

Inside Steve Wynn's Private Club

Former New Yorkers help the legendary Vegas mogul create an ultra-exclusive hideaway

By Andy Wang • 06/08/16



The lagoon at Intrigue, the new club at Wynn Las Vegas (Photo: Barbara Kraft)

It's late Thursday night at Steve Wynn's new Vegas nightclub, Intrigue, and the space is buzzing. It's industry night, and there are locals galore from other clubs, rolling in 20 deep, to celebrate veteran party-starter Ryan Labbe's birthday. L.A. nightlife is also representing at Frankie Delgado's table, where he's celebrating his own birthday with globetrotting Instagramming models. Outside at the bar and the adjacent white patio, the scene feels European even while the adjacent waterfall-and-light show feels 100 percent Vegas.

But while all this is happening, I'm in a small room, learning how the ultra-exclusive private club within this club is going to have its own app. Because of course it is. This is Wynn Las Vegas, where new chief operating officer Sean Christie (who started his career at Wynn with the now defunct Blush lounge and went on to create DJ paradises Encore Beach Club and Surrender) knows that finding different ways to market Intrigue is key to success.

Unlike most of the other big clubs in Vegas, Intrigue isn't relying on expensive headlining EDM DJs to bring in the glowstick-wielding crowds. So inside the 14,000-square-foot Intrigue is a private 85-person, 1,200-square-foot room, which has a VIP membership list of about 50 people that's slowly growing. This is where A-listers, celebrities, industry insiders and their friends can enjoy their night in a social-media-free, please-no-photos zone with an all-vinyl DJ booth. The 6-foot-5 man at the door is Timothy Sheldon, the former gatekeeper at New York's Southside who only became more of a club legend when he left Manhattan to open his own spot in Cabo San Lucas.

If things go well, Wynn nightlife executive Ronn Nicolli tells me as he shows me the prototype for the future app that will allow guests to book door-to-door visits to the private club, this small room could be open seven nights for cocktails and conversation in the future. It's got plush seating and charging stations and private lockers and its own collection of records to make it a chill all-night destination, but more than that, it's got the Steve Wynn mystique. As Sheldon points out, nobody really argues when he tells them they can't come in because "this is Mr. Wynn's private room."

Nicolli and Sheldon show me all the different Goodfellas ways into the space that's at the bottom of the stairs of what used to be the Tryst nightclub. There's a path to the private club through the kitchen of seafood restaurant Lakeside. VIPs can book an intimate dinner in the Lakeside private dining room then be whisked by a bodyguard into the private club just steps away.

On the night I visit the private club, a cavalcade of Wynn nightlife executives come in to take advantage of a calm place where they can e-mail, text and chat. I see Christie and Pauly Freedman and Jared Garcia and Ryan Perrings, all veterans of Wynn's party spots, walk in and out. Then in strolls Alex Cordova, who recently left Hakkasan Group for a senior position with Wynn. That's a lot of dudes making sure things go right on a Thursday night, but this has always been a property that sweats the details and then sweats them some more.

In fact, Sheldon and I are drinking gin and chatting about mutual New York friends when another former New Yorker, Jonathan "Shecky Green" Shecter, walks into the room. Shecter, who co-founded and worked as editor-in-chief at The Source, is a fella who's as comfortable talking about Stretch Armstrong as he is about Skrillex. He had previously worked with big DJs like his pal Steve Aoki at Wynn's other clubs, and Intrigue brought him on as a consultant to trick out the sound of the private club.

Earlier in the night, I had dinner at a Wynn restaurant helmed by another former New Yorker. Jardin, the new three-meal-a-day restaurant in the old Botero space at Encore, remarkably runs like a machine (think 1,800 covers on a busy weekend day) while maintaining a rarefied culinary elegance. Chef Joseph Zanelli, who cooked in New York at Cafe Boulud and Laurent Tourondel's Cello, serves nuanced, balanced dishes like roasted Portuguese octopus with a bed of frisee and dried chorizo that I was happy to consider a salad course even after I ate all the duck-fat potatoes on the plate.



This flower pot at Jardin is actually a chocolate cake.

Jardin's delicate fish fry (bass with lemon caper aioli) and the dazzling sea scallop cioppino with lump crab, squid and garlic bread are even bigger showstoppers. Zanelli, who previously ran the kitchen at restaurant impresario Elizabeth Blau's Andiron Steak & Sea in Downtown Summerlin, is also a man who knows how to cook a steak.

Whatever you order, you'll want to end your dinner with the dessert that looks like a blooming flower pot but is actually a chocolate cake created by pastry chef Alicia Frick and master chocolatier Bruno Codinha. Everything, including the flowers, on the plate is edible. And this is Vegas, so you can play no-limit hold-'em in the new spacious poker room at Encore, order dinner and dessert from Jardin to your card table and then slowly make your way to a nightclub when you're ready to rage or at least have a cocktail with friends. If you roll high enough, there might soon be a app (anybody will be able to download it, but only the select few will be able to activate it) to summon somebody to walk you over to the little party down the stairs from the bigger party.

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