



The 13,000 square foot Playhouse has become a favorite spot for Hollywood celebs.

PLAY TIME

Hollywood's Playhouse offers clubbers more than a pretty place to party.

By Kevin Capp

Since its opening in July, Playhouse has climbed Hollywood's nightlife totem pole by delivering the kind of spectacle normally reserved for big studio movies and Las Vegas dance palaces. Designed by ICRAVE (L.A.'s Coco de Ville), the \$6-million, 13,000-square-foot tri-level club cum "performance venue" is housed in the old Fox Theatre and features "versatile, truss-based lighting" by Steve Lieberman, of SJ Lighting, and a "customized" Funktion One sound system by Dan Agne, of Sound Investment, both of whom have been honored with Club World Award wins. Although Playhouse has its requisite Tinsel Town tabloid act down, regularly attracting A-list celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio and David Beckham, it's the club's diverse schedule of weekly events and unique take on service that help it stand apart from the Hollywood herd, which is often typified by unearned and vaguely defined exclusivity. The venue's programming includes "Playhouse Thursdays," with DJs Vice, Echo, and Eric Cubeechee, and "Dirty Sexy House" on Fridays with a rotating cast of Miami- and NYC-based jocks and resident Politik. In addition to quality deck

talent providing a cross-genre soundtrack, Playhouse boasts servers, garbed in costumes designed by Kelly Nishimoto, who moonlight as trapeze artists, aerialists, and burlesque dancers—something not even Vegas' Studio 54 offers. Credit the industry vets behind Muse Lifestyle Group with all that flash. The heads of the L.A.-based company—nightlife guru Rob Vinokur (Crobar NYC) and film producer Elie Samaha (*The Whole Nine Yards*)—have put their collective experience to good use by creating a club that doubles as an attraction. We caught up with Vinokur to talk about the Playhouse vision (hint: change is good), its accompanying eatery Sweet Love Hangover, and luring celebrity clientele in Hollywood.

How did opening Playhouse differ from your previous projects?

Playhouse was a labor of love; it took us over four years and \$6 million to take the building from an abandoned theater to a first-class venue.

How did your previous experiences help you to successfully open Playhouse? Experience in this business is invaluable. I've learned from my successes but even more from my failures.

Talk about the club's location and why you decided this was the spot to build Playhouse. The Fox Theatre is located in the heart of Hollywood and was a historic theater with amazing ceiling heights and acoustics. So it was perfect for

our vision of quality sound combined with production.

What was your vision for Playhouse,

both in terms of design and systems? Create [a] unique night-life experience, and bring quality sound and production into a more intimate venue.

Playhouse has some pretty unique promotions. What prompted you to go in this direction, and how has it worked out so far? Again, we wanted to take a different approach [and] create something that's unique and

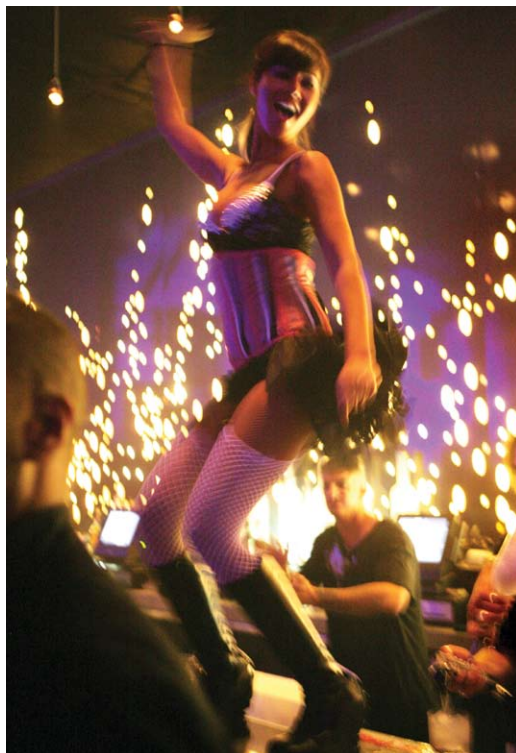
constantly changing. At the same time, we wanted to create more of a family atmosphere that starts with the staff and is extended both to regular guests and to first-timers.

Many nightlife companies are now combining dining and club experiences. To that end, what was the thinking behind Sweet Love Hangover?

How does the restaurant complement the club? [Sweet Love Hangover] is a completely separate entity. It extends Playhouse's hospitality but is very casual, fun, and quirky. It's an all-day eatery with a late-night attitude. Playhouse is now recognized as the hottest club in Hollywood.

How did you ascend up the chain so rapidly in such a competitive

Continued to page 30



The servers double as performers at Playhouse.

We wanted to take a different approach [and] create something that's unique and constantly changing.

WALK-THROUGH

Owner Rob Vinokur takes you on a tour of Playhouse.

"Located in the heart of Hollywood, the marquee of the historic Fox Theater vibrantly displays nine bold letters: 'Playhouse.' The 13,000-square-foot venue is a modern ode to stylish escapism. Once past the velvet ropes, you venture away from all that is Hollywood and into a world reminiscent of theatrical burlesque and Las Vegas light shows. You walk down a dark hallway illuminated by a series of LED lights that literally lead you toward the world of revelry. Senses are enhanced by the sights and sounds of a line array Funktion One sound system and intelligent lighting. You're immediately greeted by body-moving music, extravagant VIP booths, and a circular bar topped with caged dancers overhead. Fabric walls light up and pulse to the music. Separated into three different levels, the main floor hosts two bars, warm custom-made light fixtures, and large circular banquettes. The lower level features the high-energy dance floor surrounded by banquette seating, with large dance boxes overhead and an expandable stage that on any given day might accommodate a live show, DJ, or full production event. The top floor, appropriately named 'The Balcony,' features a retractable glass skylight, vibrant color, and rich textiles."

Continued from page 29

market, and how do you plan to stay there? There are a lot of amazing clubs in Hollywood, and we just hope to continue making Playhouse a unique experience that brings people back.

What downside is there to being the most popular club, whether in Hollywood or Miami? You can't always accommodate everyone, even though you really wish you could.

This is a big and costly project by any standard. But in this economy it seems particularly risky. What gave you the confidence to go ahead with it at this time? We believe in the brand we've created, and we plan on being a part of Hollywood for many years to come.

Team Playhouse

Owners: Rob Vinokur, Elie Samaha, and Mike Israyelyan

Sound: Steve Lieberman of SJ Lighting

Lighting: Dan Agne of Sound Investment

Interior Design: Lionel Ohayon of ICRAVE

THEATRICAL LIGHTING

29 - ETC Source Four PARS with lens kits

22 - Elation Design Spot 300 Pro moving lights

12 - Elation Opti TriPar LED PAR cans

8 - Martin Professional Atomic 3000 strobe lights

6 - Stage Spot ProCan 4-Lite audience blinders

4 - Martin Professional Wizard Extremes effects lights

4 - Elation Opti Tri 30 LED PAR can-truss toners

4 - ETC Source Four Lekos 26°

1 - MA Lighting GrandMA Ultralight Series 2 lighting console

1 - Martin Professional Jem K1 hazer

1 - Custom truss system

1 - Custom motor system with control

How important is it for a Hollywood-based club to attract celebrity clientele? And how did you and your team set about making sure celebs came to Playhouse?

We created a product people like, and we love that people from all walks of life want to come and be a part of it.

What qualities were you looking for in the DJs that you hired? It's all about the energy and the vibe they create. The DJ for the main room is on stage, so they have to be able to perform.

What other projects do you have lined up? We have two new projects opening two blocks away on Ivar that we're planning to open in 2010.



The performances may change, but the venue doesn't.



Acrobatics are part of the Playhouse spectacle.



Don't try this at home: The Playhouse staff are trained professionals.



The Playhouse troupe.



The walls of Stereolab were treated with sound paneling like "a recording studio from the sixties," Shorty says.

They Dream in Stereo

Systems By Shorty installed an audiophile's fantasy at Singapore's Stereolab.

By Phil Moffa

Usually, when a new club is built from the ground up, the soundman is brought in after construction and he works around the layout the architect provided. In the case of the stunning new Stereolab in the Pan Pacific Hotel in Singapore, owners Michel Yu and Yuan Oeij wanted a one-of-a-kind sound system to be the club's main attraction and, therefore, the sound was installed first. While doing some research online for audiophile analog sound systems, they came across multiple Club World Award-nominee Systems By Shorty (SBS), which is known for its hand-made analog components and stellar sound. Yu and Oeij gave the company's head, Craig "Shorty" Bernebeau, artistic license to provide Stereolab with the best system possible.

With a blank canvas to work on, Shorty thought of the club's interests beyond aural aesthetics.

"The owner Michel says, 'We are selling an incredible experience once you come through the doors of Stereolab.' So, it had to have an amazing sound system and design to achieve this kind of experience," Shorty says. With a blank canvas to work on, Shorty thought of the club's interests beyond aural aesthetics. Thus, he began by floating the teak wood dance floor and filling it with sand. "When you design and build the dance floor like this, it is not only easy on your joints and back to keep you in the room longer and have fun and buy drinks all night, but a floor with this design helps the sound out tremendously as well."

Continued to page 40



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