

CELEBRATIONS *of a* LIFETIME



If you have a landmark occasion or major life milestone to mark, there are plenty of unique venues in Las Vegas to ensure your festivities are not soon forgotten.

BY CINDI R. MACIOLEK

When it comes to throwing parties in Las Vegas, the sky is the limit – seriously. Because we live in the Entertainment Capital of the World the options are endless as well as the access. How would you celebrate a special event in your life? Here's your personal invite to a few private affairs that celebrated making it to the half-century mark.

As the premier wedding and event planner in Las Vegas, Tory L. Cooper has seen it all, but the city and its residents never fail to inspire her.

"The great thing about Las Vegas is that we're always renovating and reinventing event spaces, so even parties that are planned at hotel suites have new options every year," said Cooper. "There are so many diverse locations, including miX and Hard Rock Live, one of my favorite venues. It has a great outdoor balcony and a cool mix of memorabilia.

"One of the big trends I see now is renting private estates for parties. We did a silver and white party with a six-foot polar bear sculpture, snow machines, tablecloths trimmed in fake fur, a white baby grand and a 10-piece orchestra in white dinner jackets.

"Spa parties are always fun, with personalized embroidered robes and massages and mani-pedis. And, entertainment can be over the top, from The Beach Boys, Andrew Dice Clay and Frankie Moreno to the Chippendales and Thunder from Down Under."

Cooper plans birthday parties for all ages, from bar and bat mitzvahs to sweet 16 and landmark birthdays. Cooper helped plan two very special 50th birthday parties and her clients were kind enough to share their experiences, along with others who turned to India and the Caribbean for exotic ideas.

Orlando Mayes' surprise 50th birthday party was themed as the 50th "O" Awards complete with a red carpet, step-and-repeat, award statues flanking the entrance, and Walk of Fame cake. Photos by Julie Call, www.juliecall.com



Rhonda Mona's 50th birthday cake had a fashion theme.

A STAR WALKS AMONG US

"I've never been able to surprise my husband for anything -- birthdays, Christmas -- he always finds out what I plan," said Dr. Annette Mayes of her husband, Orlando. "We have a running joke in the family that he's a star because he was an extra in "Ocean's Eleven" and "Rush Hour 2," so I wanted to do something really special for his 50th birthday, playing off that theme.

"His birthday is in August, but I decided to hold his party in July to throw him off his game. Since I'm a physician, I told him we would be attending a medical research conference at Red Rock Resort. We'd have a room and he could join me for dinner. He bought into the whole ruse. A friend told

me about Tory and we started planning in earnest in May and she did such an amazing job! We decided to do the 50th "O" Awards, in honor of Orlando.

"They gave us a room that overlooked the valet. I was so worried he would recognize this stream of people checking into the hotel and he'd figure out what I had planned. Luckily, he didn't," revealed Dr. Mayes.

The party was held on the outdoor terrace at the convention center where Cooper had set up a red carpet with fake paparazzi, a step-and-repeat, a Joan Rivers impersonator to emcee the evening, large award statues flanking the entrance, a marquee and, of course, his adoring fans.

"We had appetizers on the terrace then moved inside for the remainder of the evening," explained Dr. Mayes. "Each table represented one of his favorite movies, with a centerpiece made of an old camera reel and photos of us with the name of a movie. Tory also created fake movie posters for the walls and the cake was in the shape of a star from the Hollywood Walk of Fame. We had an ice sculpture, a DJ, and our favor for the guests was a CD of Orlando's favorite songs with a cover photo of him winning an Oscar.

"But my favorite part of the evening was that we were able to pull it off. Even with all these people coming in from out of town, no one gave it away."

FIFTY SHADES OF PURPLE

Rhonda Mona had no idea what to expect for her 50th birthday, but her husband and best friend, Joan, planned a weekend to remember with Cooper's help. They rented one of the large suites atop the Palms, complete with a swimming pool, great view of the Strip and a round, rotating bed that Mona recalls as "a lot of fun."

"Kid Rock is my favorite person in the whole world, and I was told he was having a private party and inviting a few people," said Mona. "My husband and I were taken up in the elevator, and when the doors opened, there was a Kid Rock impersonator and fake paparazzi. There were so many people that

when they yelled, 'Surprise!' I didn't know what was going on!

"My husband flew in friends and family from all over the country, some people I hadn't seen in forever, and put them up at the Palms. There were about 150 people altogether, and it was a total surprise. It was themed after my house with lots of purple and leopard. My favorite flower is the purple tulip, so my husband flew in a shipment directly from Holland to decorate the suite. The arrangements were unbelievable," exclaimed Mona. "The invitations were also over the top -- leopard boxes with a baby photo of me inside atop the lyrics to my favorite song, "Brown Eyed Girl."

Since it was Mona's 50th, at 50 minutes after each hour a significant event took place: Zowie Bowie sang, a pianist the Monas knew from Chicago played, and guests gave speeches.

"The cake looked exactly like a shoebox I have with a pair of lips and a Louis Vuitton handbag. The ice sculptures resembled high heels for tequila shooters, and the bartenders were doing crazy things. I'm told, at midnight, they brought in Taco Bell, but I honestly don't remember.

"We made a whole weekend of the celebration. The next day we hung out at the pool in cabanas and went to Nove for dinner. The last day was a spa day to recoup!"

A TASTE OF BOLLYWOOD

Not everyone would think to plan a celebration inside a luxury store, but Ana Higgins did just that as a surprise for her husband, Kevin, for his 50th birthday.

"We'd eaten at the restaurant inside Neiman Marcus, both as Mariposa and now as Vintner Grill Strip, and I felt it would work well for the party I had in mind for Kevin," said Ana, who worked with Patrick Bryant, director of special events and catering for Vintner Grill, and used Destinations by Design for decor. "The space is intimate and the view of the Strip is beautiful, particularly at night.

WHEN THE SETTING HAS TO BE SINGULAR

Looking for a unique venue for your next special occasion? Here are a few to consider.

KRUG CHEF'S TABLE

The only one in the U.S., the Krug Chef's Table at Restaurant Guy Savoy in the Augustus Tower at Caesars Palace accommodates an intimate fine dining experience for two to six people. The perfect place for a marriage proposal, milestone birthday, anniversary or host of other special lifetime events, champagne, fine wine and a tasting menu featuring up to 13 courses presents the ultimate epicurean celebration while the latest technology helps you track your food preparation and interact with two esteemed culinary visionaries: Chef Guy Savoy and Olivier Krug. www.caesarspalace.com/restaurants/guy-savoy.html

◀ The Krug Room is a foodie's dream come true.



SPRINGS PRESERVE

Nature and eco-lovers are guaranteed to enjoy the Springs Preserve as a backdrop for their event. Indoors or out, for a large group or a small gathering, this environmentally-friendly sanctuary off the Strip is an ode to Mother Nature. Some specialty services include custom lighting and projections, a live animal visit accompanied by an expert handler, magicians, stilt walkers, face painters, and psychics. www.springspreserve.org

◀ The Springs Preserve offers an array of party services from Mariachi bands to magicians.



THE MOB MUSEUM

For a vintage Vegas-style party, Downtown's Mob Museum is the place. Milestone birthdays, vow renewals and anniversaries represent just some of the private events that have been held at the venue. The historic building is turn-key so you don't have to do much to make it fabulous. Food and drinks of the era, including Manhattans and Sidecars, round out the oft-repeated 1930's theme as do blood oath ceremonies, scavenger hunts, Great Gatsby attire, and a jazz band. www.themobmuseum.org

◀ Relive the 1930s with a party at Downtown's Mob Museum.



Ana Higgins surprised her husband with a 50th birthday party at Vintner Grill Strip.

"I love theme parties because people tend to lose their inhibitions a bit. This time I chose Bollywood as the theme. The traditional clothes were so beautiful and everyone dressed for the event. The colors were amazing! The women, in particular, were really into it," said Ana.

Party festivities included a henna tattoo artist, a photo station with a hookah, and belly dancers to complement the theme. The DJ played Bollywood music during the cocktail hour, then regular dance music.

"The belly dancer was amazing! She had a lot of one-on-one time with Kevin,"

said Ana. "We had a signature martini and Patrick did a fabulous job with the cake. It was really beautiful."

"I knew something was up because Ana threw a themed party for my 40th birthday as well, but I was a little lost as to the venue," said Kevin. "My brother took me out for drinks, and when we pulled into Fashion Show mall, I was confused at first. Then I remembered there was a facility on the corner. We took the elevator up and there were stanchions with my photo and a turban, so I knew we were in the right place!"

"I liked the fact that everyone got



Kevin Higgins' Bollywood themed cake

dressed up. It was small and intimate with family and friends I've known for years. Having everyone get into the theme was really fun. Everyone smiles when they talk about it. When you get my 79-year-old mom out there in a pink wig, you know they're having a good time!"

PARTY WITH A CHERRY ON TOP

If you think Cherry at Red Rock Resort is just a nightclub, you'd be wrong. It's now only available for private events, a venue that includes indoor and outdoor space with its own swimming pool as well

as equipment and acoustics remaining from its previous incarnation.

For a recent birthday celebration, the party was themed to reflect the atmosphere of a favorite vacation spot: Nikki Beach St. Barth. The décor included tepees, one used as a design element and backdrop for photos, the other as the entrance for the night's entertainment.

The over-the-top entertainment for 500 guests included a celebrity DJ, a fashion show on the acrylic runway over the pool featuring scantily clad Vegas models, silk ribbon ladies performing inside the club, and a spectacular cake parade featuring Grinder Girl, often seen on "Late Show with David Letterman." Multiple letter cakes, each accompanied by sparklers, spelled out the honoree's name.

"That party was definitely all about the entertainment," said Kasha Mackelprang, director of catering for Red Rock Resort. "Living in Vegas, there is nothing you can't have. If you can dream it, there's a way we can find to pull it off."

"Our parties are very personal," continued Mackelprang. "What will make the guest of honor happy? Those signature touches are what will keep people talking about their amazing experience long after the night has passed."

For another guest's surprise 39th birthday party, Red Rock's in-house pastry team created a six-foot-tall cake that incorporated elements of the birthday girl's favorite things: Louis Vuitton travel cases, a globe, a violin and a diamond ring. There was also a Christian Louboutin ice sculpture, complete with signature red sole, which served as the centerpiece for the evening's drinks.

"We draw inspiration from the media, including fashion shows and restaurant design. We like to delight and surprise with ideas that haven't been thought about before," said Mackcelprang. "We also pay attention to social media. An event is all about the feeling, creating an environment with memories that will last forever." □



PROJECT DINNER TABLE

Well-known for their large scale community fundraising dinners, Project Dinner Table is now expanding into private events. With a background in creating memorable experiences at places that range from Cashman Field to private orchards, the organization offers one-of-a-kind celebrations. In addition to the locally-sourced food (when possible) served family-style, entertainment can include live music, cigar rolling and scotch tasting. www.projectdinnertable.com

◀ Project Dinner Table now offers private events.
Photo by Nate Ludens



SUGAR FACTORY AMERICAN BRASSERIE

For the guest of honor with a sweet tooth, consider Sugar Factory at Paris Las Vegas. Open 24 hours, Sugar Factory American Brasserie is one of the few places in town where you can plan your party for any time of day. Birthdays for kids -- or the kid in you -- baby showers, and family reunions are welcome to celebrate with the eatery's legendary candy buffet, a live DJ, photo booths and nitrogen drink cart. Book a private interactive chef's pastry event with wine and sweets. Everything is customized for you and up to 200 of your closest friends. www.sugarfactory.com/las-vegas-paris-hotel

◀ A baby shower at Sugar Factory will bring out the kid in you.

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