

Destinations

AROUND LAS VEGAS

Olympia Gaming's new \$750 million **Southern Highlands Casino-Resort** is poised to take advantage of the emerging South Strip corridor. With an ultimate build-out in excess of \$2 billion, the 100-acre project is the South Strip's largest development to date and promises to be a luxury mixed-use destination. The project is scheduled to break ground in fall 2006 and open its first phase in summer 2008. The first phase will include 50 acres of resort and casino development and 20 acres of retail and entertainment space.

SKYSPA is the new exclusive 24-hour spa and fitness facility for guests on the private floor of the **SKYLOFTS** at MGM Grand. It has separate spa treatment and fitness suites with high-end sound systems and Japanese soaking tubs. Many of the design elements are the same as those found in the lofts. The menu has both Eastern and Western practice. Treatments include "Thai Raindrop," "Abhyanga" and "The Dreaming Ritual." Most sessions are 50 minutes for \$200 and 75 minutes for \$300. Private use of the fitness area is available for a \$50 per hour fee. Couples' sessions are available. Call 877-646-5638 or visit www.skyloftsmgmgrand.com.

Actor George Clooney and nightlife kingpin Rande Gerber are part of group that will build the \$3 billion **Las Ramblas** hotel, condominium and casino complex on Harmon Avenue just off The Strip. Construction will begin in mid-2006. The property will include 300 hotel units (part of Phase One, to be completed by 2008), 1,326 condo-hotel units, 19 bungalows and Vegas' first open-air promenade. Visit www.lasramblasvegas.com.

Ducking the Velvet Rope

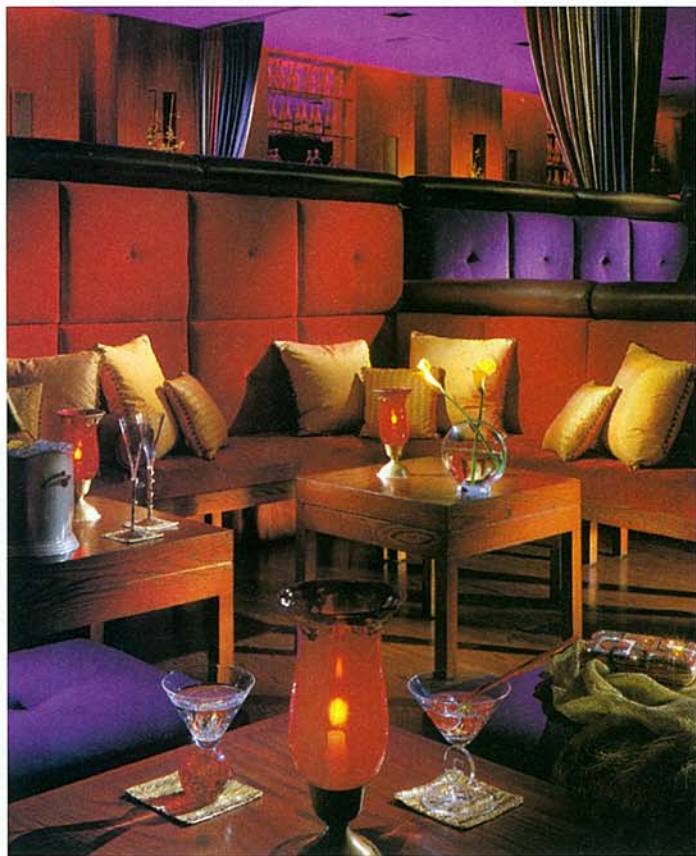
The ultimate Vegas insider grants VIP access for all

BY ELIZABETH WEISS

Steven Striker has been busy. Fresh from his high-profile segment on *The Today Show* with Matt Lauer (Lauer commissioned him to show him the VIP lifestyle in Las Vegas), Striker, founder of the guest services and event planning firm Striker VIP, Inc., most recently signed a contract to appear on the NBC entertainment show *Extra*. In January 2006, Striker will launch a quarterly magazine called *The Striker Report: The Ultimate Insider Guide to Las Vegas*, which will be a high-end, glossy publication he likens to *The Robb Report*.

Travel Agent sat down with him to learn how he built this thriving business and how he can help travel agents provide the ultimate insider experience to their Las Vegas clients.

Word has it that you are at the top of your game when it comes to delivering VIP experiences in Las Vegas. How did you develop the contacts and the know-how that enable you to do your job so well? It's just hard work. It's getting out there, going out every single night, being in the right place at the right time. In this town, there are two distinct categories of people. There is the 'in crowd' and the 'out crowd.' If you're in the 'in crowd,' you're at the table eating the lobster. If you are in the 'out crowd,' you're



You can get your client in the door of some of the best places in Vegas—such as Light at the Bellagio—if you plan ahead.

standing outside in the rain looking in the window, watching someone else do that. Of the two groups, I am wrapped into the group where I can walk into any place and be recognized and get any number of people I want into that party or event, and I've done that over time by showing up, being a nice guy and letting people know that I'm doing this for the long term.

It took me 10 years to develop the Rolodex and the confidence of Las Vegas. I underpromise and overdeliver things and products. [I ask clients,] 'What do you need? What do you want?' And be careful what you

ask for because you're probably going to get it.

What led you to establish Striker VIP? I had a small management group in the Bay Area. I put together projects were endorsed by the San Francisco 49ers. The problem was that athletes get everything for free. And I don't believe that rich people should get everything for free. People who don't have the major money should be getting more than you can afford it.

I decided to take the same royalties and the same service afforded to these guys and give it to

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the average guy with a bank account. They can now feel like the rock star, the movie star and the athlete, get into the same parties, the same events and [receive] the same types of high-end amenities and walk away with a smile.

What obstacles do Vegas travelers face when trying to plan VIP experiences without the assistance of a professional?

I don't think they are being notified of what the possibilities are in advance. This is not a town of spontaneity. You can't show up and have fun—everything is pre-booked. All the major restaurants are now prebooked 90 days in advance, the hotels are being prebooked, the car companies are sold out, the shows are sold out. What's the old saying? "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail."

How far out should people book your services to ensure they're not shut out of the best places?

At least two weeks to a month in advance.

For travel agents who don't have your kinds of connections, how can you help them deliver ultra-VIP experiences for their clients?

Use Striker VIP as a service provider. Once they book an event, trade show, a golf tournament, a poker tournament—anything that has to do with a party in Vegas—I send a check to the travel agency for a 10 percent rebate saying thank you very much for the business. They're like salespeople for us.

What is the minimum booking on which you will pay a commission?

I can't pay on one customer getting in to one club. But if they want a limo, they want to go to a show, they want to go to a fabulous dinner beforehand and a

nightclub afterwards, I handle everything and provide everything they want. We have access to every club, casino, nightclub and cabaret. We have exotic cars, limousines, helicopters and Lear jets. And they are all at anyone's disposal 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

What is the average amount that customers spend for a customized Las Vegas package?

\$250 to \$2,000 per person. The \$2,000 is the Lear jet, access to [VIP] parties, the Lamborghini when they get here, the hand-rolled cigar from Cuba in their hand, the absolutely gorgeous five-star hostess that meets them at the airport—those are the high-end packages.

The others are guys who want to come in, go to a show, go to a great dinner at the Eiffel Tower [at Paris Hotel], and have seats on the window overlooking the Bellagio fountain with their wife for an anniversary.

Can you give me an example of the types of once-in-a-lifetime experiences you can provide?

Backdoor access to VIP parties. That means you're standing next to George Clooney, you're standing next to Elton John at their exclusive party. If a valued customer says, "Striker, my wife and my four guests really want to go to the Emmys or the Grammys," I get them VIP seats.

What does every high-roller want to do when they're in town?

The club scene is the big thing. Everybody wants to go to the top club and be seen at the top club. There's one I went to last night that's going to be the top of the top. It's Tao at the Venetian. It is amazing. Multilevel, all done in Chinese Ming Dynasty architecture, full sushi bar...an opulently

sexy club, great sound system, amazing environment, cutting-edge people. Other great clubs in town [are] Ghostbar and Rain [at the Palms] because of the people. Because of the volume, I'd have to say Pure [at Caesars Palace] is number-one. Tangerine [at Treasure Island] is a great experience. Light [at Bellagio] is another.



“...the most extreme thing I've done... things got blown up and they had to sign waivers.”

—STEVEN STRIKER

What about dining?

Aquaknox [at the Venetian] is off the Richter scale. It's probably one of the best seafood dinners you can have in the United States. For sushi, I'd have to say Sushi Roku [at the Forum Shops] is at the top of my list. [For] unbelievable steaks, Boa steakhouse [Forum Shops]. You can cut the steak with a spoon. For Italian, Stefanos [the Golden

Nugget]. The waiters sing Italian songs to you and the food is drop-dead amazing.

Shows?

Ka [at MGM Grand] is the number-one show. I think *La Reve* [Wynn Las Vegas] is good. Any of the Cirque du Soleils are a home run. If you just want a good entertainer, I'd have to say Clint Holmes and Danny Gans are amazing.

What is the most extravagant experience you have ever handled for a client?

I had a group of 20 guys call me...for a bachelor party. They said, "We want to do something that's a guy weekend—what have you got for us?" I created a two-day event in the desert, militarily supervised. They got to fire automatic weapons out of a helicopter at moving targets. That was probably the most extreme thing I've done—where things got blown up and they had to sign waivers.

What is the secret of your success?

We're nice people, we deal with nice venues and we want to provide good guests with great services. And how we advertise is they're happy and they're going to go home and tell 50 of their friends, "We didn't have to wait to get into a restaurant. We were sitting so close at the *O*, show that water splashed on us. For dinner, we overlooked Las Vegas and saw the Bellagio water show every half hour in front of our window. We had an exotic car or we went to an exotic event"—something that stood out for them and impacted them for the rest of their lives in a positive way.

Essential Link: 866-848-2847, www.strikervip.com