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# »»»» KING OF CLUBS

VICTOR DRAI CONTINUES HIS NIGHTCLUB TANGO  
ONE GUTSY MOVE AT A TIME

BY HALEY CALDWELL

It is 10 a.m. on an ordinary Saturday morning and a duck row of taxicabs decorate the Cromwell's bustling entrance. For the next several hours, the yellow doors of Sin City's chariots relentlessly swing open producing the club's scantily clad pulse. Once ushered through the resort's entrance, anxious conversations weave amongst slot machine melodies as Beach Club-goers excitedly anticipate their rooftop elevator ride to the poolside paradise known simply as Drai's.

The demanding bass sweeps across the 65,000-square-foot escape and is only muted through the clandestine, soundproofed, lackluster office of the club's namesake and creator, Victor Drai.

Lounging in casual jeans and a t-shirt and with humble disregard to his inherent entrepreneurial gusto, the Moroccan-born business mogul assuredly surmises that he is just simply "a lucky guy."

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## VICTOR DRAI CONTINUES HIS NIGHTCLUB TANGO ONE GUTSY MOVE AT A TIME

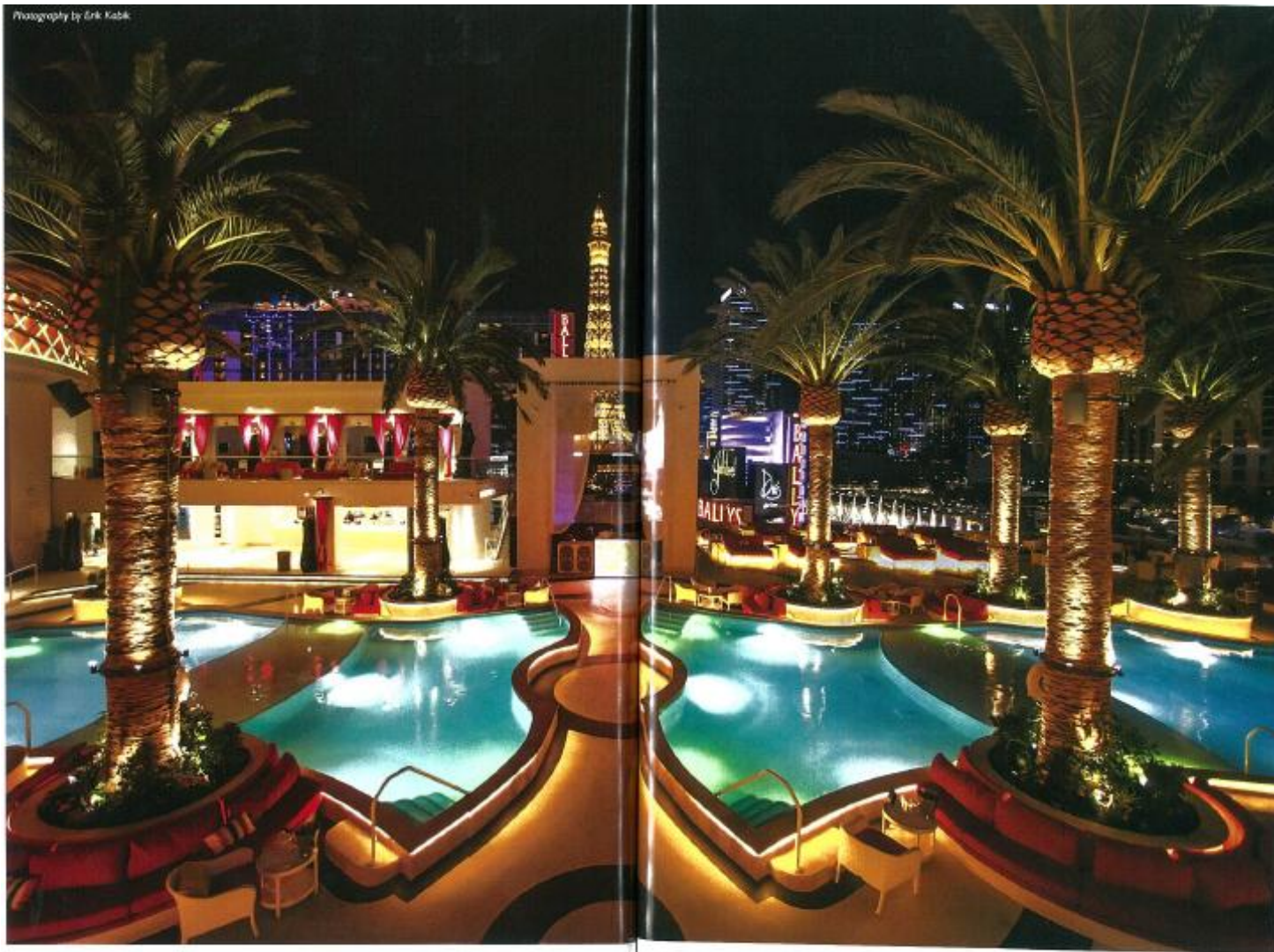
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Photography by Erik Kabik



"I'm always excited to create something different and new," Draï says of his many entrepreneurial endeavors. "I think that's really my motivation... money has never been my motivation because I have been lucky enough to make money very early on so I knew I was going to be able to make a living."

Shortly after Draï discontinued his

traditional education at the age of 15 and moved with his parents to Paris, the adolescent self-starter spent little time pondering his next move and decided instead to plunge straight into the business world.

"I started working around 16 years old in an architect's office," Draï explains. "And then, from there, I started my first business at 18...it was an exterminator business."

With the urge to continuously create seemingly wound into his DNA, Draï eventually parted with his first startup business and used the fashion inspiration of his home city to venture into a career in the industry that would ultimately provide him with his aforementioned financial success.

"It was kind of a different life in Paris, but to me, it was the best thing because I was coming from a small town and [then]

exposed to a huge town; all of the fashion and all of the things happening at the time... it was great," Draï said. "[My fashion line] was very successful and then I met a lady who lived in California so I started to travel back and forth and I fell in love with the state so I decided to close my company and move to L.A."

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## king of clubs ::

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Ignoring the criticism of those confused by his apparently impulsive departure from his thriving career in fashion, Draï focused on bringing his multi-faceted talents to life in the rolling hills of California.

Again, making the most of his surroundings, Draï immersed himself in the entertainment industry and had a successful run as a film producer. However, after releasing several blockbuster hits including "Weekend at Bernie's" and "The Man With One Red Shoe," it was another shocker when Draï decided to leave yet another successful career in pursuit of a more autonomous project.

He explains, "I'm a really independent guy and I always work for myself and in movies you depend on too many people and I didn't like that part of it...I like to be my own boss."

With a sincere passion for food and having learned firsthand about the restaurant industry from his parents who owned and operated multiple cafés throughout his childhood, Draï's next pursuit was to become a restaurateur himself.

"I started with restaurants," Draï reveals. "Draï's was originally a restaurant in L.A. and we did an evening on Monday night that came back huge. It was just a live band and from there we moved to Vegas...when I did my first restaurant in Vegas, there were no restaurants. It was before Bellagio, it was before Mandalay Bay -- there was nothing here. The only restaurant that was here was Spago in the Forum Shops."

After providing a couple of years of exemplary service, Draï decided to enhance the dining experience of his restaurant by incorporating the entertainment element that he had imagined since the restaurant's conception.

"When I created [Draï's] in Vegas, I thought about a nightclub behind the restaurant so I designed the restaurant like a nightclub, and then I started After Hours," Draï elaborates. "The only reason I started After Hours is because I can't open [the nightclub] too early because the restaurant was still very busy and we were very successful so I needed to start at midnight."

With 17 years of steady After Hours business, the unstoppable entrepreneur partnered with Steve Wynn to conceptualize and construct two clubs for the mogul's Las Vegas properties -- Tryst at Wynn Las Vegas and XS in Encore -- when they opened in 2005 and 2008.

"I made a deal with Steve Wynn so I created Tryst and then from Tryst, I created XS. Then I was in development for a beach club there but [Steve and I] came apart...I was kind of frustrated with XS because as much as the Wynn let me do on my own, I was still limited to certain things I could do."

Seeking to fulfill his need to "be his own boss," Draï left his partnership with Wynn and entered into a new agreement with the Cromwell on the Strip to open his own beach club.

It was already well known that Draï had a knack for fabricating fantasy within his nightclubs, but Draï's Beach Club was about to make Las Vegas club history with his never-before-done rooftop design.

"I knew what I wanted to do 15 years ago...15 years ago, I wanted to do a club on the roof [it would be] an amazing club," Draï enthusiastically explains of his beach club vision. "The beach club is a big new thing. I mean, it's not new yet but I think it's really the future of Vegas more than the nightclub."

Between the dayclub and the nightclub, the dual experiential sky-high venue hosts guests around the clock, six days each week, except for Wednesdays when it is closed.

Postcard views of Las Vegas Boulevard and the dancing shadows of the club's natural palm trees contribute to the playfully opulent beach club scene. Outlined with mezzanine cabanas, spacious bungalows, and luxurious daybeds, the two massive pools in the center of the wet deck are decadently exposed to the elements.

With every inch of the club designed and decorated for optimal aesthetic appeal and practical purpose, it's easy to understand the vast amount of focused work that was put in place before the revelry could ever begin.

"When you can create, you can do it eventually, so I started the design," explains Draï of the beginning stages of his club designing progression. "The design took me two years to



finish. I have designed really every inch of this club, so that's just a daily process and I live with it all night and all day in my head."

Constantly thinking of improvements and additions to further enhance the already adorned club, Draï says, "I'm not finished with Draï's [beach club and nightclub]. There's a lot that we are going to do, lots of work. Just like you know, the club now has its own life so now I have to follow the club, not what I want anymore but nobody sees [what I am working on] except for me."

Considering his continuous accomplishments, it wouldn't be surprising if the non-stop entrepreneur worked in his dreams but Draï claims, "I have a certain way of doing my life...I'm very lucky that way because I sleep, I enjoy my life, and I work hard but it's not really work for me."

Living his life a certain way has garnered Draï yet another prosperous club and it is safe to say that the entrepreneur, who is also one of 16 professionals to be inducted into the Nightclub Hall of Fame, has that rare-to-find motivated mindset that has propelled his life down a well-traveled pathway of success.

But for Draï, success is only a byproduct of living life well. He explained, "I really, really think life is way more important to your journey than the completion or the failure or the success of it because one or the other is very quick; you're a big success or you quit and then what?"

While it's easier said than done, Draï simply suggests that the secret to his well-lived life is due to "hard work -- hard work and believe what you believe."

I think people have that in their blood or don't...and then if you're lucky to do the thing you like then it's easy." □