

Jerry Kleiner: the synergist who won't sit still

syn·er·gist - a drug, muscle or other agent that increases the action of another

How does a tailor's son from the shtetls of Eastern Europe morph into the high priest of Chicago's dining scene? How does a self-declared seducer with no college education revolutionize the nightclub, steer the trend roller coaster for twenty years, weather the Great Recession, then start all over in LA? These questions darted through my mind as I walked to Starbuck's with Jerry Kleiner, who impulsively swiped scraps of trash off the ground then dunked them into garbage cans - as he has already trained his entire neighborhood to do.

I've observed Jerry with film crews for years - always exhorting blunt, terse demands and expectations. He's never



been a man to mince words, but what was it that inspired his trail-blazing actions? A blunt, terse summation was to be expected: "Not working actually works!" Jerry spurted his modus operandi as if reiterating a tidbit of common sense to the logically-impaired. His abrupt, almost reproachful tone ricochets right off any listener who's been initiated, or "Kleinerized" (a

term coined by his long time love and personal manager Marisa Molinaro) and who recognizes this outburst as pure, unadulterated passion.

Jerry has always followed his passion by default - since he is essentially allergic to jobs (showing up at some prefab, regimented, supervised environment) he says he had no choice but to create his own work site and staff. Again, and again, and again- reinventing himself with each new club or restaurant. "I would have done all of those things for free!" he declares, and that's because "I go by the feel, I create a space that makes me feel good." Easier done than said for this ADD-addled powerhouse with super human senses. Besides his keen sense of sight, touch, hearing, smelling and tasting, "the synergist" was blessed with a sixth sense - the uncanny ability to identify people who will generate creative synergy. "I can fuse people together with my energy field," he explains. That sixth sense is now leading him to a new circle of excited collaborators in LA who await his latest incarnation. "You're only as good as your last meal," he says, as he answers his phone and starts painting a friends' house over it: "No! You gotta pick a color that has "BAM!"

The book: five senses, five players

Any biography of Jerry Kleiner has to have "BAM!" I intend to recreate Jerry's journey - the launches, trend-setting successes, slow slides, stumbles, fizzles and revivals - through his

fives senses, and through the eyes of the critical players whom his “sixth sense” has attracted - players refined in the art of “Kleinerization.”

What’s most fascinating to me (and I believe will be to his readers) is that Jerry’s so called “dysfunctions” (his self-diagnosed ADD and OCD) actually fueled his function as a ground-breaking, hyper-sensual multi-tasker, and enabled him to build his empire at the pace and to the scale he did. Just as Charles Hennessy did with Marco Pierre White’s dyslexia in his biography of the great chef, I would like to explore the professional markers inspired by Jerry’s personality traits that helped forge his genius. To excavate graphic, visceral examples of weakness transformed into strength. I will revisit on the page the experiences, attributes and personalities which helped create this inspirational “high priest of Chicago’s dining scene” and which will help launch him as LA’s, etc.

I envision this story being told in ten chapters:

- five examining formative moments of Jerry’s life experienced through each of his five senses

- five profiles of players whom he has fused into his life through his “sixth sense” (sibling, life partner/manager, child, business partner, employee, friend, patron?)

It seems to me that Jerry has spent his life building his character, then building his empire, and now, he has begun building his worldview, extracting a philosophy that makes sense of it all. “This is hell and I’m just making the best of hell.” He has made the “best of hell” by continually, compulsively recreating himself - and that makes for a compelling, inspirational and highly commercial story for readers, as well as a branding tool for “the new Jerry Kleiner.”

The timeline: 6 months

Stage 1: RESEARCH

(2 months)

To explore all the manifestations of “the synergist” (Jerry’s contributions to the restaurant and nightclub industries) I would need to:

read:

- books on Chicago’s hospitality industry to map out where Jerry fits in
- all articles, interviews, letters, business plans, birthday cards, love letters and photos I can get my hands on

interview:

- Jerry
- industry professionals including his competitors
- critics (food and social)
- siblings and children
- friends and relatives

visit:

- Jerry’s venues past, present and future
- Jerry’s childhood hangouts
- Jerry’s inspirational locations

Stage 2: OUTLINE

(one month)

- detailed chapter-by-chapter synopsis
- opening quotes (gleaned from interviewees) for each chapter
- day long meeting to discuss comments, corrections, requests

Stage 3: WRITE

(three months)

- expand on approved chapter synopses
- hone the voice of the book
- complete final line edit