

Folk artist Warren Kumble • Know-how for sale

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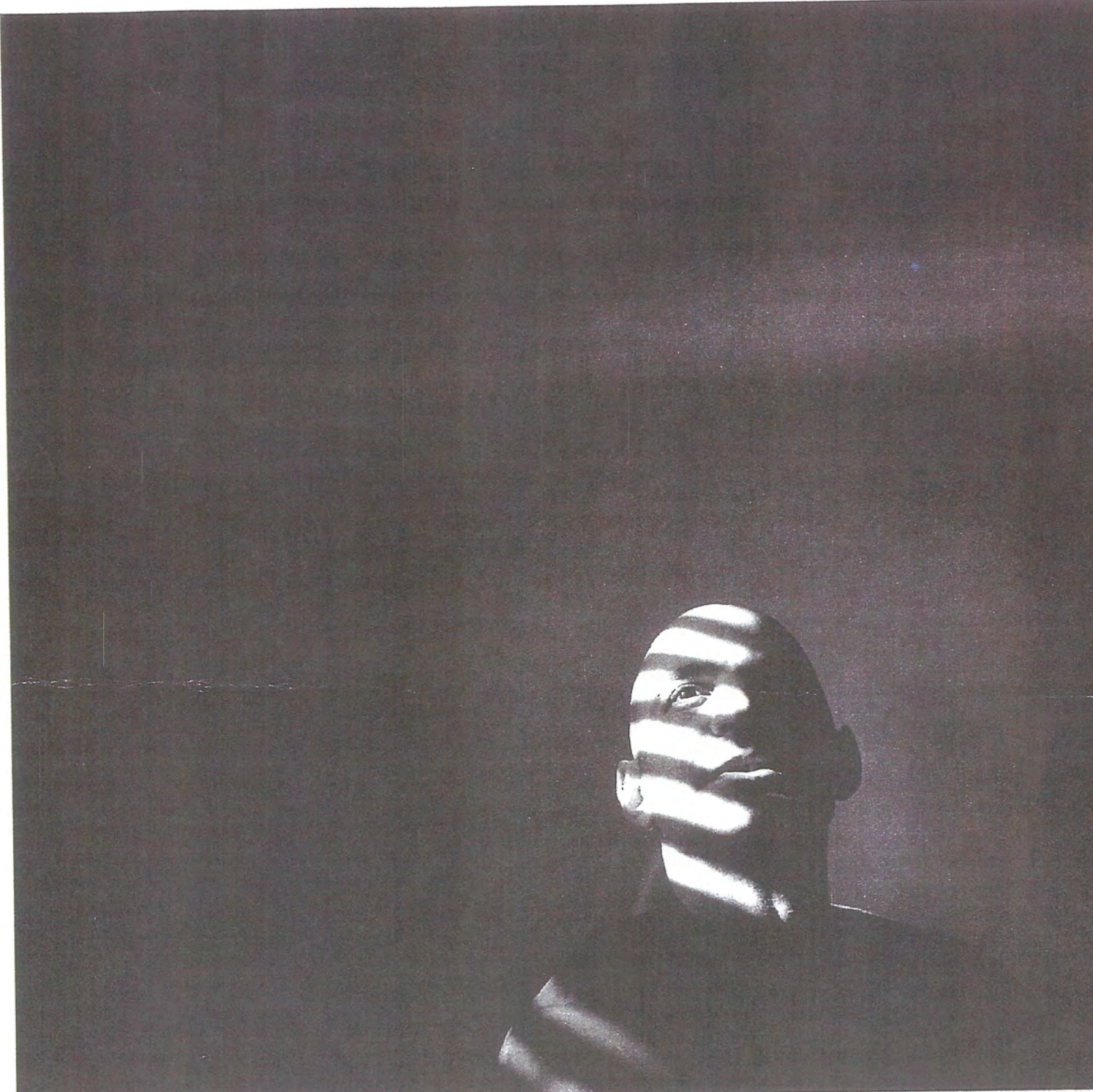


## Blast from the past

What's become of those Cold War bomb shelters?

*By David Arnold*





**“A LOT OF THESE** *older foreign students are on their fathers’ credit cards, and it’s an ego thing, how much money they can spend.”*

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# The Interview

By John Koch

AS THE EXECUTIVE director of the six Landsdowne Street nightclubs, including Avalon, Steve Adelman, 37, collaborates on design, events, and promotion.

# Steve Adelman

**How many people come to your clubs in a week?**

Over 15,000. Fridays, when Avalon has Avaland, we do pretty much capacity across the board, over 5,000. If you consider the clubs all one unit, it's probably the biggest Friday night in the country.

**So why bother with renovations and changes?**

People get bored very quickly, and we want to be a Boston destination. With [Mayor] Giuliani going after the nightclub business in New York, it's difficult to do new things there. There's a drought, and a lot of New York clubbers come here. They drive fast, 3½ hours; they fly up on the shuttle.

**What do you bring to the street that's special?**

I was a big player in building some of the most creative clubs in the country — the Tunnel, the Limelight, and Club USA, in New York. Being able to conceptualize the actual space is important, following through to the design of the invitations for the nights. Myself, John [Lyons], and Patrick [Lyons, the principal shareholders] got together to decide what Avalon is going to look like. And we added all the bells and whistles, like the photo montage in the lobby. The women's bathroom was customized to give the women a nice experience — even a bar had been planned for it, but the Boston health de-

partment felt it was not appropriate to have alcohol served over a counter in a bathroom. We're trying to bring Boston into focus internationally, but getting top world DJs isn't easy. You have to treat them right. They need to be on the right flight, picked up correctly, not in a minivan but the right kind of car. For example, Junior Vasquez: At the last moment, he didn't want to fly from New York; he wanted a limo. That's expensive. When he got here, we had to have certain fruits and vegetables, just like a band — special yogurt, special berries. These are guys who go around the world and get big money, easily five figures for one appearance.

**How much liquor do you sell?**

Our Thursday-night crowd, our international crowd, drinks a lot of champagnes. They probably have three or four drinks per person on average, which is high, more than in New York. In Boston, people tend to go to one place, and because it's a 2 a.m. closing, they drink a lot and go home. We run out of champagne buckets, and they're drinking the high-end stuff. A lot of these older foreign students are on their fathers' credit cards, and it's an ego thing, how much money they can spend.

**You've said you're aiming for something like the Ministry of Sound, a London club. What do you mean?**

Branding. We're starting our own record label and merchandising CDs and gear. Our first store is in the club now. We're licensing DJs who've played here to mix compilation discs, and we'll sell those across the country. Our first is going to be John Digweed from London. Ministry of Sound is planning, basically, to franchise its clubs. We've looked in New York for another Avalon space, but as far as franchising goes, no, not now.

**In New York, you worked with club magnate Peter Gattien, who just did time for tax evasion and was accused of many worse crimes.**

He's not an unsavory guy. He was guilty of one thing, surrounding himself with people who weren't the right people. He's a friend; he's not a bad guy. I was out of that organization before things happened.

**What's the hardest part of your job?**

Your hours are long and hard — eight to 10 hours a day and another four or five at night, six days a week.

**When do you sleep?**

Whenever I go to sleep, I set my clock for seven hours. Then I go right back to work.

**What do you do to escape?**

I box. I hit punching bags and people. It's fun. I wanted a workout I could do within one

hour that didn't rely on a lot of other people, like basketball. My girlfriend boxes, too, and she can kill me. I will be boxing till I'm 90. But I'm a lover, not a fighter.

**The Avalon sound system is overwhelming — does it affect your hearing or, perhaps, your mind?**

Fortunately, I spend most of my time on the perimeter. I try not to get overexposed — it could be a problem.

**How do you pitch the club to your patrons?**

Inviting people hand-to-hand is the most effective way. About 25 percent who come have been approached individually. We can reach a great percentage of our audience by going to areas like Newbury Street or near BU. Typical example: On a Saturday afternoon, we have 10 to 12 promoters, out of a force of 100, on Newbury Street going into stores, hitting everybody that's shopping, getting their names on lists, creating a buzz. If you're an attractive young lady, the promoter identifies himself and says, "Tonight, we'd like to invite you down to Avalon, and you'll be on my reduced-admission guest list. You can get in for \$10 instead of \$15." There's a core group in this town of 200 or 300 people who others want to follow — those are the people you need to make happy. When they're happy, the word spreads. That's how you make a place hot. □