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CULTURAL DIVIDE



# LUST FOR LIFE

## AN INTERVIEW WITH NIGHTLIFE IMPRESARIO RANDE GERBER

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After-hours for nightlife mogul Rande Gerber sometimes unfolds as follows: Invite friends to Malibu home (which he shares with wife of 11 years, Cindy Crawford, and their two children); tease the flames on the barbecue and make something sizzle, turn up the music; pour drinks generously, and laugh until someone bangs on the front door bringing the festivities to a close. It's a simple concept — soulful entertaining in a comfortable yet stylish surrounding — that spawned a revolution in the American nightlife industry.

Gerber launched his revolution in 1991 when he opened his first bar, The Whisky, at New York City's Paramount Hotel. For the next 18 years, he and his brother and partner, Scott Gerber, and their company the Gerber Group, concocted 30 bars, lounges and restaurants, each of which is a reflection of its host city. Los Angeles is home to Stone Rose Lounge at the Sofitel Hotel and Whisky Blue at the W Westwood. New York claims Whisky Park at Trump Park among other choice properties. Santiago, Chile, boasts Whisky Blue at the W Hotel Santiago. Rose Bar and Maxim Beach, a partnership with *Maxim* magazine, are nestled in ME Cancun, a luxury hotel in Mexico. And the list continues with each location a blend of creative libations and most importantly, prodigious design.

Yeah, Gerber's spots look good — an "I could get used to this" kind of good as my brother said upon first visiting Sky Bar at the Mondrian Hotel, one of Gerber's first projects. Visiting one of the Gerber Group properties makes you realize that creating a satisfying nightlife experience is a feat of acumen, art and anthropology. (Anthropology because you've got to understand people and how a space can evoke a primal energy necessary for making a deal or a date.)

As lounge lord, Gerber knows this. And now he's bringing one of his newest ventures, Café Havana, a small, socially responsible New York-based chain of Cuban cafés owned by Sean Meehan, to Malibu.

### What attracted you to the nightlife arena?

I wanted to create a new way of nightlife similar to the way I entertained at home. My friends would come over, and we would light some candles, incense, put some mellow rock 'n' roll on, sit back on comfortable couches and drink and laugh all night long. Usually around 2 or 3 a.m., I would get a knock on the door to turn the



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music down. That's when I decided to create the lounge concept. I designed my first bar similar to my living room and opened my first lounge, which at the time was a new concept in nightlife.

### What project are you currently working on?

I have had a lot of experience drinking the past 25 years. Therefore, in an effort to not put those years of research to waste, I set out to find the best vodka, rum and tequila. After finding the best of the best, I got all my friends together to do blind taste tests, which included the top-selling brands. My friends all chose my picks, which were all unknown and not yet available in most states. I have recently put together a liquor company to introduce and market our favorites in each category.

### What can patrons expect to experience when they visit this new location?

A restaurant that is fun and accessible; a place we could go to day and night. We all want to feel comfortable bringing our kids for an early dinner and also bringing a date late night. With Café Havana, we are building a café where neighbors can gather with great food, drinks and music that's also great fun — a café with social responsibility and respect for the community and environment.

### Being a resident and new business owner in Malibu, what are your thoughts about the new septic ban and how will it affect you?

I am all for protecting the environment and our waters and beaches, but I am also for moderate growth. I think the septic ban is a situation brought about by a few people who don't want any change and will go to any means to try and convince others that a septic ban is necessary to accomplish their own agenda.

### What do you feel is next in the progression of the nightlife scene?

I think landlords will not be taking as many chances with the unknown as they have in the past. There will be fewer places opening and many more closing. I will stay with my concept of the smaller, more intimate restaurant and lounge that I have been successful at for 20 years.

### What were you thinking after your first conversation with Cindy Crawford?

I hope I don't wake up from this dream.

### Can you describe the moment or event that made you realize that Cindy was the woman that you were going to marry?

When I picked her up at her apartment with a bottle of tequila, and she came down to the car with a bottle of champagne. We drank most of it.

### What is one of the most humorous or quirky things one of your children, Kaia or Presley, has ever said to you?

Every day it's something new. There was a moment after having the sex talk and explaining how babies were made, I was asked, "After you have kids, why do you keep doing it?"

### When you have a bit of "you time," what is your favorite non-work or family-related pastime?

I take a motorcycle trip with a friend every summer in Europe. No schedule or plan, we just ride ....

### What is a one-sentence philosophy or creed that sums up what you're all about?

My dad always said you have to "live while you're alive." ■