

Ziade says there are four phases.

"Phase One is booking. Otonomus technology created an advanced

AI-powered booking engine [called FIRO] that is attribute-based. You just tell us what you want so we can provide the best guest experience possible."

For example, you can choose a room away from noise and specify how often you want cleaning service.

"We give you all these options to custom tailor your stay with what you need and not to overpay for things you're not going to use."

After booking your stay, next is Phase Two: the onboarding process.

"AI will go and scrape the entire internet, including all social media platforms, get millions of data points and bring them all in," Ziade says. "The AI will then create what we call a 'unique digital avatar' of the guest. Every guest will have their own digital avatar, which is basically a digital twin of you."

Ziade says the avatar will be able to predict preferences and behaviors before you check in, even if it's your first time. It will also predict what you're going to like and how much you're most likely going to spend.

"Phase Three is the actual stay, where



Philippe Ziade

we track in real time every behavior you have while you're here," Ziade says.

I got an up-close look at how using a smartphone and the hotel's KEE mobile app—which acts as a digital concierge at your fingertips—adapts to the user's preferences, making it more personalized.

With the phone app, I scanned over the "O Brain" digital panel outside the room, which opened the door.



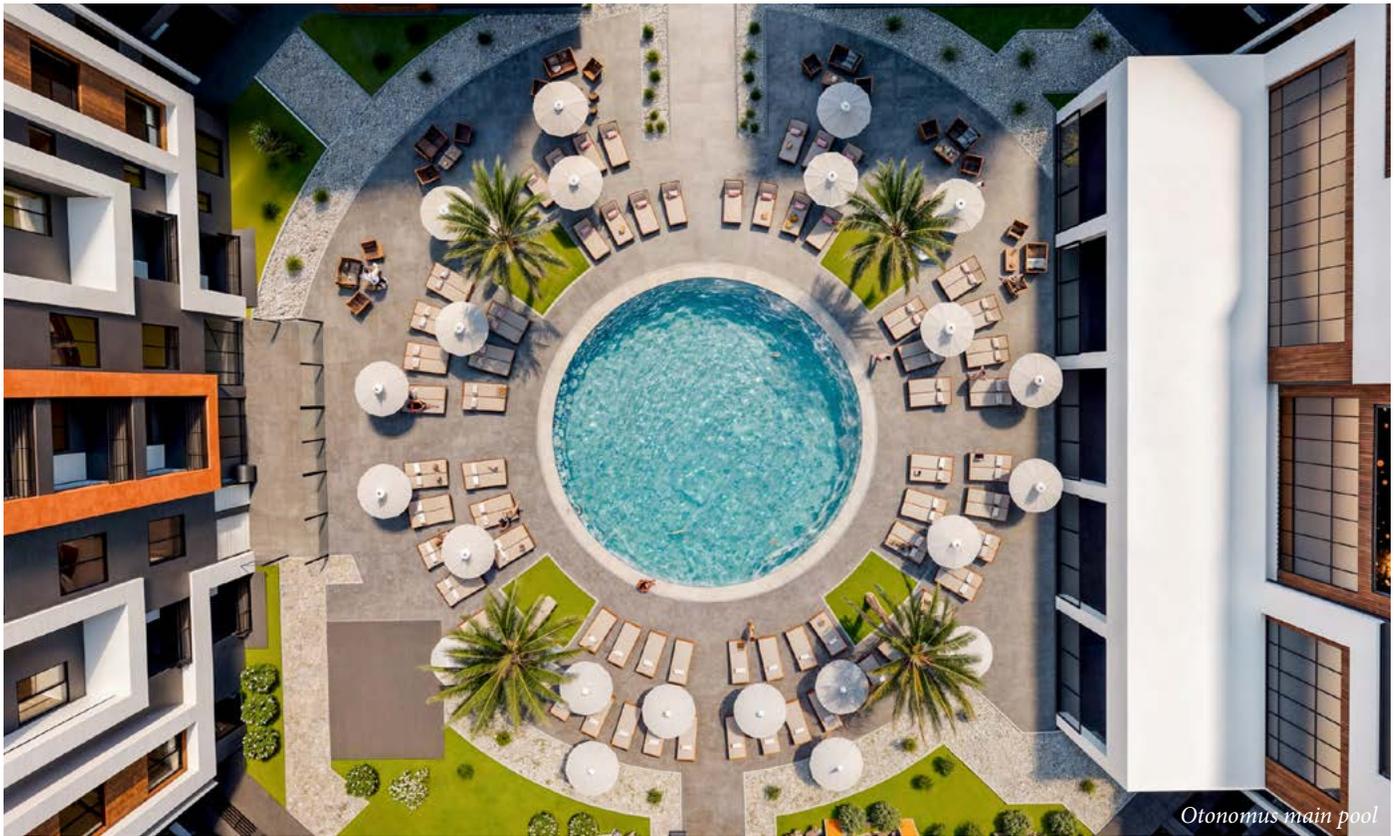
Otonomus main entrance



Otonomus living area



Otonomus guest bedroom



Once inside the spacious, minimalist-style rooms, you can do everything on demand via the app: housekeeping services, maintenance orders, temperature preferences and food ordering.

"You don't have to be in the room to activate the DND. You can do it right on your phone or can speak into your app, 'please put on DND,'" Ziade says.

That goes for opening the E-Butler. Yes, I said E-Butler.

"Let's say you forgot to get towels, so you just tell your phone, 'I need more towels,' and the team will put the towels into the E-Butler, a two-way cabinet with a privacy door outside your room. No one will access the room while you are not here."

Ziade says even with Do Not Disturb on, you can still order items to the room. A message will be sent that your items have been delivered, and they'll be waiting for you in the E-Butler.

"It makes it so much more flexible; you don't have to be in the room waiting."

The final phase is the offboarding process.

"Phase Four will capture any gaps between what your avatar told us is going to happen and what actually happened," Ziade reveals. "The more you stay with us, the more we align your avatar and customize it for you. This offers that flexibility, efficiency and luxury experience, all at the cost of an Airbnb. It makes our brand not only efficient but unforgettable."

Ziade, who left Lebanon 25 years ago to attend UNLV with barely enough money for tuition, was just named Visionary Business Leader of 2025 – Southwest by World Business Outlook for reshaping the future of hospitality.

And he's creating a metaverse of his own. Through his LIVV Homes and Growth Luxury Homes, Ziade continues to build multiple high-end residential communities in Las Vegas, including, you guessed it, the first AI-powered home.

It's a constant learning and evolving

process to provide guests with an ever-perfect stay. And whether you like it or not, Ziade says it's a process that's here to stay.

"I call it the augmented era, where all our capabilities as humans are being augmented," Ziade affirms. "Our concept is not meant for AI to replace humans. It's meant for them to enhance the performance of humans."



Above: Stacey Gualandi with Philippe Ziade at Otonomus' L'Entouraj speakeasy during construction



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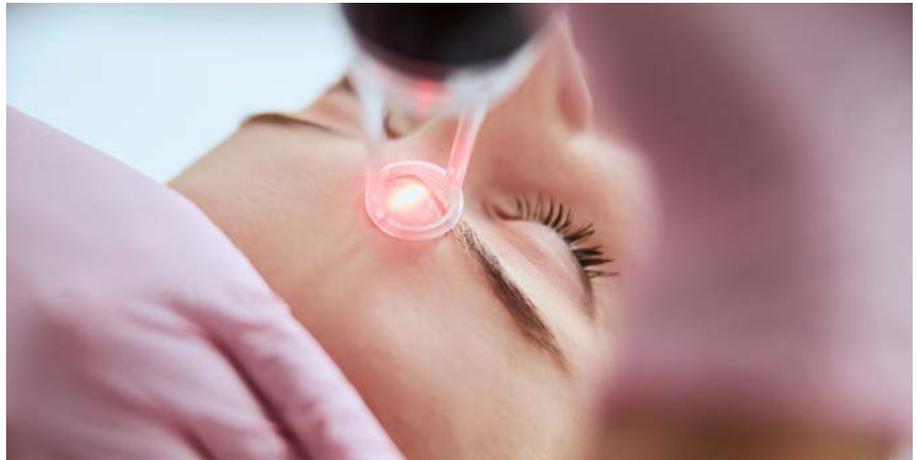
AUTUMN GLOW-UP: POST-SUMMER SKIN REHAB

By Erika Luren, MA, MS, NP

After a scorching Las Vegas summer, our skin is sun-weary, dehydrated, more wrinkled, unevenly pigmented, dry, flaking and begging for renewal. Fall is the ideal season to undo summer damage and return skin to a healthy baseline before the holiday party circuit begins.

The most rigorous and effective medical skincare treatments require avoidance of excessive sun exposure post-treatment to heal properly. Fall is a time when kids are settling back into school and there are fewer travel days or beach outings, making it prime time to book those "bigger" treatments that require a bit more downtime but deliver maximum results. Treatments such as intense pulsed light (IPL) can fade dark spots and sun-induced redness, while erbium laser therapy works on deeper levels to tighten skin and smooth texture. These can be paired with microneedling with PRP (commonly known as the "vampire facial") or used alone to stimulate collagen and reclaim that pre-summer glow. However, the best treatment for you depends on your skin type and specific concerns.

The most treated condition after a sun-drenched summer is melasma, a form of hyperpigmentation that typically covers the T-zone, cheeks and upper lip. It is exacerbated by heat, sun and hormonal shifts. Surprisingly, melasma cannot be cured once it occurs, which is why prevention through sunscreen and anti-aging serums, especially for those with natural olive skin types, is so important. For those who already have it, summer



tends to intensify its appearance. Cooler fall days are the best time to visit your aesthetic provider for high-level damage reversal.

Plan on spending three to six months on laser sessions that target pigment, such as IPL for fair skin or Q-switched Nd:YAG laser for a wider variety of skin types. Pairing these with mild chemical peels can enhance results. Of course, these are rescue therapies and we all know the best way to maintain and prevent skin issues is by doing your homework. That means committing to anti-aging skincare all year round. The best at-home reset for melasma includes nightly retinol, a daily antioxidant serum (especially those with vitamin C or niacinamide), intermittent glycolic wash and consistent application of SPF 30 or higher, even while driving.

In addition to melasma, which presents as brown hyperpigmentation, other common concerns include persistent redness and increased blood vessels

on the face, neck or chest, especially in individuals with fair skin. These conditions, often referred to as solar or actinic elastosis, poikiloderma or telangiectasia, may resemble rosacea but can also be caused purely by sun exposure. When these factors appear, it is due to UV damage, causing skin thinning, inflammation, and damage to internal skin components like collagen and elastin. This brings blood vessels closer to the surface, along with redness and speckled, uneven skin. While prevention is key—such as wearing UPF-rated sun clothing, avoiding midday sun and applying broad-spectrum SPF 30+—once damage is visible, IPL can help reduce general redness. For more distinct blood vessels, Nd:YAG or KTP lasers are effective at collapsing them.

Although discoloration is the most commonly requested post-summer concern, generalized sun-induced aging ranks among the top three. Summer sun saturation triggers an onslaught of deeper wrinkles and UV damage that begins

beneath the surface of your skin. While the appearance of lines may be subtle immediately after summer, the underlying damage often sprouts over time, ultimately requiring more invasive and high-cost aesthetic procedures later in life. Aging alone reduces collagen and elastin—the building blocks of firm, supple skin—but UV exposure accelerates the process. To stimulate collagen production, smooth surface wrinkles and restore skin buoyancy, treatments that cause micro-damage within the epidermis and upper dermis are essential. This process boosts cell turnover and activates healing. For all skin types with minimal downtime, top options include microneedling with PRP or exosomes, as well as radiofrequency skin tightening.

Of course, if you're ready to go all in, the "big kahuna" of resurfacing is erbium or CO2 laser treatment. These more intense options are also the most effective. However, they require at-home downtime of three to seven days, followed by a mobile recovery time of skin peeling, redness or discoloration lasting two to four weeks.

Post-treatment care for deep lasers involves a period of very gentle skincare, such as sensitive skin cleansers like Aveeno or Neutrogena, continual moisturization with a Vaseline-type emollient and SPF and sun protection, including hats and sunglasses during the most critical stages. Once the skin barrier is intact, maintaining results calls for an advanced skincare regimen. This should include ceramide-based creams, peptide serums, antioxidants and, of course, the gold-standard nightly retinol.

Lastly, for those who feel like their skin is as cracked as the Mojave after the solstice heat, hydrating barrier-repair treatments are the oasis your skin is begging for. Dry skin may show up as flaking or enlarged pores. To deeply cleanse and rehydrate, HydraFacials lift dirt and oil, remove dead skin, and replenish moisture. Another option, for those on a tighter budget, is microdermabrasion followed by a deep hydrating facial. These treatments are best supported by daily use of emollient moisturizers or

serums for younger individuals or thicker creams for middle-aged skin, which naturally requires denser hydration.

As we wrap up the best skincare treatments for fall, remember: beauty has its seasonality, too. After a summer of basking, fall is the ideal time to renew just in time for glam-filled festivities around the corner. Begin your aesthetic treatments in early autumn and follow the six-week

rule, allowing at least six weeks for healing before the holiday season. Your third-quarter sacrifices will be worth the results, leading to less makeup needed to achieve your glow and a smoother, more refreshed look when you do glam up. With these tips, you can expect to feel more confident in every snapshot this Thanksgiving and winter holiday season.





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FASHION DESIGNER PUEY QUIÑONES RETURNS TO L.A. THIS TIME TO STAY

By Janet Susan R. Nepales

Don't look now, but fashion designer Puey Quiñones is back in Los Angeles, and this time, he is planning to stay for good.

Born in Bobon, Northern Samar, the humble and talented fashion designer, who also has an atelier in Manila and a Q Bridal shop in downtown L.A., will launch his new couture collection and his new couture shop in the City of Angels.

He said, "I emerged as a designer from very humble beginnings, and I remain grateful for everyone who helped me along the way. Staying connected to the past, but living in the present, allows me to create garments for the future."

The soft-spoken designer attributes his Lola (grandmother) as his inspiration in becoming a designer. He narrated, "My grandmother was a seamstress. As a child, I loved to watch her work. I was mesmerized by the operation of the manual sewing machine and the clicking noise it made as the needle moved up and down through the fabric.

"The joy she found in creating something beautiful sparked a flame in me. I started sketching designs and experimenting with fabric when I moved to Manila and worked for designer Dennis Lustico, and it was clear that this was my calling."

Growing up in the Philippines has taught him the value of hard work and resilience. "My humble beginnings



instilled in me a strong sense of community and an appreciation for craftsmanship, which I carry into every piece I create."

He added, "Music also had an important impact on me. My father played records every morning on the hi-fi, so I awoke to the vocal stylings of Shirley Bassey, Johnny Mathis and Frank Sinatra. Today, I always listen to music when I am creating a new collection."

Although he lamented that his home province, Samar, has not developed materials that can be used in the creation of garments, Quiñones stressed that he has used and continues to use indigenous fabrics from other regions of

the Philippines such as piña, jusi, inaul, abel lloco and abaca.

He pointed out, "Increasing awareness of Filipino crafts around the globe through my designs is important to me."

The 45-year-old designer, who was a guest designer for "America's Next Top Model Cycle 21," designed clothes using fabrics native to the Philippines for a runway challenge where the contestants had to walk in stilts.

He revealed that he gets inspiration for his designs and creations from various sources. "I often find myself drawn to art, nature and cultural history. Additionally, I draw inspiration from the



people around me. Their stories and experiences shape the way I approach fashion. Traveling also opens my eyes to different styles and practices, which I then incorporate into my work."

This year, he launched his new couture collection at a private event as well as his new couture atelier in downtown L.A.

"The couture collection highlights an array of intricate designs that celebrate both contemporary and Filipino traditional aesthetics, blending luxurious and local fabrics from the Philippines with bold colors," Quiñones revealed. "Expect to see pieces that embody elegance and innovation."

Quiñones is the only Filipino fashion designer who has a couture dress purchased by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) as part of its heritage collection.

He described the dress that was acquired by LACMA in 2020 as part of the museum's historic collection and is now preserved alongside the creations of fashion legends, including Christian Dior, Madame Grès and Alexander McQueen: "I am still in awe of this incredible recognition. The piece, a stunning gown crafted from silk organza and adorned with intricate embroidery, was inspired by traditional Filipino textiles. When I received the news that it would be part of LACMA's heritage collection, I was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude. It felt surreal to know that my work would be preserved alongside such iconic designers."

A PeopleAsia People of the Year 2024 awardee, Quiñones shared how he manages his global shops in the U.S. and the Philippines.

"Managing my two shops is indeed a challenge, but it's a journey I embrace wholeheartedly. Each market has its



Above: A model shows off one of Puey Quiñones' creations, a modern Filipiniana dress with oversized butterfly sleeves

Top Left: Fashion designer Puey Quiñones dresses up actress Dolly de Leon for a red carpet event

Top Right: Award-winning actress and Golden Globe nominee Dolly de Leon is stylish and sophisticated in a Puey Quiñones creation

own unique needs and preferences, so I make a concerted effort to tailor my collections accordingly. Balancing both locations requires a disciplined schedule, but it also allows me to explore diverse creative avenues."

Worn by celebrities, dignitaries and other VIPs, Quiñones admitted, "I have been fortunate to have my clothes worn by some incredible individuals. Celebrities like Melissa McCarthy, Dolly de Leon and even dignitaries such as the president and the first lady of the Philippines have donned my creations. It's always an honor to see my designs being appreciated by such influential figures."

Due to the demands of his work and profession, Quiñones is aware that taking care of his physical and mental health is vital. "Taking care of my physical and mental health is crucial in this demanding industry. I make it a priority to meditate and pray regularly, practice mindfulness and take time to recharge. I also find joy in cooking, which serves as a creative outlet for me."

A very good chef as well, Quiñones shared that he learned how to cook from his grandmother. "I love preparing traditional Filipino dishes like adobo and other Samar dishes, as well as experimenting with new recipes like vegetarian dishes because my husband, Paul (curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum), is vegetarian."

Looking ahead, Quiñones said, "I have dreams of expanding my brand internationally and collaborating with other artists across different media. I'm also passionate about giving back to the community, so I hope to launch initiatives that support aspiring designers in the Philippines. The world of fashion is ever evolving, and I'm excited to see what the future holds!"

Top Right: A model showcasing one of Puey Quiñones' couture gowns

Right: One of Puey Quiñones' high fashion creations



DAVID BENOIT INSTILLS INTEGRITY AND FEELING GOOD IN ALL HIS MUSIC

By Sheryl Aronson / Photography by Sasaphotos (Sheryl Aronson & Sherman Alford)

David Benoit's creative spirit burst forth as he composed "The Three-Finger Waltz" at age 6 and, at 11, wrote a composition for bassoon and harpsichord. Music seemed to flow through Benoit's veins because his father, Robert Bryan Benoit, played jazz guitar and exposed his son to jazz music.

Benoit's career path in the music industry seemed to be a combination of serendipitous opportunities that uncovered and revealed his tremendous talents as an artist, composer and conductor. One example: He first nailed the job as Lainie Kazan's accompanist when her original guy couldn't make the tour; Benoit took over.

"That was happenstance. Lainie Kazan had a last-minute cancellation of her accompanist for her tour of Canada with the Duke Ellington Orchestra. I knew the guitar player, so I jumped into the gig without a lot of preparation. She liked the way I played, and eventually I became her conductor and musical director."

Another example of the universe opening a space for his talent was when he worked with the legendary Ann-Margret. Benoit fondly recalls, "It was another last-minute gig. Ann needed a keyboard player, and she hired me for the job. We toured South Africa and Botswana to the resort called Sun City. Ann-Margret was lovely to work with."

Touting an impressive résumé in the



David Benoit

music industry, Benoit has five Grammy nominations during a four-decade-long successful career as one of the founding fathers of contemporary jazz. In addition, he claims 41 solo recordings over the past 40 years, including his 1987 GRP Records debut "Freedom at Midnight" and its Grammy-nominated 1988 follow-up "Every Step of the Way," considered influential classics in the genre. He has also been a conductor with a wide range of symphony orchestras, including the Los

Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Dresden Philharmonic, London Symphony, Nuremberg Symphony, Philippine Philharmonic, Long Beach Symphony Pops Orchestra and, most recently, the Asia America Symphony Orchestra.

Benoit also brought his talents to film and television, with one of his most cherished roles being his work with Charles Schulz and the iconic "Peanuts" franchise, composing music for more



Above: David Benoit reminisces with Sheryl Aronson

than a decade of CBS TV specials.

Benoit spoke about his first meeting with him: "I got to meet Sparky (Charles Schulz's nickname). I had been a fan from the time I was 8 years old. I read the comic strip every day. I identified with Charlie Brown and his struggles. To be sitting there having lunch with Charles Schulz when he says, 'Call me Sparky,' is still a memorable experience."

What was evident in my interview with Benoit was his passion to instill musical integrity and sophistication into every composition he composes—and, at the same time, infuse melodic "feeling good" music that fills his audience's listening ears. I sat with him at his home in Laguna Niguel as we talked about his 40-year career and his passion for architecture.

Chic Compass: What was your early training as a musician?

David Benoit: I didn't have a lot of training. I think of myself as self-taught, since there were lots of teachers and mentors along the way. My dad was

a big influence. He was a jazz guitarist and so he'd have jazz musicians over to the house. As I got older, I had my first piano teacher when I was 13, and he was into jazz, so I didn't study classical piano until I was well into high school.

Chic Compass: You were playing and studying jazz. Were you part of the big band in high school?

David Benoit: I wasn't in the big band. I would find musicians in high school to jam with. I got used to being a bit of an outcast and coming up in jazz in a very unconventional way. The good news is that, as a result, I developed my own unique sound.

I grew up in Hermosa Beach, California, where it was all about surfing and not a big emphasis on music. To get into music, I felt I needed to move up to Hollywood. After a semester of college at El Camino, I made the move and started meeting people and networking. One of my early gigs was with an R&B and jazz singer named Gloria Lynn; we played at the Parisian Room in Los Angeles. I was the only white person in the club, and I was about 21. Everyone accepted me with open arms. In fact, Leonard Feather even came by

and gave us a nice review. That's how I became known as an accompanist for singers.

Chic Compass: You're a five-time Grammy-nominated musician and have a vast repertoire of music. Talk about your composing career.

David Benoit: The first was when I was 6. It was called "The Three-Finger Waltz." My uncle played the bassoon, so I wrote a piece for bassoon and harpsichord when I was about 11. I had a chance opportunity to work with Frank Zappa's band, The Grand Wazoo. I had a girlfriend who was playing in his band, and she said, "He's rehearsing this band. I think he might be open to reading your chart." I spoke with Frank, and he was very nice. He asked me if I had brought my music, and I said "yes." They just did a little rundown of it.

I also put on a concert with a full orchestra at Wadsworth Theatre, UCLA. The big change for me was when I made a digital recording called "This Side Up" with Jeffrey Weber, and we recorded it live at Ocean Way Studios. We put on a little song called "Linus and Lucy." This went right to No. 1.

I wanted to share this because it was that one moment in my career where my whole life changed. I'm at my place in Manhattan Beach, and there's a message on my answering machine: "This is Larry Rosen, and we want to sign you to GRP Records. I want you to meet with Dave and me in New York."

Dave being Dave Grusin, of all people.

Dave was one of my heroes. I modeled my sound after his: orchestral, melodic, and elegant. The first meeting was in New York, but the second meeting was when they wanted to hear my music. Larry said, "Meet me at this hotel," and I get there, knock on the door, and Dave Grusin answers the door. I had to go into the bathroom to contain myself. That was such a life-changing event for me and was the big launching point for my career.

GRP was amazing, especially at the time when they were so hot. That was the place to be when CDs were first introduced. Chick Corea was on the label, along with Eddie Daniels, Dave Grusin, The Rippingtons, Lee Ritenour and Dave Valentin.

Chic Compass: You've put out many albums. What are some of the ones that stand out?

David Benoit: The first GRP record was a big hit for me, "Freedom at Midnight," and that title song has become a standard for smooth jazz. That was written by me and Nathan East, the great bass player. Of course, "Kei's Song" was on that record and was a real defining album, and then "Waiting for Spring," which was my first straight-ahead jazz album with Emily Remler, John Patitucci and Peter Erskine. It went to No. 1 in the country on traditional jazz. That was very huge for me because GRP didn't want me to do the album, since my sound had been more contemporary jazz. I told Larry Rosen that I had to do this, and GRP gave me a small budget. Strangely enough, it became one of my best-selling records. I think this is Larry Rosen's genius; he was a great record man. He told me,



Above: David Benoit on the piano at the Catalina Bar & Grill Jazz Club

"We need something on this record that's very catchy that we can go to radio with." I said, "Well, how about 'Cast Your Fate to the Wind'?" I took the approach of playing it very simply and didn't try to reinvent it.

Chic Compass: We're using the words "smooth" jazz and "straight-ahead" jazz. Your career reflects both genres. Why are both genres important to the music industry?

David Benoit: When I was growing up, before it got so divided, I think there were a lot of artists like Lee Ritenour, Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock who did both. Even Miles Davis wanted to be a rock star and used those funky rhythms. Being a DJ on KJazz, I listen to a lot of jazz, and some of the music seems to be intended for other musicians—very intellectual and dissonant. I grew up in a time when Wes Montgomery was covering Beatles tunes, and now it seems like people look down their noses at that. The jazz artists back then were trying to have a broader appeal. However, with smooth jazz, the musical content has gotten a

bit lame, since there's more emphasis on dancing and clapping hands than on the real music.

I was sitting in at a concert with Michael McDonald, and when he broke into "I Keep Forgettin'" and "Minute by Minute"—these are songs that had bridges and modulations. Even thinking about Vince Guaraldi—what a great bebop jazz pianist he was—before anyone knew he did the "Peanuts" music. I think the genius of music is how you can do something that has an intellectual bent, but then the average person who doesn't know anything about music still loves the composition because it feels good. That's always been my goal: how do you make music that feels good to others but still has integrity?

Chic Compass: Speaking of Vince Guaraldi, let's talk about your relationship with Charles Schulz and the "Peanuts" characters.

David Benoit: That was another lucky moment. I told you about the "Linus and Lucy" composition. It caught the attention of Lee Mendelson, the producer of those shows. He called my agent and asked me to score one of the Charlie

Brown episodes. It was a miniseries called "This Is America, Charlie Brown" for CBS, and they decided they wanted to bring back that Vince Guaraldi sound because the people producing the show were more traditional in their approach to scoring. I knew the music well. Lee and I just hit it off. After that, I started writing all the music for the TV shows.

Chic Compass: Talk about your creative process when you are composing for the TV series.

David Benoit: They had these old bar sheets, which were very confusing and hard to read, and then they had the storyboard. It was kind of the old, primitive way to do it. Finally, they switched to video cassette, so I would take the tape, mark the time code, and start coming up with a little melody. I also listened to Vince's music, and the nice thing was that Charles Schulz said, "Write your own music." So, I wrote original music for a few of the shows. When Sparky died, that's when Mendelson decided it was just going to be Vince Guaraldi's music. At that point, I would come up with arrangements, or I'd get a cue that would fit a scene, but the composition needed to be Vince's.

Chic Compass: You've had five Grammy nominations. What has that meant to you?

David Benoit: I haven't won yet, but to be nominated is quite an honor. I'm very happy about the nominations. I think the one I was most proud of was when I got nominated for the composition called "Dad's Room," which I wrote for my father after he suffered a stroke. I remember he was in a rest home, and I was able to share the news with him.

Chic Compass: You've also worked as a conductor with symphony orchestras. How did you develop yourself as a conductor?

David Benoit: I think the early beginnings were when I was Lainie Kazan's rehearsal pianist. After playing with her for a while, she asked if I had ever

conducted an orchestra. One night, the pianist who usually played with her couldn't make it, so I subbed. I got lucky and somehow knew how to conduct the orchestra. But the second night was a lot rougher. I realized I wasn't an experienced conductor. Lainie gave me a ton of notes to prove that point.

I studied conducting independently at UCLA with John Robertson, Ph.D., and it felt like I had to take it seriously. I'm left-handed, so I started conducting with my left hand. I remember a few orchestras complained, so I learned how to do it with my right hand.

I scored a film produced by Clint Eastwood, "The Stars Fell on Henrietta." The producers were saying we should get a conductor, and I told them I'd like to be in front of the orchestra and conduct the score. Clint had a couple of my records, so he was kind of a fan and said it was fine. That's another moment I remember. I was on the Clint Eastwood scoring stage at Warner Bros., and there were 60 musicians. I was trembling. Clint was in the control room, and

there was a big screen. Unfortunately, the movie itself didn't do that well, but I remember picking up a book that listed my score among the 100 best film scores. I was hoping at that point that conducting would become my career, but it didn't really go that way. I had about five years where I was scoring films and TV shows, but it's a very tough business. I wasn't willing to give up my performance career, which is dear to me.

Chic Compass: You also developed yourself as a symphony conductor.

David Benoit: I wrote a symphony piece called "Kobe." I spent 10 years writing it and was looking for people to help me. I found an ally in Kent Nagano, the great conductor from California. He helped me with it, and I was looking for a place to debut it. My wife was on the board of the Asia American Symphony Orchestra. She told me, "I think they want you to do a fundraiser and bring your band to play a few tunes." I asked them about debuting this symphony work with the orchestra.



Above: David Benoit at the Catalina Jazz Bar & Grill, Hollywood, CA

The conductor at the time was very strict and classical-oriented, but the Asia Symphony needed to fill the house with an audience. Playing strictly classical music didn't fit the bill. The board members said they wanted pop music, Gershwin, etc. When I went to their board meeting, they told me, "We want you to be the music director."

I was astounded. I'm not Asian. I had never conducted a symphony orchestra before. They also said they wanted a youth program, so I formed the Asia America Youth Symphony.

The little youth orchestra really began to take off. One of our astounding performances was Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony," and we received a great review from Mark Swed, music critic from the Los Angeles Times. I had 21 years with that orchestra, and I would debut a composition of mine every year.

Chic Compass: Let's switch gears. Two years ago, you had a big change in your life.

David Benoit: Yes. Backing up a little bit, at the height of my career, my wife and I built our dream home: a 5,000-square-foot house overlooking the ocean. Another hobby of mine from the very beginning, even as a kid, was architecture. Our architect wanted to go Mediterranean, and I told him, "We're going contemporary, something more Frank Lloyd Wright, Prairie style." We built it and hosted a lot of music events there. Life was going very well, and then I did a tour with Dave Koz. After that tour, I was in the hospital. I had pretty much thrashed my kidneys due to high blood pressure that had gone unchecked and an unhealthy lifestyle. The next 10 years were about keeping those kidneys healthy with a strict diet.

After a few years, we couldn't manage the house anymore because my health prevented me from performing as much. We decided to downsize. Then, on a trip to Italy, I was very tired and couldn't eat. When I got back home, they put me on dialysis the next day. I

was on hemodialysis for eight months. In the meantime, I was on the list to get a kidney, and my wife came through for me. She said, "I'll donate mine." (We weren't a match.) So we entered the paired exchange program at UCLA. I got my new kidney two years ago! I'm feeling better every day. We wanted to start fresh and do something different, so we found this wonderful community here in Laguna Niguel.

Chic Compass: That's where we're sitting right now. What else have you been doing?

David Benoit: I had started with this little musical idea while on vacation in Italy. Then, when I got out of the hospital and needed to recover, I felt I should write something about the last year of the Youth Orchestra. We had this handsome young boy from Ukraine, and when the war started, I got to know his family. The grandmother looked at me and said, "Why don't you write a cello concerto for my grandson?" I said OK. I started working on it, and I just finished it a few months ago. The next big step is finding a cellist and an orchestra.

Chic Compass: What's new on the horizon for your jazz music?

David Benoit: I released my first big band album last year called "Timeless,"

and it features an 18-piece big band from London called Spice Fusion. We recorded it live at a women's college that has a great studio in the performing arts center.

Chic Compass: Lastly, talk about being a DJ on KJazz radio.

David Benoit: The owner of KJazz, Saul Levine, is a wonderful, sweetheart of a man. He heard me being interviewed at the station and said, "I like your voice. I want you to be an on-air personality." This was 13 years ago. Saul thought I'd do well. I said, "Saul, I'm more smooth jazz/contemporary jazz—not straight-ahead jazz." And he—being a very wise man—said, "Those jazz police? That's a small number."

Jazz is all the stuff I love, like Wes Montgomery, Vince Guaraldi, Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson and Stan Getz. The station represents all the different facets of jazz, whether it be intellectual, spunky, melodic or out there.

Chic Compass: Of course, some David Benoit.

David Benoit: It's always nice when I see my name on the playlist.



Above: Sheryl Aronson with David Benoit

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LAS VEGAS LIGHTS UP WITH RAVE-INSPIRED FASHION SHOW AHEAD OF EDC

By David Tupaz

Las Vegas kicked off the 2025 EDC weekend of musical festivities with a night of fashion at Area15. Produced by biteSiZeD multiMedia, Dreamsickle featured its first-ever rave fashion show, powered by eight extremely talented local designers who were eager and overjoyed to present more than 60 looks on their Yellow Brick Road runway in front of an energetic crowd.

Highlighted by the incredibly talented Jason Beaver, Debra Storey, Indigo, Heather Freels, Kapria Robinson, Heather Thomas, Chloe Stafford and Wild Muse styled by Dae Thomas, these local Las Vegas up-and-coming fashion stars understood the assignment and gave many attendees—who were planning to attend this year's EDC festivities—fashion inspiration for their outfits heading into one of the biggest weekends of the year in Las Vegas.

Beeva, by Jason Beaver, shone with a colorful and succinct collection that turned heads when Beaver created his signature green mustache into an oversized accessory garment and matching sombrero. Debra Storey's Blazzian collection brought her Cowboys vs. Aliens segment, which highlighted both her love for Beyoncé's "Cowboy Carter" album and the current style wave, coupled with an extraterrestrial-inspired showcase that made for a show-pleasing set.

Indigo, with her Indigo Jerseys line inspired by her love for the NBA, was highlighted by a

crowd-pleasing basketball-net-like train that slid down the runway, much to the delight of the showgoers. The youngest designer and UNLV student, Kapria Robinson, and her Nadamuze brand delivered a collection highly favored by most of the Gen Z attendees who came out to get inspiration for EDC.

Heather Thomas and her SCATHED fashion brand took a darker, goth-like couture inspiration and created both wedding and funeral themes for her set, which provided an awesome contrast to the show's mainly colorful ambiance. Chloe Stafford's Chloetry Design collection brought a fun, couture feel to the mostly rave fashion event with bright, vibrant dresses.

One of the most memorable collections of the night was presented by Area15's in-house rave fashion boutique, Wild Muse, styled by the incomparable Dae Thomas and her Vangaudy Haus. Thomas went big and bold with butterfly wings, mesh capes and festive makeup presented by her team, who revved up the EDC energy for all to see.

Curated for club kids and upcoming EDC ravers, the typical runway fashion show was turned upside down with charged-up dance music, trippy animations on the venue walls and sassy models who encouraged the crowd to stand up and scream for them as they stomped, danced and posed throughout the event.

DESIGNER: WILD MUSE
PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: EDITH



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: ALLIE SPARKS

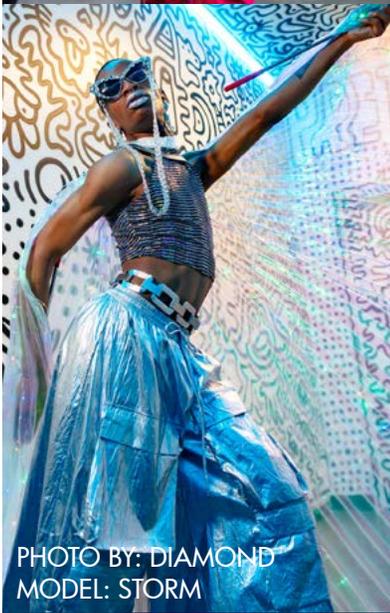


PHOTO BY: DIAMOND
MODEL: STORM



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: STORM & TROY

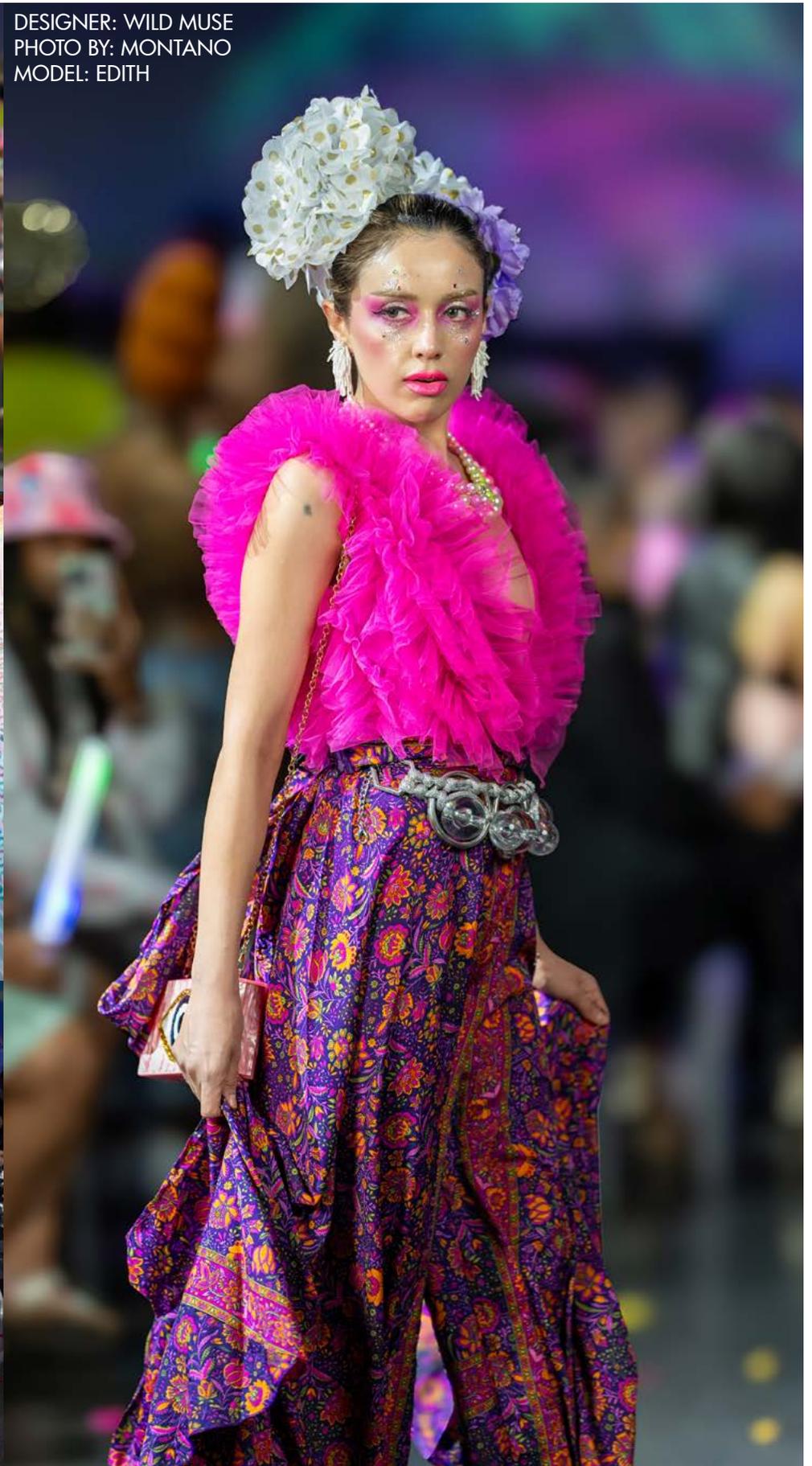




PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: INDIGO

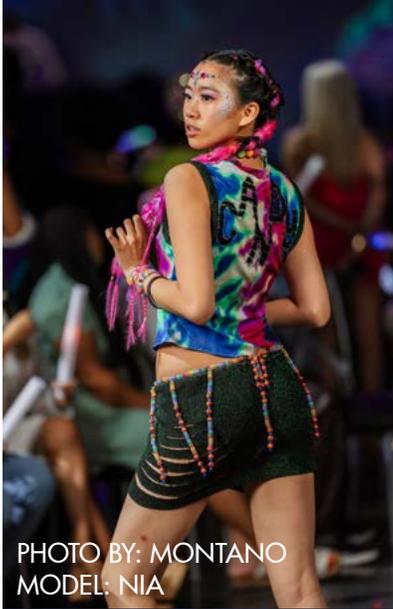


PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: NIA



PHOTO BY: NANCY MUNOZ
MODEL: TRESIN



DESIGNER: INDIGO JERSEYS
PHOTO BY: JAVON CHAMBERS
MODEL: ALEXUS



DESIGNER: NADAMUSE
PHOTO BY: JAVON CHAMBERS
MODEL: AMARI



DESIGNER: NADAMUSE
PHOTO BY: JAVON CHAMBERS
MODEL: RATRAP



PHOTO BY: SEAN JONES
MODEL: STEPHANIE



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: ANGELA CHOE



PHOTO BY: NANCY MUNOZ
MODEL: ROQUEST



DESIGNER: BEEVA
PHOTO BY: JAVON CHAMBERS
MODEL: TORRES

DESIGNER: BLAZZIAN
PHOTO BY: SEAN JONES
MODEL: ARIANNA



PHOTO BY: NANCY MUNOZ
MODEL: KAI'A



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: ALIAH



PHOTO BY: DIAMOND
MODEL: NARA



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: XIXI



DESIGNER: CHLOETRY DESIGNS
PHOTO BY: JAVON CHAMBERS
MODEL: EVA



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: BLU JADE



DESIGNER: DINK THEEPER
PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: KEVIN SMITH



PHOTO BY: JAVON CHAMBERS
MODEL: BRODIE

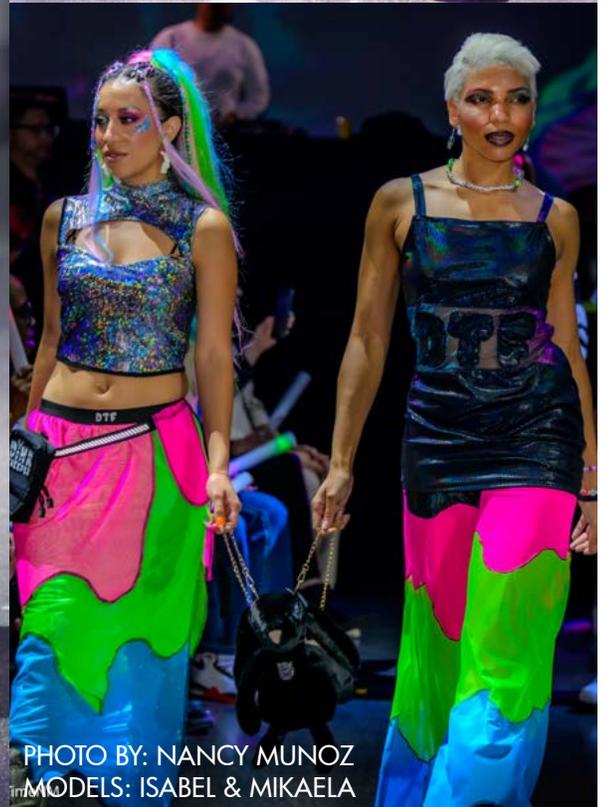


PHOTO BY: NANCY MUNOZ
MODELS: ISABEL & MIKAELA



DESIGNER: SCATHED
PHOTO BY: SEAN JONES
MODEL: ARIEL

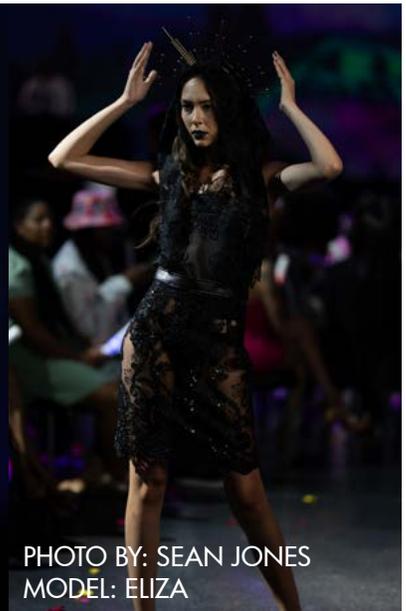


PHOTO BY: SEAN JONES
MODEL: ELIZA



PHOTO BY: NANCY MUNOZ
MODEL: KIARA



PHOTO BY: MONTANO
MODEL: HALIDE



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MODEL: NAOMI RUTH PARISETTE**

PROXIMITY: LINES IN LIFE, LOVE AND ART

By Brian G. Thornton

"Onward Ever, Backward Never" is the mantra of Michael Patrick Thieme [pronounced Tee-Me], a quote from his grandmother Marie Thieme's 2004 book of the same title. There are lines that divide and lines that define. Some are in graphite, others in paint and still others in the invisible gestures of love and shared laughter. For Michael Patrick Thieme and Larry Thielen Jr. [pronounced Tee Len], life has always been a study in linework—fluid, fearless and occasionally serendipitous. Born miles apart in suburban Illinois, these two creative forces were unknowingly sketching parallel paths that wouldn't converge until years later under the neon glow of Las Vegas.

Their story is not one of overnight romance or Instagram-ready perfection. It is instead an honest, elegant composition layered with the marks of two men navigating the contours of individual growth, artistic purpose and eventual unity. Together, they've blended households, pets, passions and professions with the precision of practiced draftsmen.

Over time, what began as two lives on separate canvases has become a singular work of art—one shaded with humor, harmony and hard-earned grace.

In this feature, we trace the merging of their lives, their love and their creative visions. This is not just a portrait of a couple; it's a study of coexistence—how



Above: Las Vegas Mayor Shelley Berkley with Michael Patrick Thieme (left) and husband, stylist Larry Thielen Jr., delivering her third piece of MPT artwork to City Hall. Photo courtesy of Michael Patrick Thieme

art imitates life, how love redraws the boundaries of what's possible and how two people found the perfect line between self and togetherness.

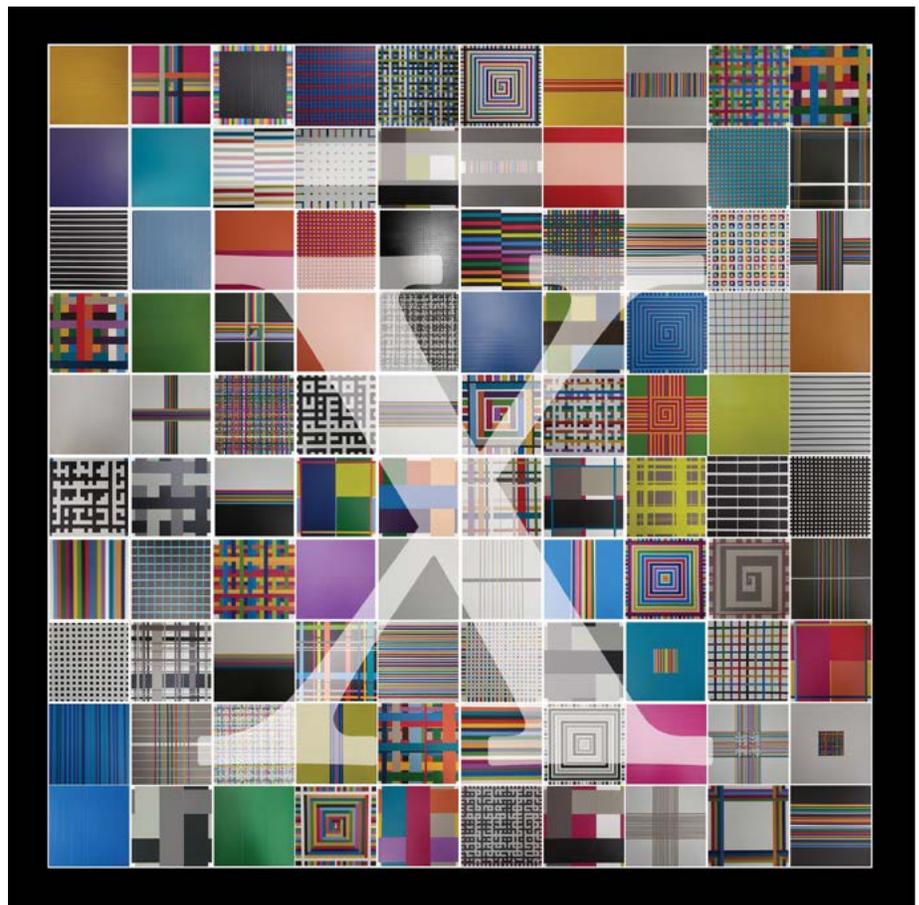
Life

Raised in Naperville, Illinois, Thieme's journey has traced a deliberate set of lifelines—geographic, professional and deeply personal. He came of age there, studied there and followed a line due southwest to Phoenix, Arizona, where his architectural career took form from 1998 to 2005. That arc eventually curved toward Las Vegas, where he's lived ever since—sketching out a life in the Mojave light.

But his earliest lines weren't blueprints. They were brushstrokes. Painting was never a hobby; it was the constant hum beneath everything else. In college, a drawing class—nude figures rendered in pencil—broke the rhythm. The exercise felt obligatory, the lines boring. One day, he exchanged pencil for paint and something clicked—color reanimated form. Passion returned. That first canvas—born of defiance and guided by intuition—still lives on his brother's wall. A relic of the moment Thieme rewrote the line.

"I studied at the School of Architecture in Versailles, France, my junior year as part of a student exchange program with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Versailles is within the former horse stables of the Château de Versailles! It was an epic year of my life ... I maximized the opportunity and traveled and explored much of Europe. I soaked in as much architecture, culture, food and art as I could."

As we delineate this story, it's noted: "We spend as much time together as possible. We enjoy gardening, growing cacti, houseplants, etc. We love to cook together and make homemade pasta, our world-famous cheesecake ... Larry likes to bake. We care for our animals—our dog Dakota, our cat Houdini and our two torties, Skittles and Yoda. We also have fish," Thieme says.



Above: "[10 x 10 x 10 x 10]" series by Michael Patrick Thieme, consisting of 100 original works, covering 10,000 painted square inches of canvas, using his current palette of only 18 colors

Love

Some lines are drawn by fate. Others by flirtation, curiosity or sheer coincidence. For Thieme and Thielen, love lines ran parallel for decades—suburbs apart outside Chicago, then states apart—until they finally intersected in Las Vegas. What began as coffee became a constellation.

Thieme reflects: "We grew up outside Chicago just a few miles apart, yet our paths never crossed ... Larry moved to Atlanta and I moved to Phoenix. We both ended up in Vegas and we are glad that finally our paths—our lines—did cross! Larry always says that meeting on June 8, three days after his birthday, was the best belated birthday gift. We married on June 8, nine years later."

Thielen recalls the spark: "Our initial meeting over coffee at Starbucks was the seed that planted our enduring relationship. I remember thinking this was going to be something special. Both having Midwestern/Chicago roots definitely helped forge our immediate connection ... we literally talked nonstop for hours. We have been together ever since."

Creativity is their shared current and mutual admiration is their secret superpower.

Thieme notes: "As we are both creative spirits, we have that inherent design connection which allows us to be each other's support team as we continue to grow our individual empires. We are each other's biggest fan. We drive each other to be the best, to propel further, to grow and learn. We challenge each other, promote each other, we critique each other."

Thielen, ever the stylist and sculptor of form, puts it this way: "As a person who creates within the beauty industry for a living, I see the multifaceted aspects of my husband's work and I'm truly impressed by his continued growth as his painting career blossoms. Likewise, he is a constant supporter of my work and has seen me become a true force within



the hair industry. We balance each other well and support each other's continued learning and growth ... it has truly been—and will continue to be—the backbone of our relationship."

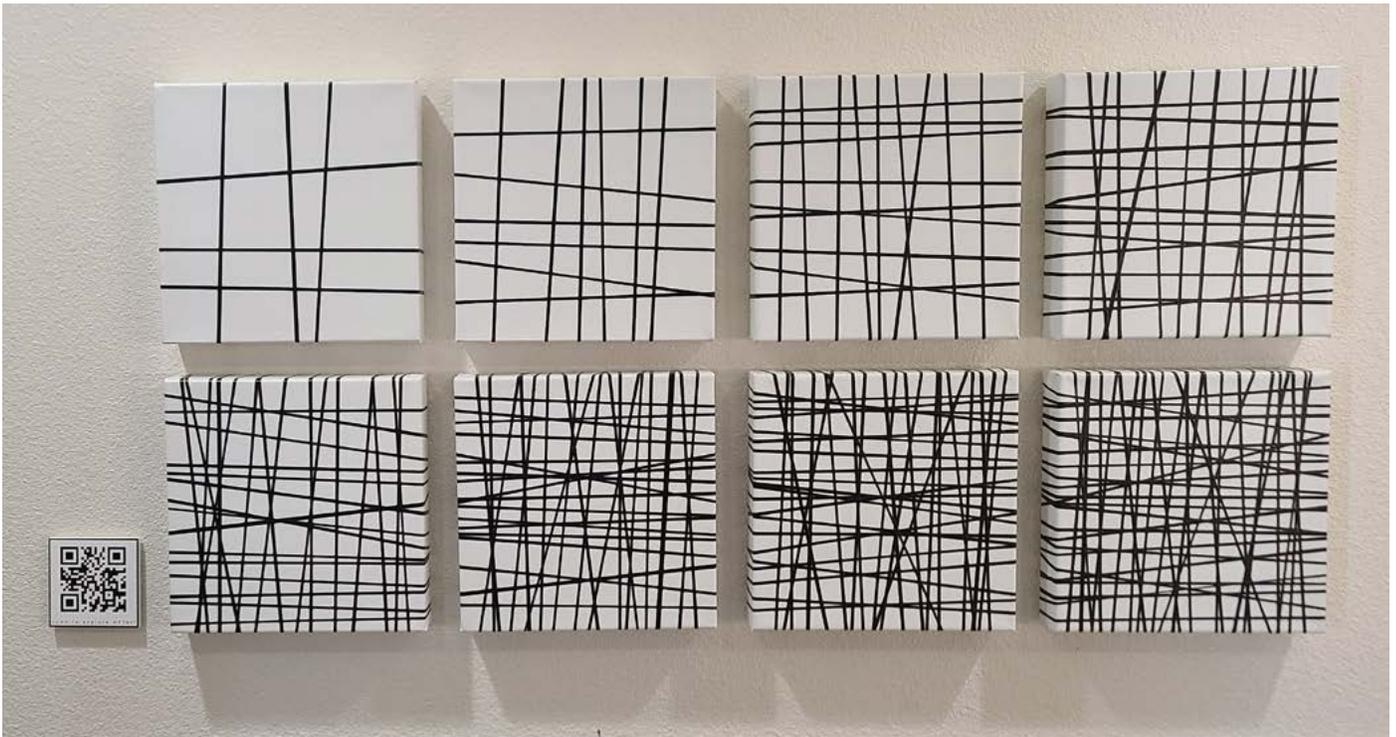
Together, they prove that love lines—once finally crossed—can draw an entire life in full color.

Art

If life and love are drawn in lines, then art is where Thieme gets to bend them. His latest series, "SIX+," is an elegant

Above: Michael Patrick Thieme in his home library/studio, where books were replaced by new paintings from the "[10x10x10x10]" series—mimicking bookends indeed. Photo courtesy of Michael Patrick Thieme

evolution—a geometric meditation on discipline and desire. Still committed to his signature technique of painting lines "individually, one at a time," Thieme wondered what would happen if those lines tilted, leaned and dared to defy the X/Y axis he once held sacred. The result? A bold departure into angled territory—still meticulous, still methodical but with a newfound organic momentum.



Above: "SIX+" installed at Larry Thielen Jr.'s salon space within LOOK Style Society. Photo courtesy of Michael Patrick Thieme

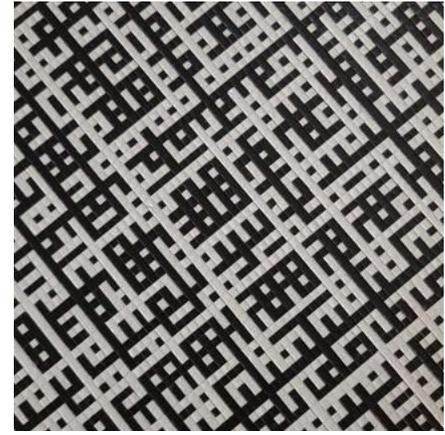
Right: Michael Patrick Thieme after installing his series "[10x10x10x10]" for its public debut at Fraiche Arts, located inside the world-famous Arts Factory. Photo courtesy of Michael Patrick Thieme

The first eight works (soon to be 12) in "SIX+" were created for Thielen's salon—a space of beauty, reinvention and art in its own right. In a nod to Thielen's fondness for even numbers (a playful counterpoint to Thieme's preference for odds), each canvas in the series receives six additional lines, building toward a crescendo of 72 in the final piece. The visual journey, from mostly white to mostly black, becomes an abstract reflection of contrast, balance and transformation.

As Thieme continues to evolve the series—experimenting with color, scale and line width—he invites us into his inner studio, where each stroke is both question and answer, repetition and rebellion.

And let's not overlook Thielen's artistic line. His salon suite within LOOK Style Society is no ordinary styling station—it's a curated canvas, a living gallery where





hair becomes sculpture and every client leaves touched by his precision, grace and glamour. Together, they live in tandem—two artists, many mediums, one ever-evolving masterpiece.

"I first began painting with lines in 2009, with my concept 'STITCH,'" Thieme says. "Initially, it was simply a response to a question ... What if I paint lines individually, one at a time while rotating my canvas after each line was painted? This led me to several painting concepts, which I have always been fascinated by. Controlling and manipulating the simple line into complex and intricate paintings resonates with me. When I started my endeavor '[10x10x10x10],' I decided this was the technique I wanted to continue to explore."

Asked whether he thought their lives today and their path were poetic, Thielen says: "Yes, it is poetic. I take hair as my canvas and create personalized works of art for clients sitting in my chair. Balayage is a technique of painting ribbons or lines of color—light or dark—throughout the crown. I mix and create custom colors to achieve a one-of-a-kind original look for women."

Thieme adds: "My series '[10x10x10x10]' was the direct result of wanting to create something grand or epic after taking a personal hiatus from painting. It allowed me to explore numerous concepts within my technique—or restriction, as I sometimes call it—of painting lines individually, one at a time. It was a two-year endeavor that required dedication, focus and meticulous work. I'm not sure I

learned anything in particular during this journey, besides the fact that I have endless ideas and future questions regarding the line. This project also cemented the idea of how I incorporate my designer/architect side into my art style and process. Larry, as always, was a huge supporter and was excited to see each piece finished ... in terms of our house space, he graciously allowed me to take over several areas to accomplish this goal."

In reflecting on his creative arc, Thieme notes a striking contrast between his earlier series "[10x10x10x10]" and the freer spirit of "SIX+." The former demanded precision—grids, rulers and measured line widths—a choreography of control. "SIX+," by contrast, is instinctive and untethered: no rulers, no measurements, just a disciplined eye and the only rule that each line must span from one edge of the canvas to its opposite edge.

This liberation from rigidity feels both necessary and revelatory—a kind of controlled chaos that mirrors life itself. What began as an exploration of line has become a meditation on balance: between order and intuition, structure and surrender. And somehow, despite its spontaneity, the result is no less meticulous—just more ... alive.

The Next Line

For Thieme and Thielen, the next five years aren't plotted in ink—they're sketched in possibility. In both hair and art, design is ever-evolving, always asking new questions and offering new

Above: Details of No. 052 & No. 089 showing how individually painted lines, overlap and intersect, creating inherent texture as layers of paint cover the canvas. Photos courtesy of Michael Patrick Thieme

canvases. Their respective crafts, though rooted in different media, share a philosophy: reinvention is not only inevitable but essential.

Thielen, ever the keen observer of beauty and style, sees the hair industry as a dynamic playground—where past trends resurface with a twist and mastery is achieved through perpetual learning. He stays sharp by watching, absorbing and innovating.

Thieme, meanwhile, envisions a lifetime of lines—each stroke a whisper of inquiry, a gesture toward the unknown. His technique of painting lines one at a time is more than a method; it's a mantra. His art has already been translated into commercial rugs for Jamie Stern/NJ, and he anticipates further product design opportunities to extend his art style.

"Together we will continue doing what we do ... encouraging each other to be the best we can be. Our life together has been a stream of unique adventures and we look forward to seeing how our lives will progress forward through all of life's twists and turns," Thieme says.

When asked about extending the lines: "Our life and time together—I would describe it as a fluid map of experiences, locations and memories. The design component is that it is not designed ... but it is organically woven together over



Above: Michael Patrick Thieme wondered what would happen if those lines tilted, leaned and defied the X/Y axis he once held sacred—an upward glance gave him inspiration for his new series “SIX+”. Photos courtesy of Michael Patrick Thieme

Right: And let’s not overlook Thielen’s artistic line - his salon within LOOK Style Society is no ordinary styling station, but a curated canvas. Photo courtesy of Larry Thielen Jr.

Contact the artists: @michaelpatrickthieme, @hairbylarrythielenjr, www.MPTstudio.com

time. Our life when we first met in 2010 was completely different than when we got married in 2019 and completely different now in 2025 ... and will surely be completely different 20 years from now. This is what is so exciting—how our life changes and morphs."

And so, the lines continue—not rigid but responsive, not fixed but full of possibility. Whether drawn in ink or sheared in silhouette, what Thielen and Thieme shape together is more than art or craft. It is a lifelong composition, evolving at the pace of their love and the pulse of their curiosity. In this ongoing map of moments—fluid, unplanned and deeply intentional—they prove that proximity isn’t just about closeness. It’s about connection. It’s about choosing, every day, to make something beautiful. Together, it’s just moving on ... to the next line.



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SWINGIN' ON A LAS VEGAS STAR

By Kendall Hardin

Once you've experienced The Swing It! Girls, you can't sa-shay out of the theatre without humming and grinning, your heart vibrating and your body bobbing to the rhythms.

Such is the power of three young women on stage—seducing their audiences with three-part harmony, hyper-synchronized choreography and infectious tunes with a vivid past.

The Swing It! Girls was conceived on the Norwegian Star cruise ship in 2011 with an experimental performance by three young performers onboard: Erin Britt from New York, Rosie Glossop from London and Phoebe Coupe from Melbourne, Australia. Performing on the ship's open-air atrium, it was an immediate hit with passengers crowding all three decks.

"When we came back into port, the booking agents didn't really know what to do with us being so far apart, so the act ultimately faded away," Britt recalled.

"Once I moved to Las Vegas in 2017, I thought if there's anywhere to make this group work, it's here," she said. She revived the group's inaugural show at the Summerlin Library, accompanied by a seven-piece band on stage. "We love performing in the Clark County libraries. It's the perfect stage for us, with free performances introducing us to all ages."

Today, The Swing It! Girls has morphed into a band of nine local performers



in Las Vegas and four in Orlando, Florida—headed by Jenna Bagatti, who relocated there in 2021.

"In Vegas, our girls are performing around town all the time," Britt said. "So we needed a corps of trained talent to fill various dates that accommodate everyone's career and personal life."

Inspired by the legendary Andrews Sisters, known for their innovative style during World War II and the Big Band generation, The Swing It! Girls capitalize on the close three-part musical harmony of the swing and boogie-woogie eras. The Andrews Sisters' musical stardom in the 1930s and 1940s has since inspired an array of superstars like Bette

Midler, The Supremes, Barry Manilow, The Beach Boys and The McGuire Sisters.

The challenge for Britt was how to produce the show without a live band so it could travel and perform in almost any venue. She secured music tracks for the repertoire, documented the choreography via video, and created the group's vintage brand. Costumes, jewelry and accessories were designed down to the smallest detail.

Above: Erin Britt, Madeline Dodier and Kelly Taylor Brown salute in sequin gowns in front of the American flag at the Marine Corps Birthday Ball at The Orleans. Photo courtesy of Pin-Ups on Tour/Marine Corps League

Today, trios can choose from more than 15 wardrobe options to fit various gigs—from sequined gowns to vintage dresses adorned with crinoline petticoats, coordinated jewelry, a hair flower and, of course, scarlet red lipstick.

But how does Britt magically convert a new recruit into a full-fledged Swing It! trooper?

"When a new girl comes on board, I give her everything at once to absorb—lyrics, musical tracks, videos of choreography, order of the set pieces and transitional banter—to learn all the routines," she explained. "Then we rehearse in my home studio until we get every detail right."

Alto Olivia Broome joined as the newest member of the "Swing Set," performing only since April. What was it like to transform into a Swing It! Girl? "After I got the callback, I had two weeks to learn 25 songs," she recalled. "It was a hefty challenge, but I absolutely love being part of the group."

"It's cool that everyone is an outstanding musician in her own right. I can brag on the caliber of talent and our ability to collaborate so well with each other."

Coco Lane Rigbye has been with the group for three years. "I auditioned because the music is right up my alley, but the three-part harmony was new to me," she said. "We're all friends, but I honestly couldn't imagine a better boss than Erin. She manages the entire act, but she's also in there performing with us, backing up the trio."

Top Right: Lisa Quibell Harvey, Brittany Avey and Erin Britt sparkle onboard a float at Summerlin's Patriotic Parade. Photo courtesy of Summerlin Council

Middle Right: Erin Britt, Kara Ackley and Jenna Bagatti as the original Las Vegas Swing It! Girls trio. Photo by Dragon Dreams Photography

Right: Erin Britt, Jenna Bagatti and Kara Ackley in the first Las Vegas performance at the Summerlin Library in 2017 with the Swing Machine band led by trumpeter Ron Levi. Photo courtesy of The Swing It! Girls



The original Swing It! Girls co-founders Phoebe Coupe, Rosie Glossop and Erin Britt following their very first performance onboard the Norwegian Star. Photo courtesy of The Swing It! Girls



"Erin has an eye for the vintage look of the period, but most important of all, an ear that can hear all the different harmonies and rhythms. That's an exceptional gift."

Brittany Avey has been with the group almost from its start in Las Vegas. "What's really special is that we're like family, mostly because of Erin and her passion for the music," she said.

"When we're on stage, we see the smiles in the audience. The songs are so uplifting! Our music creates a special atmosphere that transports everyone in the room to a different time zone. Plus, we're all best friends as musicians, which shines through in our performances."

Today, The Swing It! Girls perform special shows like "We Can Do It—A Swingin' Celebration of Female Artists," "Sleigh Bells Swing!," "The Swing It! Girls Salute Our Veterans" and their newest version of "American Road Trip." They can be seen performing at select

area malls, casino lounges, festivals, parades, block parties, country clubs, sporting events, community centers, private events and assisted living locations throughout the valley.

The Swing It! Girls also perform a three-hour gig weekly at the BLVD Grille on Water Street in Henderson. They deliver a special treat by rendering the national anthem for groups like the Las Vegas Aces at Michelob ULTRA Arena at Mandalay Bay and the Las Vegas Aviators at Las Vegas Ballpark.

The Swing It! Girls have established themselves as a vintage musical phenomenon in Las Vegas that engages modern audiences. Their act is remarkably fitting and fun for everyone in the family. While older generations appreciate the nostalgia of the music and the era in which it was born, many young people are exposed for the first time to the sound of close harmony and ageless tunes that endure in the American Songbook.

The group has attracted a loyal fan base—including busloads of seniors—making it harder to get a seat at library performances that are free to the public.

What's on the horizon for The Swing It! Girls in Las Vegas? "With the momentum and gains we made over the past year, I'm looking forward to a more regular schedule of gigs throughout the community," Britt said. "But it's equally exciting to launch additional performances—as well as new sets—in novel venues throughout the valley.

"The Swing It! Girls are definitely going to keep on swinging!"

The current cast of The Swing It! Girls in Las Vegas includes founder Erin Britt, Brittany Avey, Bridget Reilly, Kelly Taylor Brown, Celina Sasso, Jenelle Catherina, Zelda Fairfax, Coco Lane Rigbye and Olivia Broome. For performance information, visit swingitgirls.com.



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CECILIA VIOLETTA LÓPEZ

LATINA PRIMA DONNA STEPS INTO HER NEW LEADING ROLE

By Kendall Hardin

An opera begins long before the curtain goes up and ends long after it comes down. It starts in my imagination, it becomes my life, and it stays part of my life long after I've left the opera house.

—Maria Callas

Acclaimed soprano Cecilia Violetta López takes the reins at Opera Las Vegas (OLV) in its 27th season as the first Latina general director of an American opera company.

López comes full circle, having made her professional debut in *Don Giovanni*

with OLV in 2012. She returned to perform more recently with the company in leading roles as Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*, Violetta in *La traviata* and the stand-out star in OLV's "Silver Anniversary Salute" at The Smith Center.

She has called Las Vegas home for the past two decades, launching a prolific national and international career as a leading soprano after graduating from UNLV in late 2011 with a degree in vocal performance.

Named one of "Idaho's Top 10 Most Influential Women of the Century" by USA Today and one of opera's "25

Rising Stars" by *Opera News*, UNLV honored the soprano last year as Alumna of the Year. She is also the recipient of an *Idaho State Concurrent Resolution* honoring her life as an Idahoan and her work in the world of opera.

"Ceci," as she's known to her friends and colleagues, is the Mexican American daughter of immigrant parents from Rupert, Idaho. "I was raised on mariachi music and the folk songs

Above: Cecilia Violetta López is dressed for mariachi and ranchero ballads. Photo by Vanessa Preziose

Right: Soprano and General Director Cecilia Violetta López. Photo by Paulina Gwaltney

my mother would sing as she worked in the beet fields," López noted. "I didn't discover opera until much later."

An operaphile would be astounded at just some of the demanding leading characters she has mastered: Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*, Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*, Marguerite in *Faust*, Mimi in *La Bohème*, Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus*, Leonora in *Il trovatore*, Gilda in *Rigoletto*, Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Juliet in *Romeo et Juliette*, Nedda in *Pagliacci*, Desdemona in *Otello*, Hanna Glawari in *The Merry Widow* and Maria in *West Side Story*, as well as titular roles in *Suor Angelica*, *Manon* and *Frida*.

She has racked up accolades for her ravishing but ill-fated role as Violetta in *La traviata*, which she has performed in countless American opera venues. Critic James Jordan described her as "a Violetta fully formed and ready for the great stages of the world."

López has performed across the country with regional and national companies—including in Hawaii—and has soloed in recital halls, theaters, symphony halls and outdoor festivals. She has sung at Carnegie Hall, joined the artist roster of the Metropolitan Opera and has been honored with exhibits at the Idaho State Museum and the historical society museum in her hometown of Rupert.

Not shabby for 14 years of hard work since graduating from college!

Moving Toward Management

López has become a voice for opera as a vibrant art form in America and shares her story as both a performer and keynote speaker. She has been reviewed in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* and featured on NPR, PBS, Univision and Telemundo, among other outlets.

In 2014, she completed a two-year tenure as a soprano resident artist at



Opera San José—her first professional contract. In 2021, she was chosen to be Opera Idaho's first artistic advisor under General Manager Mark Junkert.

Known to local audiences as a singer, she took on added responsibilities as artistic advisor to expand repertoire, advocate for diversity in artistic practices and community initiatives, and collaborate with senior management on strategies that identify and secure financial support for the company.

"When I think of someone active in the field as a performer—who knows what's happening nationally and internationally and knows our state—Cecilia is the perfect fit for the position," Junkert said.

"Mr. Junkert took me under his wing to learn the business of opera," López recalled. "He introduced me to the administrative side of running an opera company—managing finances and board

relations, as well as programming, production and audience development.

"It created a two-way street for me to bring new ideas and models from the opera industry outside of Boise to management and the board."

López's colleagues were supportive as well. Julia Moulin-Merat, general director of Opera Columbus, board member of Opera America and a mentor with the Women's Opera Network, encouraged her to apply for the OLV job.

"Julia encouraged me to consider opera management. 'Give it five years,' she advised. 'Your heart is in the right place, and you have the tenacity for the leadership role.'"

"Today, Opera Columbus is a renowned regional company—so relevant to the community," López praised. "It's because of Julia's visionary leadership and



Above: Photo of Cecilia Violetta López in a black headdress and tulle by Paulina Gwaltney

the team she's built. When I returned home from performing in Columbus, it was Julia who sent me the job posting from Las Vegas."

"I'm excited and even giddy," López exclaimed. "I'm ready with a five-year plan to reach financial sustainability. I see so many untapped resources.

"It's all about slow, steady growth. And creating more structure to advance the company as we move forward—building OLV's team, forging new partnerships and mounting performances someday soon at The Smith Center.

"The production of *West Side Story* I just finished with Opera Columbus was a sensational collaborative partnership among the city's opera company,

ballet company and symphony orchestra. I want to create that kind of synergy here."

Launching OLV's 27th Season (2025–26)

"We couldn't be happier to welcome Ceci back to lead our dedicated team and to continue to build Opera Las Vegas' prestige as Nevada's only professional company member in Opera America," said Jim Sohre, OLV's general director since 2017.

"Ceci will open the season in style with a multimedia, autobiographic concert titled *Mariposa Que Vuela* to reintroduce herself to the Vegas Valley with selections from opera, zarzuela and mariachi."

Staged classics will feature Mozart's comedy *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The*

Marriage of Figaro), Leoncavallo's dramatic *Pagliacci* and Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, paired with a new companion piece, *Four Lost Santas* by Rose Freeman and Spicer Carr.

Annual themed outreach favorites will include *Voices Raised for Vets*, *Holiday on Broadway*, *Opera Legends in Black* and *Celebración Latina*. Visits to Myron's at The Smith Center and Monzu Italian Oven + Bar are also on the calendar, along with OLV's family-friendly tour of the operatic version of *Pinocchio*.

"I hope you'll join me in welcoming our dynamic new leader, Cecilia Violetta López," Sohre said, "with her boundless energy, fresh ideas, incomparable enthusiasm and leadership expertise as OLV's general director."

We've come a long way since Boston's Sarah Caldwell was the only female opera impresario in America. Today,

it's time for more women to make their mark. Here's to a new era of opera in Las Vegas' cultural horizon!

Note: Early in her career, writer Kendall Hardin worked for Seattle Opera's innovative impresario Glynn Ross in the 1970s and later stepped in as one of the first women CEOs to run an opera company in the 1990s when she reorganized Pensacola Opera—still a thriving regional company today.

Right: Cecilia as Cio-Cio-San with son, Trouble, in Madama Butterfly at Opera Southwest. Photo by Lance Ozier

Below: Cecilia performing "Song to the Moon" in Rusalka at Opera Idaho. Photo by Jonathan Collins





CHEF MICHAEL MINA TALKS FLAVOR, ART AND HERITAGE AT BOURBON STEAK LAS VEGAS

By Elaine & Scott Harris

Bourbon Steak at Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas exemplifies Chef Michael Mina's signature approach to modern American dining—bold flavors, refined technique and a touch of indulgence. A fixture on the Las Vegas Strip, Mina is no stranger to the city's dining scene, with acclaimed concepts like Bardot Brasserie at Aria Resort & Casino among his many successes.

We've become very familiar with Mina's distinct culinary style over the years. Having dined at Bourbon Steak numerous times, we wanted to spend some time with the globally renowned restaurateur, award-winning chef and visionary behind the Mina Group.

Born in Cairo, Egypt, on May 5, 1969,

and raised in Washington state, Mina honed his craft at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Since then, he has built a legacy of innovative American cuisine, blending global influences with modern techniques. He now oversees a portfolio of acclaimed restaurants across the U.S.—including his flagship Michael Mina in San Francisco and standout locations in Las Vegas, Los Angeles and beyond.

Chic Compass: Bourbon Steak is called the quintessential American steakhouse, each location with its unique design and nod to the local scene. What makes the newly opened Bourbon Steak at the Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas reflect the iconic steakhouse image of Las Vegas?

Michael Mina: Bourbon Steak Las Vegas captures the spirit of the quintessential American steakhouse while turning up the energy in a way that feels perfectly at home in Las Vegas. The design is glamorous yet understated, with subtle nods to the city's iconic style: rich textures, dramatic lighting and a vibe that feels both elevated and inviting. We were very intentional in balancing Vegas showmanship with culinary craftsmanship. The menu is rooted in the classic Bourbon Steak ethos with incredible steaks, pristine seafood and signature items like tuna tartare and complimentary French fries to start. In

Above: Chef Michael Mina brings his celebrated culinary vision to the iconic Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas with the new Bourbon Steak Las Vegas

true Las Vegas fashion, it's a little more indulgent, a little more magnetic and all about delivering that unforgettable moment.

Chic Compass: Walking into Bourbon Steak evokes a sense of intimacy and sophistication, with a hint of secrecy woven into the design. From the gleaming red piano to the jeweled-toned dining alcoves and floral murals, the visuals are captivating. You often use artwork to inspire your restaurant concepts. How did you discover local artist Cerissa Lopez?

Michael Mina: Something that makes each Bourbon Steak special is that we design our spaces to represent the community and city we're in. No two Bourbon Steaks look the same—that's intentional. I saw Cerissa Lopez's art around town and thought it was uniquely cool. I was introduced to her through someone we had in common, and she came up with an incredible mural that feels naturally part of the space while still shining as its own work of art.

Chic Compass: Let's discuss the caviar Twinkie, filled with yuzu and crème fraîche, as an example of playfulness in the dining experience. What other dishes highlight your creative global influences?

Michael Mina: I have to say anything served from one of our custom-made trolleys! Las Vegas is all about the show, but to me, it's just as important to have the flavor, too. We've created these carts to serve dishes like our "Smoke Show" Tomahawk and the English pea agnolotti. I'm also excited to bring back one of my original desserts—the root beer float, upgraded with saffras ice cream and gold.

Chic Compass: Aside from the appetizers, cocktails by Mike Lay, and the curated wine list by wine director Ryan Gotti, let's talk about the steaks. I read your team researched over 50 cuts to select the best for Bourbon Steak Las Vegas. What criteria did you use? And tell



Caviar "Twinkie"



Duck Fat Fries



Ora King Salmon

Brûléed Basque Cheesecake



Michael Mina: I first worked with Chef Josh Smith to open Bardot at Aria, and watching him grow into the leader he is today has been incredibly rewarding. When Josh joined our team, he brought the discipline, work ethic and passion we value most at Mina Group: excellence, consistency and creativity.

Chic Compass: We heard about a new dining membership program. What can you share?

Michael Mina: Since this location is so accessible for Las Vegas locals, I wanted to create a club that would offer a unique opportunity for guests to experience Bourbon Steak. Throughout the year, we host intimate, invite-only events, special menus and VIP access to all Mina Group restaurants.

Chic Compass: Bourbon Steak Las Vegas took years to bring to life, but so did your cookbook, "My Egypt." Tell us how your heritage influenced this project.

Michael Mina: About 10 years ago, I began traveling back to Egypt to reconnect with my roots. It was initially for a restaurant project, but with every visit, I continued to discover how much of an impact culture and cuisine had on me as a chef, and I wanted to share it with the world. I've always been passionate about balancing flavors and utilizing the right mix of ingredients to bring out the most in every dish. This comes directly from my Egyptian heritage. There's not a lot out there on Egyptian cuisine, so I wanted to share the story of my roots while also creating a book with recipes that any at-home cook can recreate.



Chef Michael Mina with Elaine Harris

us about the butter-poaching and mesquite-grilling process.

Michael Mina: Butter poaching is at the heart of how we treat steaks at Bourbon Steak. It's a consistent cooking process that gently infuses the meat with flavor and retains moisture. We slowly poach the steak in clarified butter infused with herbs, garlic and aromatics. It's not about overpowering the beef—it's about enhancing it, giving it this unbelievably tender texture and depth of flavor. Once it's perfectly poached, we finish it with a high-heat

sear to build that beautiful crust. You get this incredible contrast: a rich, almost velvet-like interior with that classic steakhouse char on the outside. It's a technique I've been using for years, and for me, it's the best way to honor a great cut of beef.

Chic Compass: As someone who's opened restaurants across the globe, what does it take for team members to thrive under the Mina Group brand? Tell us about working with Executive Chef Josh Smith.

Whether crafting a cookbook or designing a showstopping menu item, Michael Mina's passion and purpose continue to shape the culinary world, both in Las Vegas and beyond. Be sure to visit one of his many restaurants (theminagroup.com), including Bourbon Steak at Four Seasons Hotel Las Vegas.

ABOUT TOWN

United Way of Southern Nevada
Toquerville Society at Rita Deanin Abbey
Museum (Photography by Ian Bon)

Right: (L-R) Lucy Formato, Willow Layland,
Laura Sanders

Below: (L-R) Sam L. Rudd, Laura Henkel,
David Pesta



Above: (L-R) Stacey Gualandi,
David Tupaz

Far Left: (L-R) Greg Forni,
Janet Quintero

Left: (L-R) Angel Williams,
Chris Williams, Marta Schmitt



Chic Compass Launch Party at Loaded Empanadas (Photography courtesy of Cashman Photo)

Above: (L-R) Roxy, Skai, Deng and Nate Jones, David Tupaz, Sondra Lynch

Top Right: (L-R) Tony Pearson, Stacey Gualandi

Below: Suzy Urbiztondo Pugh, Jonathan Karrant, Yuan-Fen Lai, Ann Parenti, Gloria Cunningham, JoAnn Toronto



Above: (L-R) Lena Walthers, Kiky Hutton

Below: (L-R) Camryn Gordon, Brian Sessions, Chanelle Hayes-Sessions

Bottom Left: (L-R) Kimberley McGee, Mimi Rogers, Judy Tarte, Kendall Hardin





The Music of Nathan Tanouye performed by Jazz Vegas Orchestra

(Photography courtesy of Jazz Outreach Initiative)

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NEWH Student Scholarship Awards Brunch held Saturday, June 14th, 2025 at Bel-Aire Lounge (Photography by Dragonfly Photography)

Above: (L-R) Alecia Lopez, Meghan Granil, Tristan Casco, Marie Leon (Board Member), Giovanni Jones, Landri Luca, Amber Andrews, Shiva Manshour, Aly Huang, Kristin Bradley (Board Member)

Right: (L-R) KC GoLightly (Board Member), GLINDA The Good Witch, and Reichen Gihbsson (Board Support)

Below: (L-R) Ann Parenti, Julie Orndorff





Melissa Manchester Concert at 54 Below (Photography by Sheryl Aronson and Sherman Alford (Sasaphotos))

Above: Melissa Manchester

Top Right: (L-R) Melissa Manchester, Marilyn Maye (Vocalist)

Right: (L-R) Melissa Manchester, Jim Caruso (Broadway Singer/Dancer)

Bottom Right: (L-R) Melissa Manchester, Gloria Reuben (Actress)

Below: Melissa Manchester



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