

# MERCURY

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF LOS ANGELES ATHLETIC CLUB



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Dear Members,

In the century and a half that the Los Angeles Athletic Club has been a part of the city's landscape, Downtown has seen periods of massive change, ebbs and flows, evolutions reflected both in and outside the club. Regardless of era or external fluctuations, the function of the club has always been to offer relevant services, and to support members' needs in a modernizing world.

And as much as things have changed over the years, perhaps most interesting is how much has remained the same — how much of what was fundamentally significant to members in the club's heyday remain most consequential to them today. It's the cyclical nature of these core values that has made us recently rededicate our effort to upholding the original mission statement of the club: "LAAC is devoted to the lifelong pursuit of health-giving amusements."

Through stories curated for this issue of Mercury, we've taken the opportunity to examine closely the meaning of that statement in all its components. Consider the phrase "health-giving," for example. Of course, athletics come to mind — and to us, sports should be about physical health, camaraderie, and teamwork. But health-giving can mean so many things — it can be sports or working out, of course, but we believe a healthy lifestyle extends to socializing with friends, meeting fellow members, having a drink together, finding a home away from home (or office).

"Amusement" is another term with multiple meanings. Kids certainly find our programs at camp or in the pool amusing, but planning a wedding, sharing a meal with friends, or finding new fashion interests can all fall into that category.

Finally, we consider the implication of a "lifelong pursuit." This is no doubt an objective for each member individually, but also one for which we aim to provide a platform in perpetuity. Many families hold memberships through multiple generations, sharing major life moments at many different times of their lives, and contributing to what makes this place so special. We make every decision knowing those future generations will also rely on the club.

To us, the mission is just as relevant today as it was back in the late 19th century. Regardless of how those words are interpreted, we're committed to preserving and pushing forward, always finding ways to uphold and support exactly that.

— *The LAAC Editorial Team*



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VOLUME 106—ISSUE 1

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A wooden award featuring a silver figure of a man standing on a dark wooden base. The figure is highly detailed, showing muscles and wearing a tank top and shorts. The award is set against a background of industrial machinery, including a large gear and various metal parts, suggesting a workshop or factory setting.

Words by Gregory M. Fields  
Photography by Lauren DeFilippo

# Molder of Men

*Wooden Award Craftsman, John Billings*

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**"If there's anything you could point out where I was a little different, it was the fact that I never mentioned winning."**

*-John Wooden*

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**I**f it were possible to Google a location for “cognitive dissonance,” you would likely find hard court coaching legend John Wooden posthumously residing there. For a man who never talked about winning, Wooden won a ton. His UCLA teams dominated collegiate basketball to a degree unparalleled in modern college sports history. The numbers verge on absurd: ten national championships; seven of those back-to-back when no team has ever won more than two consecutively. From 1970–1974, Wooden’s roundballers won 88 straight games — a standing record that has never been remotely threatened. Even as a player for Purdue — where he also won a national championship — he took home All-American honors three seasons in a row. “First ever” and “only” are common qualifiers for Wooden’s professional achievements. That would include his induction in the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach.

But to Wooden, winning was the afterglow; the shortchange, Wikipedia summary of his achievement. Success was the substance, but did not always require victory. Winning for the sake of winning was a shallow, ultimately unsustainable pursuit, according to Wooden. As an end unto itself, winning makes compromises easier to justify. And Wooden was not one to tolerate compromise. To him, the scoreboard was a simplistic, one-dimensional metric of winning. Self-satisfaction,

character and doing one’s best were the true rewards of success.

Had the marmish Wooden stayed a high school teacher in Indiana, it is unlikely we would still be talking about him. Instead, he instilled his belief system in the minds of many remarkable young athletes. Though he certainly coached some spectacularly talented players at UCLA — Bill Walton and Kareem Abdul Jabaar come to mind — most of his players and many of his teams were not always exceptionally gifted. His teams often won championships without a single player over 6’5” tall. Yet Wooden inspired a desire for excellence and his teams responded with execution that bordered on superhuman.

But Wooden didn’t just inspire greatness in his players. He touched the lives of nearly everyone around him, including a 17-year-old recent high school graduate. But this young man did not play basketball. He was not a student. He worked in shipping and receiving at UCLA’s student union. His name was John Billings and John Wooden knew who he was. “He’d always say hello; but not just that. He was interested in my life,” Billings recalled. No one knew it at the time, but Billings would become the primary keeper of Wooden’s most important legacy. From that point forward, John Billings’ life would be forever entwined with the Wizard of Westwood.



## SOMETHING OF A DINOSAUR

“I’m something of a dinosaur,” Billings recently confessed over lunch in the dark paneled comfort of LAAC’s gastro pub, Invention. “I guess my title would be ‘Master Mold Maker.’” Now 70 years old, Billings is soft spoken; thoughtful. He pauses philosophically after a statement occasionally, as if he himself is surprised by the new insight that has just occurred to him. He is the quintessential artisan: a man of artistic sensibility shaped by manual skill. Not surprisingly, his idea of an art collection is unique. It involves metal figurines and plaques.

For 40 years, Billings has been designer and maker of some of America’s most prestigious awards. He redesigned and remolded the Grammy Awards — making

350 replicas for last year’s show alone. He restored Judy Garland’s damaged Grammy Award at the request of her family. But perhaps his proudest achievement and longest standing association with the Club is the Wooden Award: an intricate trophy representing the five disciplines of basketball and awarded to America’s finest collegiate player. Though the award ceremony is now off-site, the Wooden Award was originally handed out at the LAAC for many years. But even today, Billings hand finishes the trophy and personally transports it to the City of Angels from his workshop in Ridgway, Colorado — a one-signal town ensconced between the Cimarron and San Juan mountain chains. Instead of shipping it FedEx (“It would just get broken,” says Bilings), the Wooden Award rides shotgun with Billings in his truck nearly 1,000 miles to California.



## THE MEDICINE MAN OF MAN-TO-MAN

A native of Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley, Billings' lifelong association with John Wooden verges on mystical. Over the course of his life, he was drawn into coach's orbit repeatedly; almost randomly; as if their relationship was drafted by a screenwriter. "There's a part of (Wooden) in me," Billings muses. It may seem surprising that a legendary figure such as Wooden would interface with a shipping and receiving clerk at UCLA student union back while he was piling up basketball championships. But this was apparently a common theme with Wooden. "He didn't demand respect, he gave it to you first," Billings remembered. And that apparently applied to the guy helping to pack jerseys for Wooden's summer basketball camp.

What was it like being in Wooden's presence? "I wouldn't call Coach a religious man; but he was definitely very spiritual. Almost like a medicine Man," Billings recalled. Present for nine of Wooden's ten championship years, Billings remembers the championship coach's palpable intensity. "(Wooden) was never a threat, but you listened to what he said because you felt like at any moment he was going to haul off and pop you in the head," Billings chuckles. "But of course, he never did."







John Billings in his Ridgway, CO studio, June 19, 2017

## SPOT ON

Billings would eventually leave UCLA in search of a career. He was seeking more tactile work that would reward his artistic sensibility. The idea for his artisan calling was planted early on while growing up in the San Fernando Valley in a “pop-up” neighborhood thrown up virtually overnight for returning G.I.s. He vividly remembers visiting the neighbor who worked out of his garage making sports trophies for several local companies. Billings found himself “just hanging out” at the workshop, fascinated by the molds used to cast the trophies. “Everything was backwards; facial features; everything. I was fascinated by it,” recalls Billings. Years later he attended dental school and learned how to cast teeth. At night and while still working at UCLA, he’d cast jewelry. He even utilized his intensive attention to detail at the local laundromat as a licensed spot cleaner. “I could look at a stain and tell you what they were eating,” Billings laughs.

But things took an auspicious direction when he returned to the garage workshop of his youth many years later. That same trophy mold maker — Bob Graves — had cultivated a good living and plenty of work, but he’d been slowed by diabetes. He’d run himself on daily dialysis via a machine in his garage. Needing assistance, Billings started as an apprentice for a few hours a day. He’d help Graves with the more physically demanding facets of the job. He was sweating; crafting; learning.





## THE CHARACTER IN THE FLAW

Graves happened to be friends with Duke Llewellyn, the LAAC's Athletic Director at the time. In 1976, he and Wooden had come up with an idea for a sports award to be presented in his name. First, they photographed Wooden's players engaged in the five disciplines of basketball: passing, guarding, rebounding, dribbling and shooting. Then Graves created molds for the bronze player representations that would sit atop the trophy. The molds were multifaceted and complicated, requiring 11 separate pieces and meticulous detail. As his apprentice, Billings helped make the first awards from the molds Graves created — the same molds that are still used today for the annual Wooden Award.

Though it would seem to be rather routine, molding and finishing the molds for the eponymous award is fraught with challenges every single year. The finishing process alone takes a full month; and that's if a piece doesn't break or split. Only manual filing tools can be used. An electric dremel, "isn't precise enough," according to Billings. Every trophy is idiosyncratic and distinct. Perfection is not the goal; in fact, quite the opposite. Because the results of the molding process can be unpredictable, one of Billings' most important decisions every year is distinguishing between "flaw" and "character" in the casted figures. "Sometimes we have to decide between the two," comments Billings. If one were to guess, this master mold maker would probably veer in the direction of his lifelong mentor. Much like looking beyond winning to find success, Billings is often looking beyond the flaw to find character. And perhaps this is John Wooden's greatest legacy.



# The Heart of LAAC

*"Customers will never love a company  
until the employees love it first."*

~Simon Sinek

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**W**hile you may love the LAAC for a variety of reasons – superb athletic facilities, decadent food and signature cocktails, etc. – it is a love founded on the devotion of our staff. Working behind the scenes to help create the wonderment of the LAAC are some of the most loyal employees you will find anywhere. From kitchen to cleaning staff, these members of the LAAC family are vital to the Club's prosperity.

The LAAC employees featured here have dedicated a majority of their adult lives to the Club, including one with over 45 years of service. Each was asked: Why do you love the Los Angeles Athletic Club?



“I’ve been working here since 1971 and I love it here. I have worked many other jobs, but I plan on retiring here.”

FRANCISCO (FRANK) GARDEA

---

*First Cook*  
*hire date 4.31.1971*



“I’ve been working here since I was 21 years-old and this is the best place. Sometimes there are good days and bad days, mostly good ones, but you handle it.”

ESPERANZA URIBE

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*Housekeeper*  
*hire date 2.28.1977*





“I love everything – the people, everything. Every morning,  
every day, I’m always happy to be here.”

RAUL MARTINEZ

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*Kitchen Attendant  
hire date 6.20.2007*



“I have worked here for 24 years.  
I like painting and (the LAAC)  
has been good to me.”

JOSE JOVEL

---

*Painter*  
*hire date 2.3.1993*

“I started off as a painter and added  
more to become a handyman here. I like it  
because it’s never the same project.”

ARQUIMIDEZ HERNANDEZ

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*Painter*  
*hire date 1.15.2001*



“I like my schedule and my relationship with the members.  
I like that I am able to help them.”

PEDRO LUNA

---

*Cleaner*  
*hire date 8.28.1984*





**This page:** This featured piece of boxing legend Muhammad Ali was created by Art Mobb on Plexiglass and is owned by Ali's daughter, Laila. Art Mobb is a creative coalition of artists committed to serving the community with art and born out of a passion, respect, and admiration for sports athletes and celebrities that make a difference. Art Mobb's work is dedicated to providing hope and opportunity to others.



# Reviving a Golden Era

*One Punch Ended Collegiate Boxing's Heyday Decades Ago,  
but Ramon Espada Wants to Bring it Back*

**R**amon Espada took his first punches at four years-old, in Southside Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, when he left his grandfather's doorstep and was jumped by three kids from his block. He then ran back into the house, his eyes wet with tears. "Okay, that's not going to happen again," his grandfather told him. "Let me teach you how to throw some punches." Short and stocky, his grandfather had boxed as an amateur in Mexico and showed Espada how to shorten his punches — what Espada would call chop shots: quick, inside hooks. Wiry and strong, his uncle helped out, too; he had boxed in the Marine Corps and showed Espada how to dodge a barrage of blows, even at close range, just like he did. "They used to say, 'You couldn't hit that guy with a handful of rice,'" Espada says. It was the mid-1970s, and they would take him to a local gym run by a middleweight champion from the 1940s. He devoured boxing books. He collected VHS tapes of famous bouts. Whenever Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, Roberto Duran, Marvin Hagler and many boxing titans fought, Espada's family gathered around the living room television to watch. And in an area drowning in violence, then as now, the lessons he learned, which marked some of his first memories, hardened his fists, helped him survive and lit a fire deep within.

Around that same time Espada was learning to fight back, half a country away, boxing at the Los Angeles Athletic Club was in decline — a once unthinkable outcome considering how the sport formed The Club's backbone almost since its 1880 founding. De Witt Van Court, nationally recognized as the dean of boxing instructors, came to The Club in 1896 and by 1908, he managed Southern California's first officially sanctioned boxing tournament, which featured winners from The Club in all eight divisions. "Club Nights" were championed

on The Mercury's cover, and hundreds donned formal wear and imbibed while notable up-and-comers and occasionally professionals traded blows beneath a cloud of cigar and cigarette smoke billowing in the sixth-floor atrium. Amateur boxing suffered by 1915, in part because of rumors of scandal and the death of a heavyweight in a California ring, and by 1917, only eight boxers were listed on The Club's rolls. Amateur boxing enjoyed a resurgence in the years to come but it was short-lived, for the ripple effects sent forth from a chilly midwestern night in 1960 would forever change American boxing.

On April 9 in Madison, Wisc., the site of the NCAA Championships, University of Wisconsin middleweight Charlie Mohr faced San Jose State's Stu Bartell. The Badgers, college boxing's powerhouse, sought their ninth national title under famed coach John Walsh, and it all came down to Mohr, a New York native who went undefeated in 1959 as a junior in the 165-pound weight class. But in the second round, Bartell landed a mighty haymaker to the left side of Mohr's forehead, shearing a blood vessel in Mohr's brain. He died a little more than a week later, on Easter Sunday, and within a year, the NCAA ended sanctioned boxing. College boxing had swelled after World War I, when many soldiers returned home after sparring on overseas bases; it took hold at Ivy League schools in the East and spread nationally, threatening college football in popularity. But, as is eternally true in boxing, one punch changed everything.

So even while Ali, Foreman, Liston and Company starred and "Rocky" dominated the 1976 box office, boxing's cache at The Club wasn't the same. "The club had progressed," says Sam Lagana, formerly The Club's former Sports Marketing Director who ran the boxing event for a decade starting in the mid-1990s. Its speed bags and heavy bags were still worked over, but other



#### RIVALRY IN THE RING

Friday 12.04.2015

Ramon Espada (top right)

Avram Winston (USC fighter)

sports passed boxing's popularity, such as gymnastics, fencing, squash and especially handball. Espada wouldn't see this dynamic until after moving to Los Angeles in 2002 in an effort to raise his two sons outside Chicago's violence. He initially worked in the aerospace industry in Pasadena — and played a part in the Mars Rover project — but his love of boxing remained. As a teenager, his parents had asked him to quit because they thought boxing kept him in trouble, but he'd always sneak off to the gym for sparring sessions. He boxed briefly in the Air Force, and, after leaving, trained with his mentor George Hernandez. Before long, Espada had learned enough that he could teach others, and by the late 1990s, he started coaching at local gyms, first in Chicago, then LA. "I knew LA was a hotbed for boxing," he says. While coaching at LA Boxing, he found that many of his students hailed from USC and UCLA, which didn't have boxing clubs. Soon, he helped found the USC boxing club in 2007-08, then the UCLA boxing club a year later. Those steps forward were in line with one of Espada's ultimate dreams — to return collegiate boxing to its prominence of yesteryear. "It's gotten a bad wrap because of some of the characters involved," Espada says. "But I think it's an intelligent person's sport at the core and I would like to see it put back on the proper platform."

For someone as grounded in boxing history, Espada

didn't know about The Club's deep ties until he was connected around 2010 to help with Fight Night — or what would eventually become "Rivals in the Ring," which is entering its eighth year and will be held November 17th. Espada hopes to reel in fighters from UW, Cal, UNLV, Oregon State, UC-Davis, Utah, the University of San Francisco, Santa Clara, UCLA and USC for this year's event and, as West Region chairperson of the National Collegiate Boxing Association, help more college club teams pop up around the country. "To me, collegiate boxing is a well-kept secret," he says. But he'd like for that secret to get out, one day.

For now, Espada, 46, trains fighters seven days a week at a friend's gym in Tarzana and at the PED Building on USC's campus, where he remains the boxing club coach and works with 40 to 50 fighters after starting with just three; the UCLA club, meanwhile, started with five and is up to 50 to 60. He still teaches the chop shots that his grandfather taught him, and the defensive techniques that his uncle passed down. "Some of that stuff is a lost art," he says. "I see a lot of boxers get through their careers and they don't have a full arsenal." But he's keeping the past alive, which makes his partnership with The Club all the more poetic. "I want to be able to walk away from this thing," Espada says, "and have it continue to grow for generations to come."



#### *From the Archives*

Mercury cover, Volume 15, January 26, 1927.

Boxing was introduced at the LAAC in 1880 without fanfare but later became a backbone of the LAAC and most athletic clubs.

Words by Stef Ferrari  
Photography by Allen Daniel



**Martin Family: Daniel** (left), **John & Denise** (center), **Nick** (right)  
Daniel is wearing the same blazer his father wore at the club years ago as child.





# All in The Family

*Multi-Generational Members Have Unique Glimpse into Club Life and Legacy*

**T**he halls of the Los Angeles Athletic Club can sometimes have the reverent feeling of a hallowed institution — a library or monument — an establishment that has no doubt seen and been integral to a great many memorable moments. It has the collective gravitas of all the members who have crossed its threshold throughout its more-than-a-century in existence, making it easy to imagine some of its most famous members strolling the very same corridors — to picture Walt Disney or Frank Baum stopping for a drink, or to socialize with members of their day.

But while some histories may not be quite as well-documented, they still exist clearly within the minds of many who still walk the halls today. Of nearly 4000 current members, almost 1000 have family members within the club, and many are multi-generational. For those members, it's personal history that they reflect upon — they may even recall fond childhood memories formed within the walls at 7th and Olive, thanks to their parents or grandparents who were members before them.

For John Martin, who is one such member, what comes to mind first are grand visions of the dinners he attended as a kid, accompanying his father in the early days of his membership, shortly after the family moved to California from Chicago in 1960. "I was always eyes agape at the mounds of shrimp or whatever was available at the club dinners," he recalls of those first experiences. "It was just fantastic for me as a little boy to walk through there and see the meat carvers and the bounty, and then to sit at such an elegant dining room. It was a really special treat."

For others, the pictures that linger are of early athletic pursuits. "Ever since I was about seven or eight years old, my dad would bring me and my brother along on the weekends. We

used to play basketball, or it was a swim day," says Saro Tuna, who — along with his brother, Avedis — is now a second generation member. "I remember after we'd go swimming, we'd go down and watch TV. I can still remember my dad would wrap a towel around us, and bring us a Gatorade while we'd watch sports. It was such a great time."

Since those early days of their lives, the club has continued to perform many functions for families like the Martins and the Tunas. From athletic endeavors and mealtime reprieves, to a place in which special occasions (both Martin's children have enjoyed birthday parties on-site) or business meetings have been held, the LAAC has become a second home, an office extension, or simply a gathering spot for many multi-member families.

Today, both Martin and his wife Denise Meyer (who is also a member) are Administrative Law Judges for the State of California, and as such, now utilize the club in more professional capacities than those first days having dinner with his dad. It even provided a physical intersection for his professional and personal life early in his career. "When I got a job in private practice in 1989, the law firm I was with had a habit of regularly going out to lunch at the club at least once a week," Martin recalls. "When I became a partner in the firm in 1991, part of becoming a partner was that they paid for my initial membership to the club. That's when I first fully joined myself, which is now 26 years ago. We would eat once a week at Duke's. It was very pleasant; everybody knew your name."

Tuna still finds himself utilizing the club for fitness purposes. "I've been playing a lot more racquetball," he says. "And I do boot camp with Nacho (Ignacio Macias), one of the trainers I've known for a really long time now."

And beyond the professional and athletic, members recognize social value in their visits. Tuna continues, "My wife signed up about two years ago; she'll bring her friends to have dinner on the 3rd floor and socialize. My brother and I, we're here pretty often now socializing. I've met so many people just by being on the 3rd floor after working out, or meeting up with people there."

Martin has extended The Club's hospitality to others in his life as well. "We've brought my grandmother or my in-laws. Annually, I'd host an alumni get together for fraternity brothers of mine. We've had retirement dinners here for people that I work with," he says. "It's been a real integral part of our lives for many years."

Those who attend the club are quick to recognize, though, that perhaps what makes the environment most special — and its significance so enduring — are the people who operate it every day. From the top of the organization, where management has been handed down through five generations of Hathaways, through employees in all departments — many of whom have tenures that span decades — members who have grown up with the club regard those people as an indispensable part of the experience. And they're quick to count them as extended family members.

"A lot of the workers, they've known me from such a young age," Tuna reflects. "Whenever I come in the mornings, I'll see Gary (Tolley) and have a chat with him. He's known me for a while, and it's a really nice feeling." Of Marco (Ramirez), who has shined shoes at his post for nearly 34 years, he continues, "He is like an uncle to me — he's one of the people that got me so attached to the club. Whenever my parents were out of town he would always invite me over to his house to have dinner. It's truly been something special to me."



Brothers and LAAC members, **Avedis & Saro Tuna**

"I have lots of memories of the people, and still see some of the old timers there," Martin expresses a similarly fond nostalgia for club employees. "There are still people like Marco and Jorge (Guevara), so it feels like a home away from home."

Today, the place remains a major part of their lives — as well as those of their own families. "I try to get down at least twice a week. My wife comes two to three times per week at lunch, if not more, to work out or do yoga," Martin says. And there is already evidence of a third generation in the making. "Occasionally my boys — especially my 11 year old — will ask to come and play racquetball on the weekends."

Watching such young members make their way through Juniors

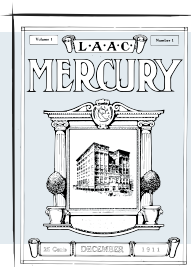
programs or join their moms and dads for a meal these days, it's not hard to imagine they're daydreaming about the days when they'll be grown up enough to order for themselves and maybe fill their dad's shoes — freshly shined by Mr. Marco, of course.

Martin acknowledges that potential for posterity. "I know my children now feel like they'd like to continue the legacy, and should they be so fortunate as to remain in LA and be in a position to do so, they'd love to be members themselves and if they have children, bring them up there, too. We'll go for a fourth generation if we can," he laughs. "I can't imagine it not being a part of my life."

Tuna shares the sentiment. "I

definitely want my kids to experience everything that the club has to offer. Everyone at the club is so good-hearted. It'd be great to have my kids growing up with the same people."

Many of the best things in life are passed down through generations; family heirlooms, key pieces of advice and wisdom, the genes for thick hair and height. But for many members throughout the history of the Los Angeles Athletic Club, what has also been handed down over time is a love of the club itself. And whether through childhood memories or weekly yoga classes, their connection and contribution to the club's past, present and future is a privilege appreciated by both club and member alike.

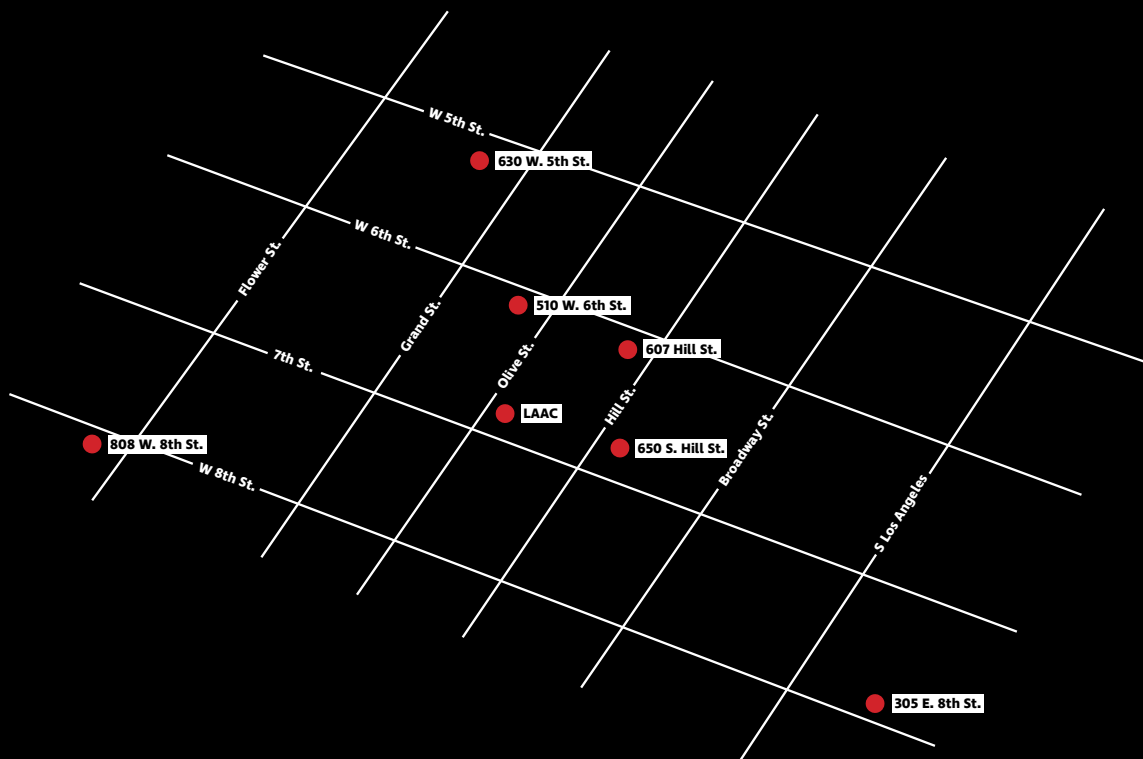


### *From the Archives*

Debut Mercury cover, Volume 1, December 1911.

25,000 people attended the opening reception of the LAAC's current clubhouse during a three-day celebration from June 13-15, 1912.

Words by Stef Ferrari  
Photography by Antonio Diaz



# DTLA's Hidden Places

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**D**owntown Los Angeles has all the usual bustle of a big city. It has all the hallmarks of a major metropolis that makes it easy to get excited about big name or popular places, or to find a few regular haunts and rarely venture beyond them. But for as much as it has to offer in the way of hot spots and acclaimed cultural destinations, it may be even more rewarding for those looking to enjoy something a little less commonly visited.

“Off the beaten path” is a phrase that can become clichè for travelers, and the standard fare comes to mind — a local favorite taco truck or some hole-in-the-wall bar — but Los Angeles' downtown area has far quirkier hidden treasures. Sometimes they're hard to find, and others are hardly concealed at all, but somehow stay beneath the radar of the rat race and regular press rounds. In a city that has long been associated with a single industry, the diversity of Downtown demonstrates that there truly is something for everyone — if you're willing to take a closer look



## *Gerard Leon Jewelry*

607 Hill St #422, Los Angeles, CA 90014

If it feels as if the jewelers here have been doing this forever, well, that's because it's almost true. At least, they've been honing their craft and passing down knowledge, technique and expertise for six generations. Theirs is a family trade, and one they take quite seriously. If you have the pleasure of meeting this LAAC member, and if Gerard can spare a few moments, his stories are as precious as the pieces of jewelry he painstakingly hand-engraves —and each piece has a personality and purpose.

It's a lineage with an appreciation for jewelry as an art form, and it shows in the pieces they offer the city's shoppers. Personally, I had a hard time taking my eyes off the glittering sterling silver and gold pendants carved with mesmerizing precision by hand.

The idea at this little shop is to merge tradition with modern style and technique, at the intersection of which is a familial passion. It's a place with rich history, a clear eye for astonishing detail, and a focus on serving people as well.

## *Saint Vincent Deli*

650 S Hill St # S2, Los Angeles, CA 90014

From the outside, this eatery appears as if it could be found on a movie set or somewhere in Disneyland. The quaint facade is a forced perspective that resembles a small alpine house stuck in time, but its sign lets visitors know it has actually been here in Los Angeles since 1986. That's when its proprietors Jerry, a LAAC member, and his family first opened their doors to a community that, Jerry says at the time, was sorely underserved when it came to quality lunch.

Today, healthy portions served on styrofoam plates are influenced by the family's Turkish and Armenian heritages, but the warm, familiar service make patrons feel right at home regardless of background. Items like gyros and kebabs are available for combos that'll run you about \$8, and sandwiches and sides like fresh hummus or dolmas (stuffed grape leaves) are also on offer. For those just looking for a little afternoon break, the Turkish tea service is a spectacle of tradition, arriving on a brass tray, and pairs perfectly with the dessert for which they've become famous — the St. Vincent's ashta, a traditional Arabic dessert of custardy clotted cream on toasted bread soaked in simple syrup and dusted with crushed pistachio. It is astonishingly delicious and simple.

And beyond St. Vincent's Deli' traditional offerings and family-run vibe, all of which makes it feel especially authentic, its integration of city-specific staples into its menu — like kebab tacos — and welcoming spirit makes it feel authentically, essentially Los Angeles.



## The Library Store

630 W 5th St, Los Angeles, CA 90071  
( this is the gift shop inside the library )

A quirky collection of gifts and knick knacks awaits guests exiting the Los Angeles Public Library. From the functional — candles, greeting cards, notebooks and pens — to the head-scratchingly delightful — like campfire-ready aluminum martini glasses —the store has something for just about everyone.

Of course, traditional books are on offer, as well as a selection of marked down titles from the library. A children's section includes a diverse selection of titles classic and contemporary — my personal favorite title being a New York Times Bestseller called *Dragons Love Tacos* — as well as colorfully painted wooden toys and finger puppets. California visitors will find souvenirs from greeting cards to maps of Los Angeles and even earrings inspired by the California bear.



## Roy Hopp & Company

510 W 6th St., Los Angeles, CA 90014

This locksmith has been around since 1947, and seems as if it might require a treasure map to unlock its location. Into the office building, past the front desk and down into the basement of 510 West 6th Street, those in need of key-related services will find the tiny shop. The entrance — a striking red door with a large keyhole that serves as a window inside — gives the impression that a detective or perhaps a private eye resides within, though the services offered are far more practical.

Customers will feel as if they've stepped into another realm — or at least into another era in which tradesmen took a special pride, and an occupation like locksmith could be ascribed levels like "Master." Customers rave about the fair prices and the expertise in all things lock and key, as well as the fast, friendly service, and attention to detail.



## *Athletic Club Flower Shop*

808 W 8th St, Los Angeles, CA 90017

There is hardly an occasion in which flowers aren't an appreciated offering — whether it's an actual holiday, birthday or anniversary, or when paying a visit to an old friend or the home of a dinner party host. In a city surrounded by beautiful blooms, this stop amidst the downtown hustle slows down to appreciate the natural gifts of the area.

Beautiful bouquets and a bounty of multi-hued horticultural prizes are peddled here, conveniently located and easily organized. Exquisite floral designs for any occasion emphasize the art that is w and the city that it serves.



## *No Ghost Bears Coffee*

305 E 8th St #3, Los Angeles, CA 90014

Perhaps more of a coffee nook than a full-fledged shop, this purveyor can be found between the Fashion and Flower Districts downtown. What it lacks in space it more than makes up for in flavor — both in each cup and on its walls. Serving beans sourced from its sister company (small-batch Los Angeles roaster Suits & Knives), drinks are meticulously prepared on a La Marzocco espresso machine wrapped in Star Wars storm trooper decals — which purrs to life when I order my macchiato.

There's clear passion in the coffee craft between the two brothers who operate the place, and they're passionate collectors of nostalgia as well. Vintage tchotchkes — an old cassette player and collection of tapes with artists ranging from George Jones to Depeche Mode, a typewriter, a sewing machine — create a timeless, eclectic atmosphere hospitable to the city's hipsters and business hustlers alike. It's a hip hangout, an ideal place to hide away, have a cold brew or a cappuccino, and hang at a table outside to people-watch — if you can find it.





## *The Shoe Shine Man*

**Men's Locker Room, 5th floor**

It may seem an anachronistic idea to some — a stodgy service of a bygone era — but the importance of a proper shoe shine cannot be overstated when it comes to completing a man's look. And no one keeps the practice as stylish as Marco, a shoe shine expert and self-proclaimed "shoe-ologist." Fortunately for club members, Marco has been honing his technique for more than three decades — all of which have been spent at LAAC.

Marco is as passionate about the the club as he is his craft — a set of offerings which also includes shoe repair and restoration, cleaning and deodorizing. But if they are interested, members will find something more from interacting with Marco — rich stories and memories from the club's history, insights and information about the world surrounding it. After all, he's had the pleasure of watching multiple generations pass through during his nearly 34 years with the club — and it's a shinier place because of him.

# Kids Club

## *Juniors Programs of the Past & Present, and for Their Futures*

**I**n the early part of the 20th century, some of the fiercest figures in the sporting world — boxers and fencers among them, wielding foils and donning laced-up leather gloves — were scarcely five feet tall. It seems a far cry from the kinds of antics we let our little ones get up to these days, during a time when we more readily associate baseball, basketball, swimming or cycling with kids and tykes — but it wasn't so strange in those days to see children's programs for even such contact and confrontational sports. They were a fearsome set, and, in fact, some of these pint-sized prize fighters were even based right here — practicing under the tutelage of the Los Angeles Athletic Club's Juniors Programs. A browse through archival issues of the Mercury magazine show these child champs taking it all quite seriously, duking it out with opponents of similar size.

The selection of sports and activities may have changed over the years, evolving and adapting to shifting favor, but youth participation has become a major part of American culture in the century since. And while many of us may remember being a part of a team or a participant in a fitness program as a recreational, purely joyful experience, the world of youth sports has long been developed with an eye on the practical aspects as well.

During that early half of the 1900s, sports in America were often seen as an extension of religion — a way to nurture and fortify the body, which was believed to function primarily as housing for the soul. This was the original intention of institutions like the YMCA, and later the Boys and Girls Clubs and Boy and Girl Scouts, which also went on to offer their own versions of organized sports for their







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On Saturdays, activities at the Club were geared toward juniors. DeWitt Van Court, and assistant coach Clayton Frye taught the fundamentals to such eager amateur boxers as Cyril Chappellet, left, and Luther Pierce Fitch.

members. And beyond spiritual purposes, there were patriotic reasons to join in as well. During times and in places of heavy immigration, sports were considered activities transcendent of language and custom, and a way for newcomers to the U.S. or children of immigrants to learn American ways and become acculturated. There were no borders on the court, field, or in the ring, and participation helped develop a source of nationalist pride (or regional pride — go, Dodgers!). There are even cases that contend participation performs a greater collective societal function. According to a study conducted by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports in 1997, they were useful for "...social development, because many of the social and moral requirements for participation in sports are parallels to how individual must function in law-abiding society."

As time went on, particularly in major cities — organized sports began to be viewed as a preferred method of congregation, keeping kids off the streets and out of trouble. Community centers and churches often operated gymnasiums and offered a platform for practices and games. They saw the opportunity for enrichment and education outside the classroom.

Of course, social significance aside, the physical benefits of children's involvement in sports have always been appreciated. At LAAC, those benefits were also observed; an early edition of the Mercury mentions that Juniors Programs, "give everyone the opportunity to improve their physical fitness and to increase their athletic skills." When I was a kid, it was about keeping us busy, making sure we maintained a certain level of activity — and was a way for my mom to get us all out of the house. But she also wanted to make sure we were avoiding sedentarism as well. Instilling the importance of movement and exercise at a young age is hard to overstate, as it hopefully provides the foundation for a healthy lifestyle as an adult.

And youth participation in sports offers so much more; we have seen evidence of that in more recent years. Today, strong evidence exists that social skills, self-esteem, focus — even academic success — can be considered results of participation. Being a part of a program encourages kids to become goal-oriented and organized. It teaches them perseverance, discipline, teamwork — not to mention

opportunities for mentorships and appreciation for authority to develop. Of course, as adults we know how strongly each of these skills easily translates to the real world, and prove relevant to future goals.

And while times have changed a bit, sports still offer our little ones so much. Today, the Juniors Programs at LAAC have been adapted to modern interests, but continue to support so many of these functions. Swimming is largely recognized for its ability to help kids develop coordination, not to mention it is an arguably invaluable skill for safety reasons. Swim lessons are available starting as young as six months, at which point parents and children spend sessions getting comfortable in the pool, helping the littlest ones acclimate to and gain confidence in the water, which sets a foundation for future interests — in the pool and out. The Junior Aquatics program then ranges through beginner's lessons on proper positioning and technique, all the way to more intermediate options, preparing them for perhaps more focused pursuits.

Additionally, the Club's annual summer camp offers two week sessions that include swim lessons and basketball, as well as arts and crafts, friendship circle, music and story times, and even quiet time. The day camp format gives kids an opportunity to be independent, realize artistic skills, and to detach from the technology that dominates so much of their daily lives. During the day camp format, they can connect with nature and develop an appreciation for adventure, learn to communicate with one another and make friends — possibly even with fellow future members. According to a study in *Psychology Today*, summer camp can help kids become "more resilient to life stress," by providing a platform to learn creative problem solving and how to approach challenges in an independent but guided setting as well. All while giving their parents the peace of mind of knowing their little ones are being well taken care of.

Regardless of motivation or era, and despite which activities are most popular in the moment, there's no question that there are innumerable reasons to encourage child participation in sports and fitness. And while they may not want to challenge their Juniors to a duel anytime soon, through the available programs and camps, future members can be sure The Club is always in their corner.



### *From the Archives*

Mercury Cover, Volume 4, December 15, 1915.

In the Club's earliest days, family festivities often ended with a shower of balloons for the children.



Interview by Sarah Dubbeldam  
Photography by Angel Rogersw

# Married to My Passion

*A Discussion with LAAC Member Candice Cuoco*

**F**rom FIDM to Project Runway, to her designs now cloaking the likes of Letoya Luckett and other A-list celebrities, Candice Cuoco is a true fashion entrepreneur with a spunky spirit and an inspiring psychological process behind her work. As a fellow female business owner, I so enjoyed the ups and downs of her story and her perspective on “making it,” creativity and true success.

**It seems there is always an “aha” moment that makes someone pursue a career. What was that for you?**

I guess to understand the path I’m on now, you have to know where I began. I moved out at 14. I had my daughter young, pregnant and gave birth at 17. I was really reckless before I had her, but she saved me in a way.

I went to college to become a nurse but quickly learned it wasn’t for me. I had a few odd and end jobs — I worked at Home Depot for two years, was an Assistant Manager at Ross, but I was miserable. I was depressed all the time and felt like I had tried it all but also failed at it all too. I remember my sister told me, “Why don’t you go to school to make (stuff)?” But where I come from, that’s not a possibility or a job — it’s just a dream. I figured if I had spent this long miserable in reality, let’s try the dream world for a while. I looked up the Academy of Art solely based on the fact that Alexander McQueen would come handpick his interns from

the graduating class and I knew in my soul I would one day be one of them. I applied there and got in. Two months into my semester I discovered McQueen had committed suicide. There was no reason for me to stay at that point so I left. I started designing again, but I didn’t really have the know-how to construct anything, I realized I needed to educate myself at a quick pace because anything that doesn’t move extremely fast bores me, so I enrolled in FIDM.

**How did you get on Project Runway?**

Project Runway actually reached out to me — at first I thought it was a joke! I told my daughter that I probably wasn’t going to do it. But, my daughter — who was nine at the time — got up on her tippy toes and put her finger in my face. She explained to me that if I didn’t do the show, she would be very disappointed in me. That was the final word; my little girl sealed the deal. The deadline for the application was at midnight, and here I was at 11:56 p.m. — I was sweaty



and sewing in my mom's hallway, doing my at-home video they require you to do. I looked crazy — that's probably why they picked me. It almost looked like an S.O.S. video. The show called me the next day and the rest is history.

**What emotions did you feel when your line debuted at New York Fashion Week?**

One of the biggest feelings or emotions that I had in the end with Project Runway and showing at Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, was not showing the collection that I intended. It was the only time I ever let anyone break me down or get in my head. My decision to take almost every show-stopping piece from my collection out was based on the fact that I had so much respect for the judges. That's what they wanted me to do. Strip it down. To them my collection was, "Too much." So, I went back to the workroom and strip down the entire collection. There is a hard lesson that I learned: You may have a lot of respect for someone, and they may be experts, but not everyone is an expert on who YOU are and what you represent — no matter who they are. You have to think for yourself, your brand and NEVER EVER let anyone make you feel like you are too much or not enough.

**There is a lot of diversity in your designs including mixing black with floral — what are your psychological motivations behind your designing?**

I grew a lot from Project Runway, before, I was still finding myself as a creative. Everyone saw me as this dark, edgy designer. True, I'm dark and there's edge to me, but there's still this romantic, feminine side. I love a good strong floral. We're women and we're emotional. You can still be dark and edgy and not lose that feminine side. I'm a sucker for romance, so there's always this deep sorrow to it. It's my way of healing myself some way.

**I read that you want women to live confidently, fearlessly, and defiantly. How does this play into your work?**

I think it's about coming out the dark and going into the light, but still being okay with the fact that I love the dark, at least for me. We all have so many stories of going through something dark and everyone wants you to shun it and hide it and not tell anyone but there's something so beautiful about coming out of it and blooming — maybe that's why I love flowers so much. The process is emotional for me. It's like constantly asking yourself to cut open a wound, dissect it and creatively find a way to heal with it and from it. I heal my way through life through my designs and through the triumph of other women and THEIR stories.



**What do you feel led to your success? What advice would you give to someone who wants to start something?**

Well, I don't feel like I've made it, and I don't feel like the squiggly line has stopped for me. I feel like my line goes in such a circle — like a black hole. Honestly, I was so bitter about my childhood growing up, and I never wanted to give it any credit to who I am now. But I would say that I know how to go without because of it. I'm okay being hungry for a while or not having what everyone else has. And not being on top — I'm okay at the bottom. So, once you get comfortable with that, you only go up from there. I think, chase something that gives back to you not something that can be taken from you. Where everyone always says, "You need to go out and live your life while you're young." It's like, when you see my garment at a Nicki Minaj or Ariana Grande concert and you see one of them wearing my leather corsets or massive beaded leather gowns, that's me going out with you. That's me living.

**Where are you headed and where can people find your designs?**

Recently I've started a line with Vanessa Simmons called BAD BUTTERFLY. We launched in March 2017 and are raising the company from the ground up. I've also started a shoe line, LilyJamesLA, with Toni Ko, founder of NYX cosmetics. We plan to launch LilyJames in February 2018 at AGENDA. As far as my couture line, CANDICE CUOCO, it just keeps growing and blooming. A year and a half ago, I said I wouldn't have a store for at least ten years and now I have a store and headquarters. It's in Downtown LA, the heart of the fashion district. Now I think a few stores in a few key locations would be great. What I eventually want to do is become creative director for a major fashion house other than my own. I want to collaborate with influencers, focus on collaborations with women because they bring a different vibe and energy to your brand it helps breathe new life into it. I always say, "WOMEN RUN THIS HOUSE." I don't see that changing!

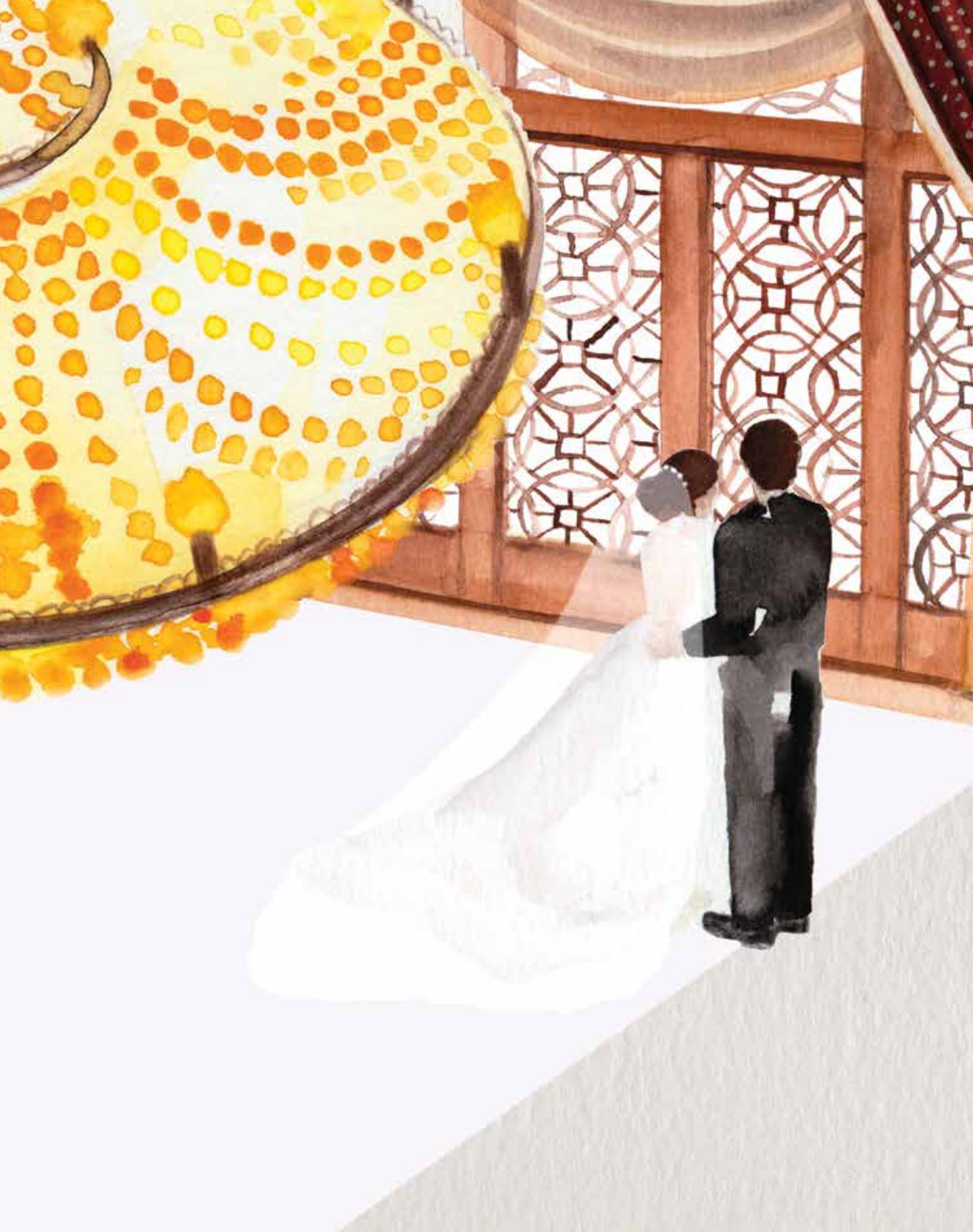
But, end result, where I see myself going is having my label and then having multi-labels underneath me. The sky's the limit and even then I won't stop. I am married to my passion and I don't believe in divorce.



*From the Archives*

Mercury Cover, Volume 37, November 1949.

The Mercury began devoting more space to women's fashion and social news in the 1930s as every attempt was made to adapt the social program to the wishes of the members.



Words by Stef Ferrari  
Illustration by Martine Loubser  
Photography by Fitz Carlile

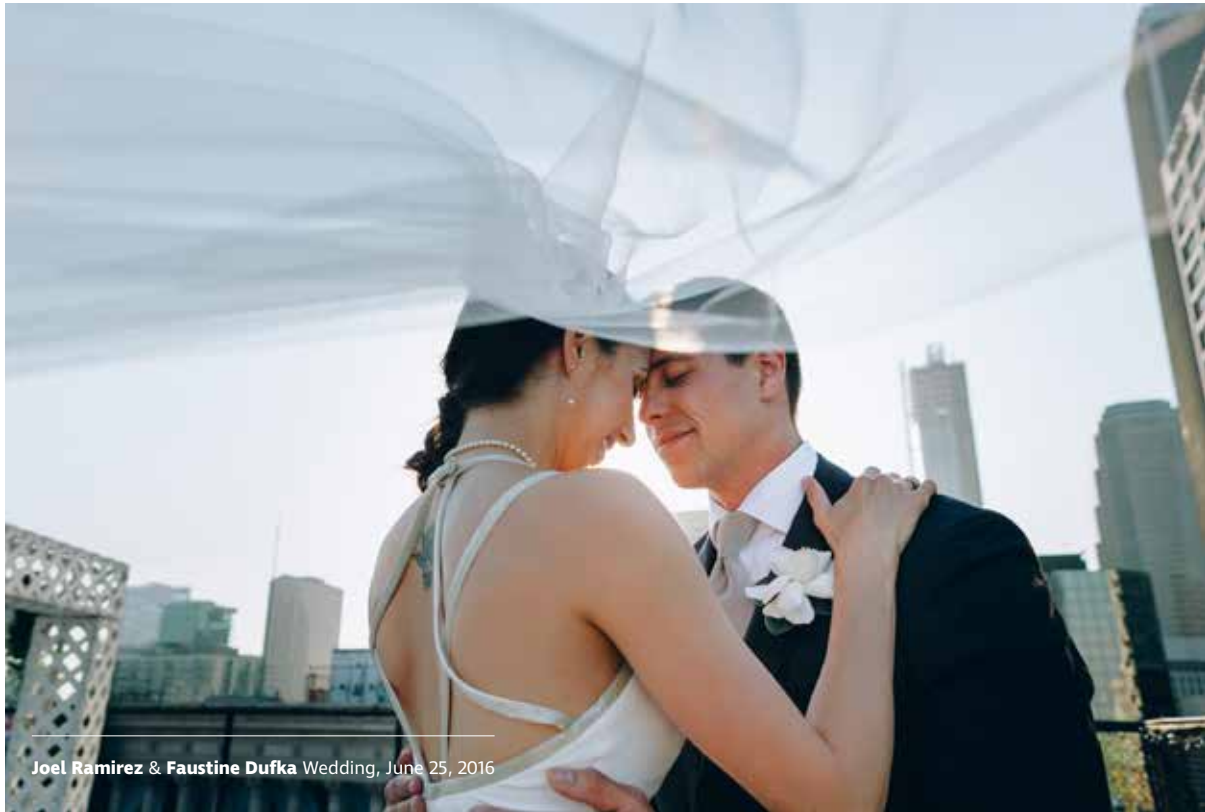
# An Affair to Remember: Before, During and After

*Event Planner Nam Lam Offers  
Tips to Make Wedding Prep  
More Enjoyable*



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**Nam Lam**, a preferred wedding planner at LAAC



Joel Ramirez & Faustine Dufka Wedding, June 25, 2016

**G**etting married is something for which many couples plan for years, the decision to make their relationship official and tie the knot is a step toward a future they've carefully considered, and one they can't wait to take. And while a wedding is a romantic representation of that brand new union, and a way to celebrate the excitement of what's to come with the special people in their lives, sometimes planning that wedding can be a harried affair. It requires organization and foresight and attention to a ton of tiny details. But it's also about inspiration, celebration of love and a new life — and it should be a fun process, rather than one that induces panic for months prior.

Choosing a venue is often the first step. For LAAC members — many of whom have seen a number of their major life moments unfold inside the

club — it's a natural fit. It's easy to see why. Entering the Los Angeles Athletic Club can be so appealing to so many sensibilities. It can be like stepping into a time capsule; there's charm, elegance, opulence, whimsy and history. It can be a step back in time, to the Roaring '20s perhaps. Or members can imagine dining in the same room as Charlie Chaplin, even having brunch with the founders of Los Angeles itself. Maybe dancing the night away with Marilyn Monroe. This type of timeless style set amidst the modern touches and amenities make it a versatile option for a contemporary wedding party.

To make an event unique to each couple, to reflect their individual personalities but also present their combined sensibility in their first hours as a union is a challenge that often requires the practiced hand of a professional. Fortunately, Nam Lam of Modern LA Weddings is one

such expert at producing this kind of elegance. Lam is a preferred event planner at LAAC, and one of the most sought-after wedding experts in Los Angeles. He has been the creative mind behind some of The Club's most memorable and exclusive weddings, including one of our very own — Cory Hathaway.

We asked Lam to share some advice on executing a fabulous LAAC wedding, and he was kind enough to get down to the prenuptial nitty gritty — one simple but impactful detail at a time.

Once the venue is secure, Lam suggests making a low-stress first choice — color palette. Color will inform many of the subsequent selections and set the tone for everything from cocktail napkins to cake decorations to floral arrangements. For those willing to take a closer look, unique color combinations can be found all over

The Club; embracing and finding inspiration in the intricate details of the club's interiors will make an effortlessly cohesive experience.

The diversity of ambiance around the club can also provide a platform for just about any vibe — from fun and low-key casual, to black tie class. An ideal venue for a more formal ceremony can be found in the 4th floor Victory Ballroom, with its chic white walls and elegant chandeliers.

Perhaps one of the most unique things about The Club is its rich heritage. The staff can help couples call attention to that by displaying framed historical facts throughout the event space. It's a distinction that separates the club from other venues and makes a statement.

As decor, Lam loves utilizing lush, light-colored floral arrangements in the ballroom that will contrast and balance its dark wood interiors and rich red curtains. Tall arrangements will add a heightened sense of drama.

Speaking of drama, The Club has played host to a variety of wedding styles and themes — everything from the jazz-age “Great Gatsby” to a Tim Burton-inspired “Romantic Goth,” or cultural nods like “Indochina meets Downton Abbey,” and “Mid-Century Urban Chic.” Couples can always bring their personal passions, ideas, and inspirations into the mix.

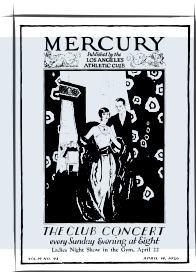
Lam also emphasizes the importance of music to the ambiance of a wedding. The acoustics of the main ballroom lend themselves as a stage for a powerful vocalist, and commissioning an opera or jazz

singer to perform gives couples a chance to show off their style. The foyer into which guests will exit the elevator on the third floor is an ideal location for a dramatic or whimsical welcome installation. It's a little bit of personality that sets the tone for what's to come, and gives party-goers something to remember when they step inside.

When it comes to food, couples can get adventurous. The Club's experienced catering department is dynamic and capable of creating just about any kind of cuisine, and coming up with something that speaks to each couple. Food stations can be a fun alternative to a traditional plated dinner, giving guests a good reason to get up, get to know one another, and give the party a dose of energy.

And with a breadth of options in terms of space, a couple can take guests on a journey — from ceremony to cocktail hour to reception, Lam recommends hosting each in a unique setting each time.

Perhaps most importantly, Lam recognizes how important it is for couples to enjoy the moment, and that means taking a few extra moments for themselves. The Club's facilities are always available, and prior to the big day, couples can take a breath, head to the spa, have a massage and have a break from the wedding day hustle. Because when it comes to sweat, the bride-and groom-to-be can save that for a healthy, head-clearing workout — and not for the details.



### *From the Archives*

Mercury Cover, Volume 14, April 14, 1926.

The Apollo Chorus was founded in December 1932 and has performed twice yearly ever since.



# Home Away from Home

*A Photo Essay*

*Located in the heart of Downtown Los Angeles for over 100 years, the Los Angeles Athletic Club offers a unique experience for its hotel guests. Among The Club's most notable residents was Charlie Chaplin, who lived at the LAAC during his formative years and cherished the privacy it afforded.*

Photography by Antonio Diaz  
Modeling by Clayton Snyder & Caitlin Coons  
Clothing by Ted Baker  
Styling by Pocket Square Clothing









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Staying at the **Los Angeles Athletic Club** is a unique experience unlike any other hotel. All guests are extended **Olive Club** memberships that allow access to all of the private club's amenities.











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The **Los Angeles Athletic Club** hosts exclusive events for its members throughout the year. The Club's poolside Valentine's Day dinner featured an elegant, synchronized swimming performance by The Aqualillies. The glamorous group filled the pool with vintage red bathing suits, white caps, and Frank Sinatra.





Words by Amy Schlinger & Stef Ferrari  
Photography by Matthew Christopher Miller  
Styled by Olivers Apparel

# A Sport for Life

## *The Untold History of Handball in LA*

**C**hances are, at some point in your life, you've seen a handball court. In fact, you've probably even been a handball player a time or two.

Anyone who can recall a childhood recess or after-school hours spent on the playground, whipping a ball against a wall between friends has, in essence, played the sport.

There are many accounts of how handball may have originated. From early Egyptian and Roman records as far back as 2000 B.C., to the codification of the modern day, team sport version in 19th-century Germany and Scandinavia, one thing is clear: it's a pastime enjoyed by many cultures.

Ireland stakes particular claim, where it was once played against the walls of ancient castles and monasteries. Handball courts provided an activity for laborers, and when daytime play was done, these same courts — many of which still reside in the Irish countryside — were used for celebrations and dances at night. In later centuries, the game was popular as much for its value as a sport and entertainment, as its social aspect. Following matches, players often came together to dine and drink at their local pub, and Irish immigrants would carry that camaraderie, along with the game, to America in the 1800s.

The first court in the U.S. was built in San Francisco during the gold rush, attached to the alleyway of a bar,

and the game was favored initially by the city's Irish and Jewish immigrants. It soon took up a following in New York where one-wall handball was the variation of choice, and during The Great Depression, it provided cheap or free entertainment. As the sport's popularity spread in the '20s, tens of thousands of handball courts were erected, most of which consisted of three walls and were in schools and parks. They became anchors of community, with neighborhoods growing up around them. The courts were considered a place of refuge during tumultuous times.

Courts were also cropping up in Los Angeles, where the Los Angeles Athletic Club saw a spike in interest among members. In the 1930s, LAAC handball enthusiasts included Club champion Ernie Clark and actor Harold Lloyd (in fact, Lloyd was such an avid player, he kept his own courts behind a false wall at his Beverly Hills estate and studio).

The sport was growing in popularity, and even had a national championship tournament, but still lacked funding and real organization. In 1951, an enthusiast named Robert W. Kendler created the U.S. Handball Association to help address those issues. He standardized court sizes and raised money to fund tournaments. As his efforts took hold and major players like Jimmy Jacobs started to gain notoriety, the sport grew.

In 1954, new regulation handball courts were built at







Once courts were constructed in schools and parks, such as the Venice Beach Recreation Center, Los Angeles became a mecca for handball. In 1954, the **Los Angeles Athletic Club** built the first handball courts on the Pacific Coast with a glass sidewall spectator gallery and a back-wall window for photo and television purposes.





LAAC. They were the first on the Pacific Coast to provide a glass sidewall spectator gallery and a back wall window for photo and television purposes. The nation's four-wall handball championships were held at The Club in 1955 and 1959, and for the first time in the history of the sport, both tournaments were televised. Thereafter, a series of national handball victories were secured by LAAC members: the open singles by Jimmy Jacobs in 1955-57; masters' doubles by Alex Boisserie and Joe Shane in 1955-56, and then by George Brotemarkle and Bill Feivow in 1959.

In 1960, the four-wall and three-wall singles titles were won by Jacobs, the masters' doubles by Feivow and Brotemarkle, and the four-wall open doubles by Jacobs and Dick Weisman. Polishing off this outstanding record, the 1970 national tournament, held at The Club, attracted more than 600 entrants. The sport was so popular within The Club that an early edition of Mercury suggests, "seldom is there a moment of the day when the courts are idle."

In the 60s and 70s, there was a shift in the demographic of players, attracting Hispanic immigrants in L.A., during which time came the rise of Naty Alvarado, arguably one the best handball players of all-time. The first professional handball tour was held in 1973, and

from the 70s to the early 90s, Alvarado won more pro handball tournaments than anyone and held 11 national singles titles, a record he still holds today.

The 1970s handball enjoyed a new generation of popularity, facilitated by the existence of a lot of courts. Elite clubs like LAAC, the New York Athletic Club, and the Manhattan Beach Athletic Club constructed four-wall courts for their members, and public courts began appearing in places like the YMCA. Los Angeles area fire stations also became an unlikely home to many courts; each generally constructed a fitness area for their staff, and for many stations, that meant a handball court. In turn, firefighters have become a significant part of the Southern California handball community.

Since the pinnacle of the sport's popularity in those days, a number of factors have contributed to a lessening interest. Logistically, when racquetball lost some of its steam during the 80s, the demand for new courts fell. Many existing courts were torn down, leaving players with a lack of places to play. The now-defunct Southern California Handball League even suffered from notorious L.A. traffic as a factor in its decline, as players were forced to travel greater distances to the remaining facilities, and struggled to make time and connect with one another. Culturally, there's been a general decline in the kind of



**Vic Perez** (left), a LAAC member, is a top-10 player in the World Players of Handball (WPH) rankings. The LAAC has been the home of many handball legends, including Jimmy Jacobs, Alex Boisserie, George Brotemarkle, Bill Feivow, among others.



streetside, pickup sports played by neighborhood kids so common in the mid-20th century, and Physical Education classes have also cut back on handball in order to focus on activities that engage a larger number of students.

Handball is still offered as a club at many colleges, and a tournament is held annually. And of course, participation in any extracurricular activities can take a back seat to career and family in post-collegiate life, but proponents of the sport hope players develop a dedication to the sport during those years that will ensure their interest for life.

That's the thing about handball — it's a lifetime sport. It can be played as kids on a makeshift court, perhaps be a competitive outlet during college years, and can be picked up later on as a break in the action of a hectic career, a chance to connect with family and friends.

Handball is a simple game, but one with a long, complex history. For centuries, it has been a casual pastime or a competitive sport, an outlet and an opportunity to connect. Regardless of country or culture or era, it has always functioned to bring people together, across socioeconomic statuses and demographics that may otherwise not cross paths, a handball court has been a cornerstone of community, and continues to offer those same benefits to all who choose to engage.

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Words by Katie Scrivner  
Photography by Allen Daniel  
Styling by Pocket Square Clothing

# Hip to Be Square

*One Club, Two Experts, Five Looks*

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**F**rom their unlikely beginnings as college roommates with no formal training in fashion, Rodolfo Ramirez and Andrew Cheung surged to the forefront of the Los Angeles menswear movement with their accessories-turned-lifestyle brand lifestyle brand, Pocket Square Clothing (PSC). Although Ramirez and Cheung started out making bow ties, they took the name of the iconic and symbolic pocket square, a stylish modern accent with humble beginnings of its own. With effortless artistry that gives dressy details to casual clothing and a comfortable cool to formal wear, their style is sprezzatura at its best. PSC invites exploration and encourages everyone to find individual ways of expressing personality, polish, and poise.

We asked Ramirez and Cheung to design looks for five areas of The Club. Much of their inspiration comes from classic style elements of the '20s, '50s, and '70s. They used eyewear and watches by Komono and hats by Yellow 108. In a city as diverse as Los Angeles, Ramirez and Cheung are able to draw from international fashion while providing local support. The PSC flagship store in downtown L.A. carries the featured brands and is located two blocks from The Club.



## DAYTIME DINING

With its strong, graceful styling and fresh, seasonal menu, the Famous Players restaurant provides the perfect setting for a business lunch or breakfast with friends. Whether making an impression on colleagues, compadres, or competitors, a crisp linen suit epitomizes effortless cool. Ramirez and Cheung start with “the basics of fit and proportion,” then play with patterns and textures. “Wear a classic suit,” Ramirez advises, “and have it tailored.” Recording artist Rome Castillo illustrates the art of achieving a custom fit that suits both your personality and your person. Ramirez points out that, given Castillo’s creativity, “It was important for us to have fun with this look.” A tropical print adds playfulness without going full-on cabana wear, and the band collar shirt is a fun and fashionable way to look buttoned up without the button-down. The whole look is a perfect example of PSC’s signature style of dressed-up casual.

MERCURY



## CHECKING IN

When the clothes fit the man, the man commands the room. Here, a custom look demands custom surroundings. All LAAC hotel rooms are luxurious, but the themed suites encourage the ultimate in personalized personal comfort. With bespoke PSC pants and a perfectly packable neck-scarf, Garret Gooch is ready for a sweet stay in one of The Club’s nine themed suites. Blue pinstripes present a strong vintage vibe while achieving a modern silhouette, and classic color combinations keep daring style choices grounded in tradition. “We like to pull from classic and vintage styling,” Ramirez says, “but it’s important to stay current and refined.” By ditching the socks and rolling the cuffs, they update this timeless trouser with a casual nod to menswear trends of mid-century Europe. Dressing down these dressy high-waisted pinstripes with a cool, collar-less shirt strikes that modern men’s fashion balance of laid-back formal and elegant casual.



### RAISING THE BAR

In a playful nod to the pre-prohibition traditions of the Invention bar, the PSC guys outfitted mustachioed model Greg T. Brown in colors and styles reminiscent of the Prohibition Era. "Vest and rolled-up sleeves give an effortless aura," notes Ramirez, while simple, muted colors pair perfectly with the classic stylings of one of L.A.'s oldest bars. With floor-to-ceiling windows providing a 180-degree view of downtown Los Angeles, Invention's relaxed but stately atmosphere provides the perfect setting for a modern laid-back look with an upscale feel and reverence for timeless aesthetics. To a jacketless effortlessness, a floral denim tie from PSC adds some formality while keeping it fun. Both Invention and Brown's ensemble are designed to accommodate with equal ease anything from working to socializing to relaxing.



### POOLSIDE COOL

The Plunge provides the perfect backdrop for a casual look with nautical nuances — like this breezy ensemble on creative director and DJ Donovan Briggs. A modern take on the bold patterns of the 1970s, these cropped trousers in a large-scale navy gingham are a confident choice for summer social events or poolside dining. Their high hem calls for no or no-show socks, which calls for shoes designed to blend business and leisure. Quarter Joggers by Freeman Plat have the brogue-perforated, tasseled soul of a fine loafer built on the sole of a premium running shoe. Silk scarves are a PSC favorite since they provide an easy way to dress up an otherwise casual look. A PSC neck scarf ties together this outfit with a necktie alternative that is cool in both temperature and style.



PSC Founders **Rodolfo Ramirez & Andrew Cheung**





## TOP OF THE WORLD

We round out our style tour on The Club's rooftop, a perfect place to observe and honor Downtown L.A. while enjoying the amenities of the LAAC. Here, Ramirez and Cheung model their own looks from Pocket Square Clothing. Cheung pairs white chinos with a blue windowpane blazer, accenting a dark floral shirt by Stitch and Note with one of their store's namesakes — a bold black-and-white pocket square. Ramirez's merrow-stitched pocket square plays off '70s-inspired pants by highlighting the blush hue of the pastel plaid. Other PSC details — a floral lapel pin and olive polka-dot neck scarf — provide fun, expressive accents to Ramirez's custom navy blazer with off-white buttons. With a practiced eye, the PSC guys pull off traditionally tricky feats of fashion, such as wearing more than three colors or mixing patterns, but their attitude of accessibility encourages everyone to try a bit of fashion adventure. For instance, if you don't feel bold enough to try patterned pants, Ramirez and Cheung suggest having fun with socks and accessories, pointing out that "these are often the most accepting places for guys to go crazy." They should know. From humble beginnings, Pocket Square Clothing has grown like crazy, pushing the L.A. fashion scene forward with its refreshing blend of old and new, formal and casual, and the effortless cool of sprezzatura that pairs perfectly with the LAAC.





# Collaborators Dinner

*Blue Room Celebration of Creative Culmination*

*July 14, 2017*



Words by Katie Scrivner  
Photography by Antonio Diaz

**A**nyone who has had a childhood can probably agree that the only thing more thrilling than a secret hideaway is a secret hideaway through a hidden passageway. Of

course, the only thing better than that is a grown-up version of it! When a bookshelf in the Invention Bar opens to reveal a narrow staircase, the thrill of entering the Blue Room is already underway.

Back in 1913, prominent Club members founded this lounge for a social branch of the LAAC. They dubbed their club-within-

the-Club The Uplifters. Walt Disney, Clark Gable, L. Frank Baum, and other members of The Uplifters Club would meet in the Blue Room to promote the arts and socialize over drinks.

The hidden staircase was closed during prohibition and later became a hidden storage area for alcohol, but in the decades that followed, it fell out of use and was forgotten. When the Blue Room underwent a major renovation in 2015, the rediscovery of the secret stairwell was just the beginning. The new look, designed by Timothy









Oulton, restores the room's speakeasy style for a new era. Between walls filled with vintage photographs and sports memorabilia, Timothy Oulton designers Dani and Raoul Morren added Chesterfield sofas, wingback chairs, and eye-catching installations that pay homage to the past while creating a delicious anticipation of the future.

That future was put on hold when the newly updated Blue Room was closed during the recent renovations of the other parts of The Club.

To celebrate the re-opening of the Blue Room, the LAAC honored those who had reimagined, redesigned, and reinvigorated this historical space by throwing an intimate, elegant party — the Collaborators Dinner.

This exclusive event, which took place in July, brought together those who had contributed to the beautiful and innovative renovation of the Blue Room — thanking them, introducing them to each other, and launching the lounge's exciting new elements and direction. Beneath the Timothy Oulton crystal chandelier, a group of about ten creators, designers, and Uplifters enjoyed an inspired six-course dinner, custom cocktails, and lively

conversations, surrounded by flickering candlelight, red roses, and a rich heritage.

Vintage books at each place setting contained both the original theme song of The Uplifters Club, honoring the Blue Room's past, and the evening's menu, honoring the Blue Room's future.

A big part of that future is the Macallan Whisky Cart. A Blue Room exclusive, this mobile bar brings expertly curated Macallan whiskies around the room for the mixing of custom drinks on request. Macallan Ambassadors Brian Summers and Kieron Elliot were on hand for the debut of this customized whisky experience.

An all-copper collection was introduced to the bar itself, along with a new Blue Room cocktail menu created by consultant Marcos Tello, another of the evening's honorees.

Other attendees included the LAAC's Cory Hathaway, Uplifter Suzanne Joskow, and Arturo Villarreal of Phoenix Construction.

The Collaborators Dinner was a fitting culmination of a successful collaboration — celebrating the opening of the new Blue Room and the triumphant return of the club within The Club.

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**“A day without laughter is a  
day wasted”**

~ Charlie Chaplin