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20 ODD QUESTIONS

Ian Schrager

The club kingpin-turned-hotelier on first love, room service and where to go when St. Barts just won't do

Oct. 5, 2012 12:54 p.m. ET



Ian Schrager RAMSAY DE GIVE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

IT'S EASY TO SEE why Ian Schrager's name is synonymous with disco-era excess: He co-founded the nightclubs Studio 54 and Palladium, the nocturnal homes of Andy Warhol, Madonna and countless European jet-setters. With his best friend and business partner Steve Rubell, Mr. Schrager ruled New York's night life of the late 1970s, though his reign was cut short in 1979 when he was convicted of tax evasion. Mr. Schrager spent 13 months in jail before reinventing himself as a hotelier, creating nine boutique properties, including Morgans in New York and the Mondrian in Los Angeles. At 66, the Brooklyn-born businessman is pioneering two new ventures: Public, a line of accessibly priced boutique hotels, and Edition Hotels, a more upscale group of properties he is developing with Marriott. To celebrate Public Chicago's first anniversary, next week Mr. Schrager is throwing a gigantic Studio 54-themed party at the hotel, with some of the club's

original bouncers and DJs. He lives in Manhattan with his wife, Tania, a former ballerina, and their five children (four teenage daughters from previous marriages, as well as their 2-year-old son). He continues to indulge his workaholic tendencies, but says he is happiest playing on the floor with his son.

I'm not into nostalgia, and I only look back to find lessons. I try to make as much distance between Studio 54 and myself as I possibly can, but I decided to put nightclubs in all of my new hotels, so it's the next generation of Studio 54. I'm trying to recreate and capture the energy and magic of Studio 54, but without all of the indulgences.

When I travel, I just take what I need and I run. I always have my briefcase stuffed with work, even when I go on a holiday. It's a black old-fashioned one from T. Anthony. I used to have a camel-colored one, but it got beat up pretty quickly.

My favorite destination used to be St. Barts, but it's been discovered by so many people, so now it's less interesting. I love Ravello, Italy. I proposed to my wife there on a boat trip.



Jerry Hall, Andy Warhol, Debbie Harry, Truman Capote and Paloma Picasso at Studio 54 TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES



Ravello, Italy ALAMY

My best vacation was renting a boat and motoring along the Adriatic, going along the Croatian coast, before it became so fashionable. I've also sailed around the Turkish islands, the Greek islands and Sicily.

I always buy souvenirs for my kids—a hula girl from Hawaii, or in Ireland I'd buy a four-leaf clover or leprechaun—so they have these mementos of my trips on their shelves. It's something emotional for them.

I consider myself fortunate to have grown up in Brooklyn. It's what gave me my drive to succeed, the upward mobility I've been after my whole life.

My biggest mistake may sound trite, but it was not buying the house next door to me at the beach in Southampton. I had just sold my company and was trying to exercise restraint, but I will forever regret it.



Morgans hotel in New York IAN SCHRAGER COMPANY

My wife's wisdom is to get balance in life. You can't just have a successful career or a great marriage or family. You have to have it all.

Basketball was my first love. It was all I cared about when I was growing up. Until about five years ago, I would drive around with a basketball in my car and when I'd see a game, I'd get out and play.

My pet peeve in hotels is when they're too pretentious and when the service is too obsequious. It feels like it belongs in the 1800s. White gloves, gold epaulets, brass buttons—these things are meaningless.

When I go to a hotel, I want to feel like a guest in a good friend's house. I want to be treated nicely and have every whim catered to. It means if I want room service that it's quick,

inexpensive and tastes good.

My secret weapon is curiosity. I'm like a sponge, curious about everything.

My favorite place to view contemporary art is in other people's homes. In this country, museums are like subway stations, and it's not an enjoyable experience. If you can't sit and contemplate art, you can't enjoy it. I'm fortunate to see museum-quality art in some of my friends' homes.



Peter Luger Steakhouse ALAMY

For my own art collection, I mostly like things that I can touch and feel and not just look at. I have a couple of Picasso drawings and Andy Warhol paintings. I just got a beautiful Anish Kapoor gold sphere that I love. It's about 4 feet in diameter, and when you look into it, you appear upside down.

When you create a hotel that's supposed to be family-friendly, it doesn't need to have cartoon

characters on the walls and other clichés. I want my children exposed to sophisticated things and have things be expansive to them.

My favorite restaurants in the world are in New York. I like Peter Luger Steakhouse, I love Nobu and I love 15 East. I think they have probably the best fish in the city.



Mick Jagger LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS

The most exciting city to me is still New York. I think if you were born and raised here, there's no other place like it in the world. It makes all other places seem provincial. The only thing that comes close is Paris.

A comfortable home for me is when it feels comfortable and you can't say why. It's all the things that go unnoticed, and is subliminal. It has to be a stylish place.

My most memorable hotel guest, when I was younger, was Mick Jagger. Now I think the most memorable guest was Bill Clinton, because he's like a rock star. He stayed at the Public in Chicago. Mitt Romney was there a couple of months ago, and we also had a fundraiser for President Obama.

I enjoy going to the ballet. I've always been curious about it. I was curious about the music, and the choreography of Balanchine and Diaghilev.

Ballerinas are incredibly graceful and great athletes, and I admire the kind of resolve and the training to master that. My wife is a former ballerina, but I'm the one always saying, "Let's go to the ballet."

The first hotel that really resonated with me was the original Carlyle in New York. It was special in a difficult way to define, in an ethereal and visceral way. Even though it was very expensive and fancy, it felt special.



From left: T. Anthony briefcase; a basketball; a hula girl ISTOCKPHOTO (HULA GIRL)

If I couldn't be a hotelier, I would have been a film director or an architect, but then you have to answer to a lot of people.

I relax by spending time with my family, because I've been there and done that. I've had a very eventful life and done everything I wanted to do. Now I just want to hang around with my wife and kids.

—Edited from an interview by Jackie Cooperman

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