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THE TASTING PANEL

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Rebecca Wilkowski is a nationally recognized photographer and photojournalist based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Rebecca has been featured on CBS, ABC, NBC and the WB. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including *Professional Photographer*, *Shutterbug*, *The San Diego Union Tribune* and *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. A champion of the environment, Rebecca is also a certified San Francisco Bay Area green business and one of only

11 photographers in the country approved by Green America's Green Business Network.

coRREcTioNs

In our September issue, Charlie Arturaola was mistakenly identified as a Master Sommelier. Charlie is not affiliated with the Court of Master Sommeliers.

Also in our September issue, the saké story photos on pages 108-109 were not correctly attributed. All of the photos for this story were taken by Richard Carleton Hacker.

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President/COO: Meridith May

Vice President: David Gadd

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editor in chief

Anthony Dias Blue

ablue@tastingpanelmag.com

publisher / executive editor

Meridith May

mmay@tastingpanelmag.com

818-990-0350

managing editor

David Gadd dgadd@tastingpanelmag.com

associate editor

Rachel Burkons rburkons@tastingpanelmag.com

senior art director

James McManus mcmansudesign@gmail.com

new york editor

Lana Bortolot lanab@me.com

northern california editor

Deborah Parker Wong

texas editor

Anthony Head

southeast editor

Fred Minnick editor@fredwrite.com

editor at large

E. C. Gladstone

london correspondent

Steven Spurrier

contributing editors

Tony Abou-Ganim, Bridget Albert, Ian Buxton,
Becky Sue Epstein, Richard Carleton Hacker,
Rudy Maxa, Merrill Shindler, Ben Weinberg

operations manager

Cecilia Loschin closchin@tastingpanelmag.com

marketing + events director

Nicolette Teo nteo@tastingpanelmag.com

advertising/production manager

Sara Deckers sdeckers@tastingpanelmag.com

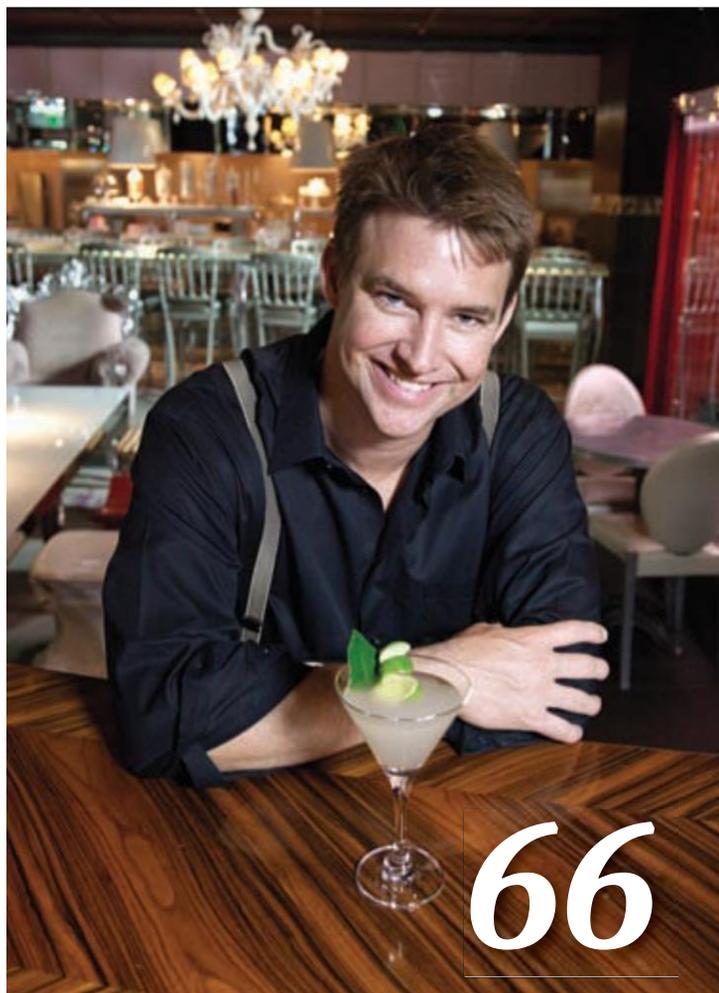
contributors

Rob Brown, Tom Clark, John Curley, Danielle "Deed" DeBruno, Joel R. Gaff Jr., W. Blake Gray, Geoff Kleinman, Eric Lesser, Allison Levine, Hasse Nilsson, Nick Passmore, George Phaedon, Eli Pitta, Mike Riccetti, Laura Sanchez, Maria Schriber, Tori Soper, Kenn Sterns, Rebecca Wilkowski, Doug Young

WE HAVE MOVED! Our new address is:

THE TASTING PANEL

17203 Ventura Blvd., Suite 5, Encino, CA 91316



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sbe:

a Sexy,

big Empire

At The Bazaar by José Andrés, Lead Bartender Rob Floyd and sbe Senior Director of Operations Boe Trumbull showcase cocktails at one of the restaurant's signature tableside mixology carts. Seated, Trumbull explores the realm of molecular mixology in the Smoke on the Water cocktail, made with Johnnie Walker Black and liquid nitrogen, while Floyd relishes a José Gimlet, made with super-premium Beluga vodka.

the Entertainment Empire

by Rachel Burkons / photos by Rob Brown

Throughout human history, empires have risen and fallen on the backs of innovation (hello, Roman aqueducts), dynamic leaders (Louis XIV did more than just lounge in gilded Baroque thrones) and building upon the success of previous powers (Rome may not have been built in a day, but the Greeks greased the wheels).

In today's competitive hospitality industry, food and beverage empires certainly exist (fortunately with significantly less sacking and pillaging), but few have been more successful than the powerhouse sbe, a hospitality and lifestyle company with a diverse group of properties that have changed the face of modern entertainment through killer design, industry-leading practices and sure-and-steady growth.

From the shores of the Pacific to the heart of Hollywood, mapping the company's Los Angeles holdings is like a Who's Who and What's Hot for the City of Angels. From high-end Philippe Stark–designed hotels and restaurants, to nightclubs so exclusive they're practically celebrity holding pens, sbe properties are among the city's most influential, fashion-forward and, of course, mixology-driven.

Leading the charge in this innovative empire is sbe Chairman and CEO Sam Nazarian, who founded the company in 2002 with the hope of closing the gap in the industry wherein high-end concepts, precise operations and upscale mixology were frequently mutually exclusive affairs. Nearly a decade later, Nazarian and sbe have changed the game, and the brand's unique knack for carefully crafting a complete experience has set the industry standard.

Mixing Across the Empire

"Mixology is about understanding your audience, and understanding what they will drink," states Boe Trumbull, Senior Director of Operations at sbe. With this in mind, nothing at sbe is done in broad strokes: From the décor to the cocktail menu, each sbe outlet is precision-crafted to generate a specific appeal and tap into precise tastes.

From high-volume venues like West Hollywood's The Abbey (winner of TripOut's Best Gay Bar in the World title), where vodka Red Bulls fly off the backbar, to chichi outlets such as Hyde Lounge Sunset, where Paris, Britney, Lindsay and other first-name-only celebrity fodder have been known to get their drink on, the mixology program at each and every sbe property is tailored to a T.

"Since the inception of our very first venue, we have



At Katsuya Hollywood, GM Ryan McCallum presents The Dragon cocktail. All sbe properties are a carefully-crafted marriage between form and function, with stylish cocktails served against a decidedly fashionable backdrop.

sought to create a different experience for our guests," continues Trumbull, whose role as the opening manager at sbe's very first venue (the now-defunct but long-reigning hotspot Shelter) has seen him helm sbe's success for nearly a decade.

One of the most innovative beverage-related moments at sbe came early on and has become the brand's signature service: tableside mixology. "Nobody has ever been able to perfect tableside mixology outside of us," states Trumbull—and this is no bull: With the implementation of tableside



Senior Director of Operations Boe Trumbull knows that a quality base spirit makes all the difference, and he works closely with partner brands who share his vision of sbe success. “It is very important in a multi-tier mixology platform such as ours to find brands that meet each tier’s needs in one program, so finding partner brands to work with is important.”



At Sayer’s Club in Hollywood, tableside mixology drink carts bring the bar to the bottle service set. With super-premium spirits on bottle service, such as Beluga Noble Russian Vodka, fresh ingredients and a capable hand are musts.

mixology in several of sbe’s nightclub environments, bottle service has been revolutionized.

Better Bottle Service

“Bottle service is the self-service buffet line, while tableside mixology is the four-star fine dining approach to

providing a guest with an enhanced spirit experience,” says Trumbull, sitting in front of a gleaming silver cart at Bar Centro in The Bazaar by José Andrés at the SLS at Beverly Hills (the hotel snuggles up against the border of L.A.’s ritziest community). Rather than just delivering a bottle and a bucket of

ice to big-ticket guests, enjoying the sbe tableside mixology experience is like a drink and a show all wrapped up in one.

“Everybody said it couldn’t be done,” continues Trumbull, “and when the executives challenged me with the idea of creating some way of bringing the ‘full mixology bar service’ to the tableside, after many prototypes of our mixology cart, we struck gold with a final version that is in use today at all our upscale nightlife venues.” Narrow, on wheels and the perfect cocktail-mixing height, the sbe drink carts are portable bars specially-designed for each venue, with drawers for every imaginable bar tool, and fresh ingredients on hand to complement premium quality spirits.

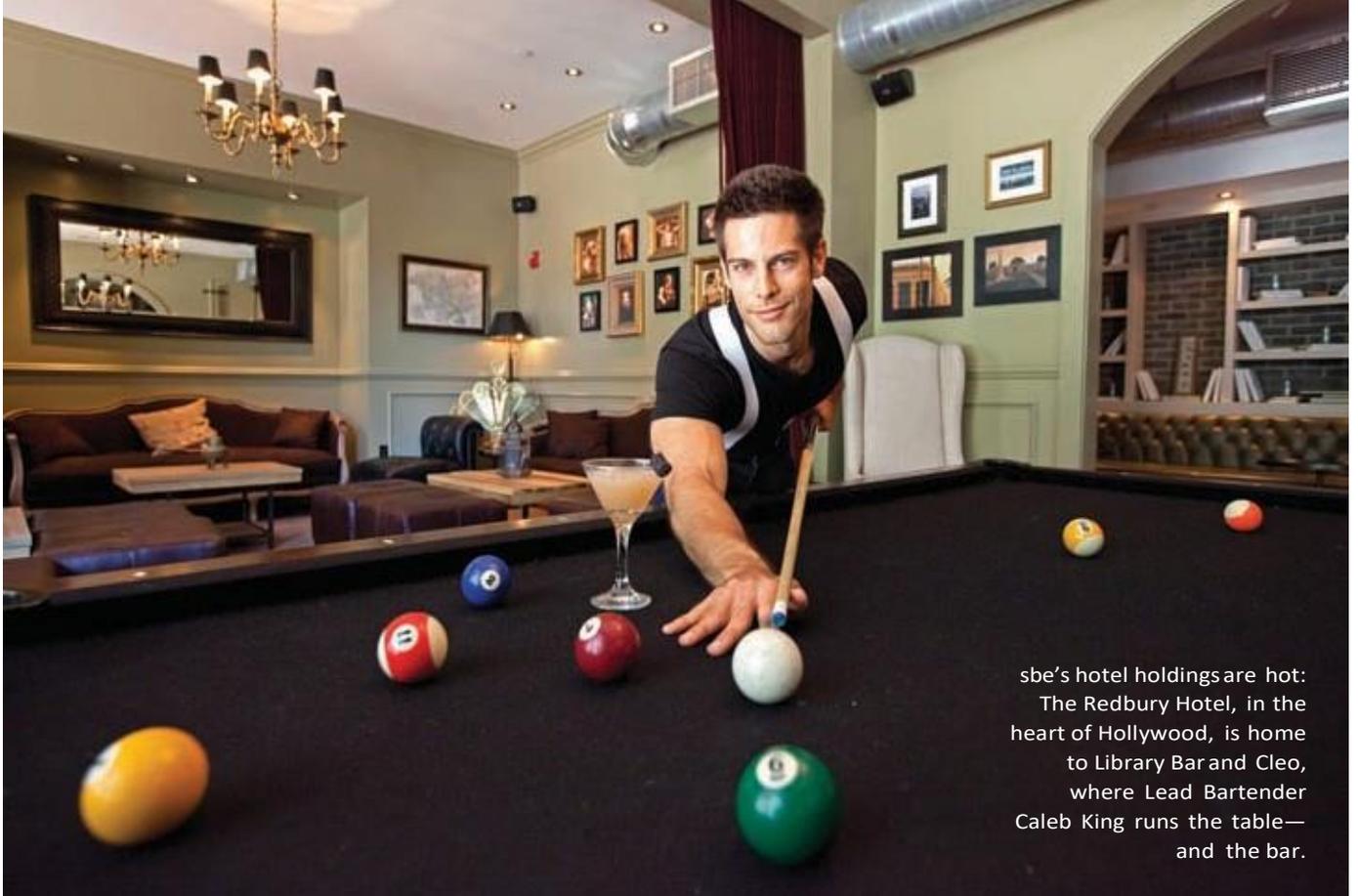
A Standard of Service

While individualized tableside attention has become a calling card of sbe service, getting a great cocktail at an sbe nightclub or restaurant is an equally focused affair. “There’s a tremendous amount of thought that goes into developing menus,” explains Costas Charalambous, SVP sbe Nightlife Group. “We take the spirit brand, the culture of the surrounding community, the food menu and the venue’s programming all into account when crafting the cocktail menus.”

Think of it like mixology Disneyland: Every last detail, down to the rail you sit on while waiting in line for Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, is just-so, precisely designed to evoke a certain feel. “It’s an orchestration of both creative and scientific elements,” continues Costas.

While sbe’s cocktail menus are alchemic and really just a small part of a specific venue’s big picture, the company’s intensive staff training is also among the industry’s best. “Stand, shake and serve at two o’clock,” muses Ryan McCallum, GM at Katsuya Hollywood. It’s a ritual we hear echoed over and over again at the other sbe accounts we visit, where a clear culture of jiggering and precise cocktail construction have established a level of consistency that’s difficult to find in a company this size.

“Since we have venues all over the country, we have to be precise and consistent so that each drink tastes



sbe's hotel holdings are hot: The Redbury Hotel, in the heart of Hollywood, is home to Library Bar and Cleo, where Lead Bartender Caleb King runs the table—and the bar.

exactly the same every time," says Charalambous, who relies on veteran staff to implement rigorous training company-wide. "The common thread is our culture and our team's commitment to achieving balance, consistency and excellence."

A Culture of Cool

There's no doubt that sbe's venues are cool and cater to a decidedly chic crowd, but their mixology staff isn't bad either. From guys like Mike Swan, Bar Supervisor at Sayer's Club, who was the second bartender hired by the

company and has seen the sbe brand develop its empire, to mixologists such as Caleb King, Lead Bartender at Cleo, who has also worked with other 'tenders in other sbe outlets, this is a mixing masterclass.

It's a collaborative family effort at sbe: "We're all working in each other's bars all the time," laughs Swan, who attributes the portfolio's continued success to Nazarian, whose vision and knack for branding was like nothing the industry vet had ever seen before. McCallum concurs, "Template-style bartending helps us keep it simple, and once a bartender is trained at one of our locations, they can work in any of our locations."

Over at the super-swanky SLS Hotel, where sbe has teamed up with famed Spanish chef José Andrés to put together the ultimate drinking and dining experience at Bar Centro in The Bazaar by José Andrés, Lead Bartender Rob Floyd is another industry veteran, but he's new to the sbe way of life.

"When sbe called, I jumped at the opportunity," says the talented barman, whose passion for pushing limits comes across clearly on the palate. "sbe is all about the personal human experiences, branded in a cocktail. They have an attention to intention—and it makes all the difference."



Beautiful Beluga

As always, sbe's finger is on the pulse of the industry, as evidenced by their partnership with Beluga Russian Noble Vodka, a high-end brand that's a perfect fit for sbe's tableside mixology and upper-tier cocktail programs.

"It's fantastic!" exclaims Rob Floyd, who practices liquid alchemy with Beluga Gold in the José Gimlet, served at The Bazaar by José Andrés (see sidebar). "It's such a great spirit to work with that this cocktail is really something special, a high-end take on a classic. It would only honor Dr. Gimlet!"

Like all products of great care and class, Beluga Gold comes with its own tradition: Each bottle is equipped with a specially-made wooden hammer, used to break the wax seal from the bottle, and a brush to clean it away.

Brewster's at Four Points by Sheraton LAX: Happy Flight

Bars at airport hotels rarely get palates excited, but with sbe's involvement at Brewster's at Four Points by Sheraton, mere moments from LAX, a couture cocktail is a dream come true for weary travelers. Explains Senior Director of Operations Boe Trumbull, "The unique surprise is that Four Points delivers the full spectrum of our unique beverage program."



Victor Hernandez.

This is put to action by bartender Victor Hernandez, who recounts his time spent training under Caleb King, and who says that the outlet's unique take on a Mojito has people clamoring for more, wherever they're from. "They like it because it's made with tequila, but it's not a Margarita. They always ask for another one!"

FOUR POINTS MOJITO

- 1½ oz. Corzo Silver Tequila
- ½ oz. Cointreau
- 3 oz. lemonade
- ½ oz. lime juice
- ½ oz. club soda
- ½ oz. simple syrup

Katsuya Hollywood: Sushi Chic

Among Los Angeles sushi aficionados, the name Katsuya has long been synonymous with fresh, innovative Japanese fare, and signature dishes like the baked crab roll, crispy rice with spicy tuna and spicy albacore sashimi with crispy onion have been winning over sushi snobs (this writer included) since the late 1990s. Back then, the restaurant was a tiny hole in the wall in a Studio City strip mall, and before long, it was one of the hottest tickets in town, with Hollywood types eagerly waiting for their spot at the sushi bar.

sbe, with its keen eye for adapting to success, partnered with the eponymous sushi maestro and design guru Philippe Starck, and now the five Katsuya by Starck locations across Southern California are a feast for the senses.

Of course, with an sbe makeover, a cocktail facelift was in the works, and now, visitors are greeted with exotic flavors that entice the palate, such as the yuzu in The Dragon cocktail. "These are all really strong flavors, and people are wowed," says GM Ryan McCallum.

THE DRAGON

- 1½ oz. Grey Goose Vodka
- ¾ oz. yuzu juice
- ¾ oz. simple syrup
- ½ oz. Perfect Purée Ginger
- Half superfine sugar rim



Ryan McCallum.

Bar Centro: Mixology Madness

Rob Floyd is somewhat of a mad scientist behind the stick at Bar Centro, inside The Bazaar by José Andrés, which is the hotpot eatery inside The SLS at Beverly Hills, sbe's first hotel outlet. There, he follows Chef José Andrés's molecular motivation, with ingredients such as liquid nitrogen taking center stage at the bar—and on the drink carts.



Rob Floyd.

"We're smashing the idea of what a cocktail is," explains the Lead Bartender, who was a chemistry major at Florida Southern University. "Most of the time, people walk in here, and hear 'liquid nitrogen' and 'atomized Johnnie Walker Black,' and they never thought they'd see these things in a cocktail. It's a phenomenal experience."

JOSÉ gimlet

- 2 oz. Beluga Gold Noble Russian Vodka
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- ½ oz. simple syrup
- Key lime peel
- Kaffir lime leaf

Sayer's Club: Super, Super Cool

If you don't know where Sayer's Club is, don't worry: You probably can't get in anyway. The super-exclusive club is more of a speakeasy than most that claim the name, with its hidden entrance through sbe's very own hot dog shop (Papaya King), and celebrities have been known to favor the haunt.

Inside, you're transported to a private concert venue, with a stage that lowers from the ceiling offering live music and sbe's signature drink carts making the rounds so you don't even have to get off that comfy couch for your cocktail.

"From a service standpoint, sbe is on a different level. You can go stay at our hotels, then eat at our restaurants, then go to our nightclubs—and it will all be perfect," explains Mike Swan, the hotspot's Bar Supervisor, who has been with the group since day one.

PineAPPLE SmASH

- 2 oz. Stoli Vodka
- 2 oz. fresh pineapple juice
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- ¾ oz. simple syrup
- 1/3 glass of muddled mint
- Dash of Angostura Bitters
- Dust with powdered sugar



Mike Swan.



Caleb King.

Library Bar: Teacher's (Cocktail) Pet

Library Bar, in the Redbury Hotel in Hollywood, is like your living room—but better. With its impeccable design, it's the kind of place you want to make notes about, borrow ideas from and revisit for further inspiration.

You'll want inspiration from the cocktail-making team here too. "We're a high-volume bar, but all of our drinks are labor intensive, and our cocktails are very well-balanced," explains Caleb King, Lead Bartender at Library Bar and sister restaurant Cleo, in the hotel's lobby. It's that attention to detail that keeps customers, tourists and locals coming back for more.

"The experience we offer is unbeatable," he continues. "Mixology at sbe is a show. When we're all shaking and popping together, in the same way, the guests love it."

mediterranean mArgArItA

- 1½ oz. Milagro Silver Tequila
- ¾ oz. fresh lime juice
- 1 oz. housemade fig-almond simple syrup
- Dried fig garnish ■■

