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# SPIDER MIEN

Steve Adelman, founder of nightclub Avalon and members-only-lounge Spider Room, tells us how we can be like him.

Many men have, in a moment of drunken brilliance, proclaimed their desire to open an awesome club. You were then pursuing a doctorate in economics, so getting in the nightlife business was a somewhat surprising move. When did you know that's what you wanted to do?

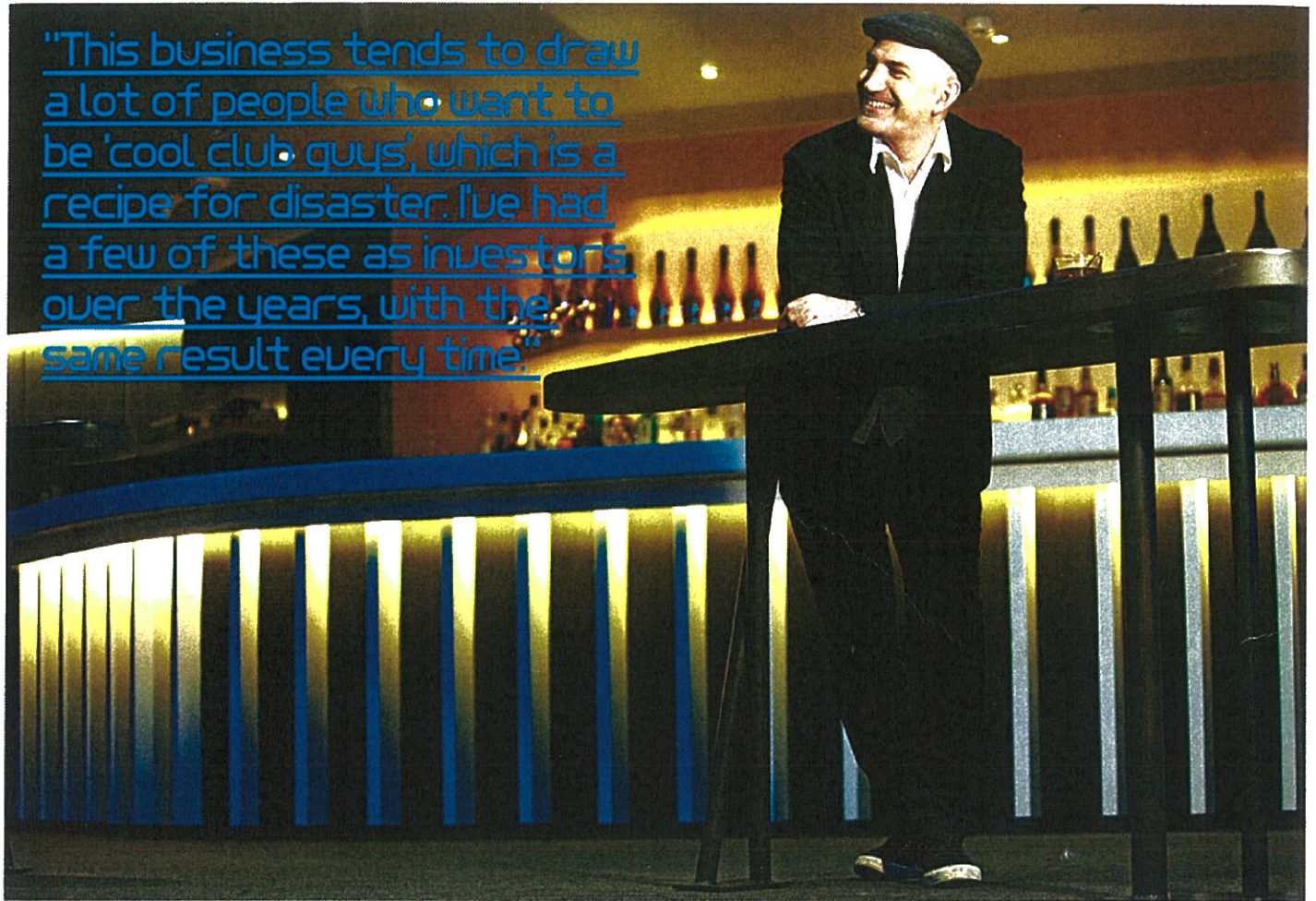
I was actually working on my doctorate while doing consulting work and wasn't enjoying [it] either. I began helping out a friend in Boston who was opening a club, but solely on the business end of things. I was 24 and had only been to nightclubs a few times in my life. I started getting involved in other parts of the business and one thing led to another. I found out that my skills were not in mathematics but in something else totally unexpected; I was able to determine in a sense what people wanted. I thought, "Maybe I can turn this into something I can make a living at, and not do the 9-to-5 thing."

**We'd love to spend a day in your shoes. What would it be like?**

Actually, my day may not be at all what you would expect. I wake up at 7am to do business in the US and review the numbers from the following night. At 10am, I head to boxing and then to the office at noon. On a daily basis, I have five to six



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meetings involving marketing, budgeting, creative and staffing issues. At 7pm, I reach home and try to rest, grab some dinner, then head back to the clubs until 2am. At night, I'm monitoring the execution of the week's plan and rarely have time to socialise other than with my managers. The next day, I wake up and do it all over again, six days a week. The irony is I found a way not to be a 9-to-5 guy, only now it's 7am to 2am!

**Spider Room is named after your legendary celebrity club, "Spider Club", in Los Angeles. How did you come up with that name?**

The name was coined by Isaac Tigrett, founder of Hard Rock Café and House of Blues. He was developing a private club in London and when that met with some issues, he offered the name to my partner and me. It was meant to evoke old-school elegance such as El Morocco and The Stork Club. At first, I didn't like the name but eventually it grew on me and has served me well over the years. The Spider Room as the newest version of the concept. "Old-school values with modern charm" is the way I like to describe it.

**How do Singapore nightclubs differ from those in LA?**

In general, whether in Boston, New York, LA or Singapore, the same elements make a great club: Music, service, design, creativity, and so on. The market in Singapore is the smallest I've done business in, which has its positives and negatives. Positive being you are able to connect to your customer base fairly easily, negative being there aren't a whole lot of them to choose from. The clubbers here certainly know how to have fun and have an energy all on their own, which helps define them as unique.

**Let's say we've decided to act on our drunken proclamation of starting a club. Where should we start?**

(1) Do your homework. Get to know everything about the business yourself. (2) Get yourself some money, a good attorney, and be ready to practice infinite patience. (3) Stop making drunken proclamations. Clubs with drunken owners usually close soon after opening. My career in nightlife probably has lasted as long

as it has because my desire was never to open up clubs when I was younger, only to find a way to earn some money and apply myself in a way that makes me happy.

**How did you get so good at your job?**

[Laughs] Not sure I'm that good; just been lucky enough to survive this far in a tough business. The one thing I can say is that I am not afraid to fail and realise that there can be no success without shortcomings. Just go for it and let the inevitable critics do all the worrying for you. These are just people without the courage and determination to do it themselves. In the end, you'll always end up winning by simply trying.

**What are the nastiest bits of your job?**

This business tends to draw a lot of people who want to be 'cool club guys', which is a recipe for disaster. I've had a few of these as investors over the years, with the same result every time. Keeping them away from the operations gets to be a full-time job. Not fun. Depending on the city, dealing with police and authorities can also be a huge headache. Fortunately,

in Singapore we've been able to develop a good, proactive relationship with officials, who have been great to work with. Over the years, I've been able to deal less and less with belligerent customers directly, which the management staff now handles. That was never something I've looked forward to. Nothing worse than a drunken 22-year-old telling you how to run your clubs at 2am in the morning.

**If you could party with anyone in the world, who would it be?**

Barack Obama. After a few drinks he seems like the kind of guy who would loosen up and tell great stories. I'd also be able to personally pledge my support because if Romney had won, I'll probably take up full-time residency here.

**How often do people ask you for a membership to one of your clubs?**

I'm asked that all the time, and have had to develop a set response, "Call me on Monday." I'm afraid I'm going to offend a lot of people I've met if they read this, but honesty is always the best policy.