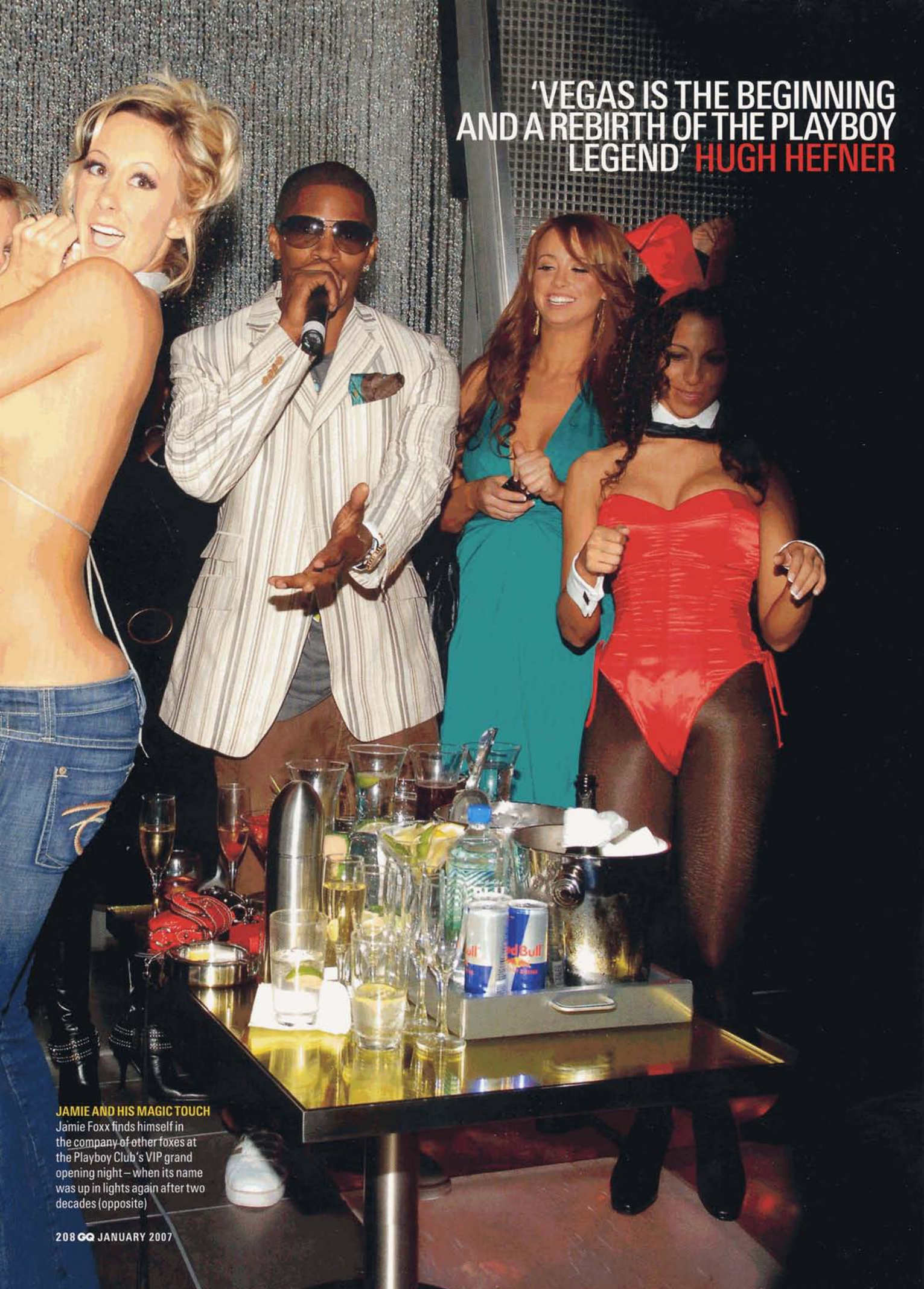


'VEGAS IS THE BEGINNING  
AND A REBIRTH OF THE PLAYBOY  
LEGEND' **HUGH HEFNER**



**JAMIE AND HIS MAGIC TOUCH**

Jamie Foxx finds himself in the company of other foxes at the Playboy Club's VIP grand opening night – when its name was up in lights again after two decades (opposite)



# PALMS

A MALOOF CASINO RESORT

# THE BUNNYS

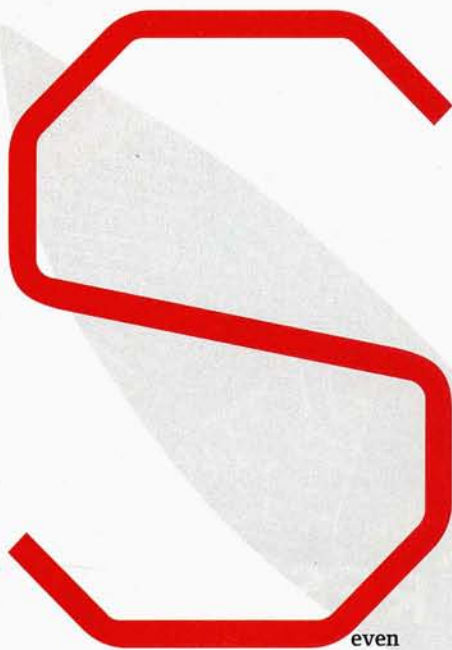
More than 20 years after it called time on the party, the world's sexiest superclub has opened its doors again. Former Playmate **Marilyn Cole Lownes** hits the strip where pneumatic blondes meet hydraulic blackjack at Las Vegas' Playboy Club

# BACK

WELCOME HEF & CHRISTIE HEFNER

# PLAYBOY CLUB

# OPENS TONIGHT



**S**even o'clock on an early October evening at the poolside of the Palms resort in Las Vegas. Hugh Hefner and his three girlfriends-of-the-moment, as well as several Bunnies and Playmates, George Maloof, owner of the Palms, and his business partner Michael Morton, are gathered under a clear night sky. We are here to watch Hef, one of the pillars of the sexual revolution of the Sixties and Seventies, light up a vast Bunny logo on the side of the building to mark the first Playboy Club to open in 20 years. According to Oscar Goodman, the mayor of Las Vegas, "Having the first Playboy Club open up here at the Palms casino is the biggest thing that has happened in Vegas since the last Elvis Presley concert." And as one of the world's most famous icons lit up the Fantasy Tower of the Palms, its state-of-the-art technology showing the Playboy bunny logo winking, smiling and turning multiple colours and patterns, memories come flooding back for me. As a Playmate of the Year and a former Bunny Girl from the late London Playboy Club, I am witnessing a legend not only reborn but brought strikingly yet artistically into the 21st century.

Standing in the entrance of a Playboy Club for the first time since the Seventies, I'm not nostalgic, I'm electrified. Stepping from the lift on the 52nd floor of the Fantasy Tower (which houses the Playboy Club and the super-exclusive £40,000-a-night, 10,000sqft Hugh Hefner's Sky Villa) I'm greeted by two "door Bunnies" in their all-new Bunny outfits redesigned by Roberto Cavalli. In my days, collars and cuffs meant starched white collars and black bow ties; today their collars are gold and silver chokers embedded with diamanté bow ties, their cuffs made of jet beads. Their ears are longer and pointier too, with smaller tails made of real rabbit fur.

But even more eye-boggling is the scene unfolding behind them.

"The diamond back bar is set with 10,000 diamond-shaped crystals setting off the word Playboy," marvels Scott DeGraff, Michael Morton's partner in the N9NE Group, who, together with the Palms' owner and Playboy Enterprises, is responsible for developing the club.

"We wanted it to be rich without being gaudy," says James Geier of 555, the Chicago-based design team brought in to bring the new Playboy legend to life. "The whole point of the design was to pay homage to the past in a very modern, stylistic 21st-century style."

Accordingly, to the left of the bar is a VIP room furnished with huge chairs covered in zebra skins complete with manes, tables in grey alligator-skin in front of black crocodile high-back sofas and stools in red snakeskin. Black beaded lace curtains separate the likes of Paris Hilton – a regular at the Palms along with Britney Spears – from the rest of us ordinary folk.

"The whole essence of this room is that no one has ever integrated gaming and lounging," says Michael Morton. "You go to all the casinos and gaming is one area and you have to go somewhere else to relax. It's different here. When you sit down on a couch it requires a bottle service. For a twosome, it's \$1,000 minimum; at bigger tables, it's between \$3,000 and \$5,000 minimum."

The new mood of exclusivity doesn't end there. "We are selling an annual VIP membership for \$7,500," says Morton. "It's a gold key that gets you immediate access to the club as we expect hours' long queues.

torn jeans with Prada shoes, he's OK, and if he's wearing Converse and jeans but we see he has a Rolex watch, that's fine too." What customers will find when they gain access – apart from the Bunnies, of course – are state-of-the-art facilities. "These are the only gaming tables in the world that have hydraulics for the height," says Morton proudly. "They are at regular chair height but if we get a high roller or someone who is superstitious who wants to play at the traditional height, each one of these tables is hydraulically powered so we can push a button and change the height of the table."

Another unique feature is the eight blackjack tables, which are not covered in the ubiquitous green baize of all the other casinos. Instead, the croupier Bunnies, cute and curvy, wearing vintage-style costumes in black satin, are dealing the cards on a red and black table complete with small white silhouettes of Playmates.

Pointing over to a corner of the gaming room where Hefner and his entourage of girls are lounging on black leather sofas studded with tiny gold Bunny logos, Morton indicates to the wall behind them. "That wall has different 60 plasma TV screens all showing Playboy material. The archivist in Chicago pulled centrefolds, photos of parties at the Mansion, celebrities, cartoons, art and burned DVDs for us. There's a lot from the Sixties, because we wanted to pay homage to the past." ("The whole goal was to evoke what Playboy stood for and is," Scott DeGraff tells me later. "We would not be able to earn the living we do in Vegas without the First Amendment rights that Mr Hefner fought for.") ▶

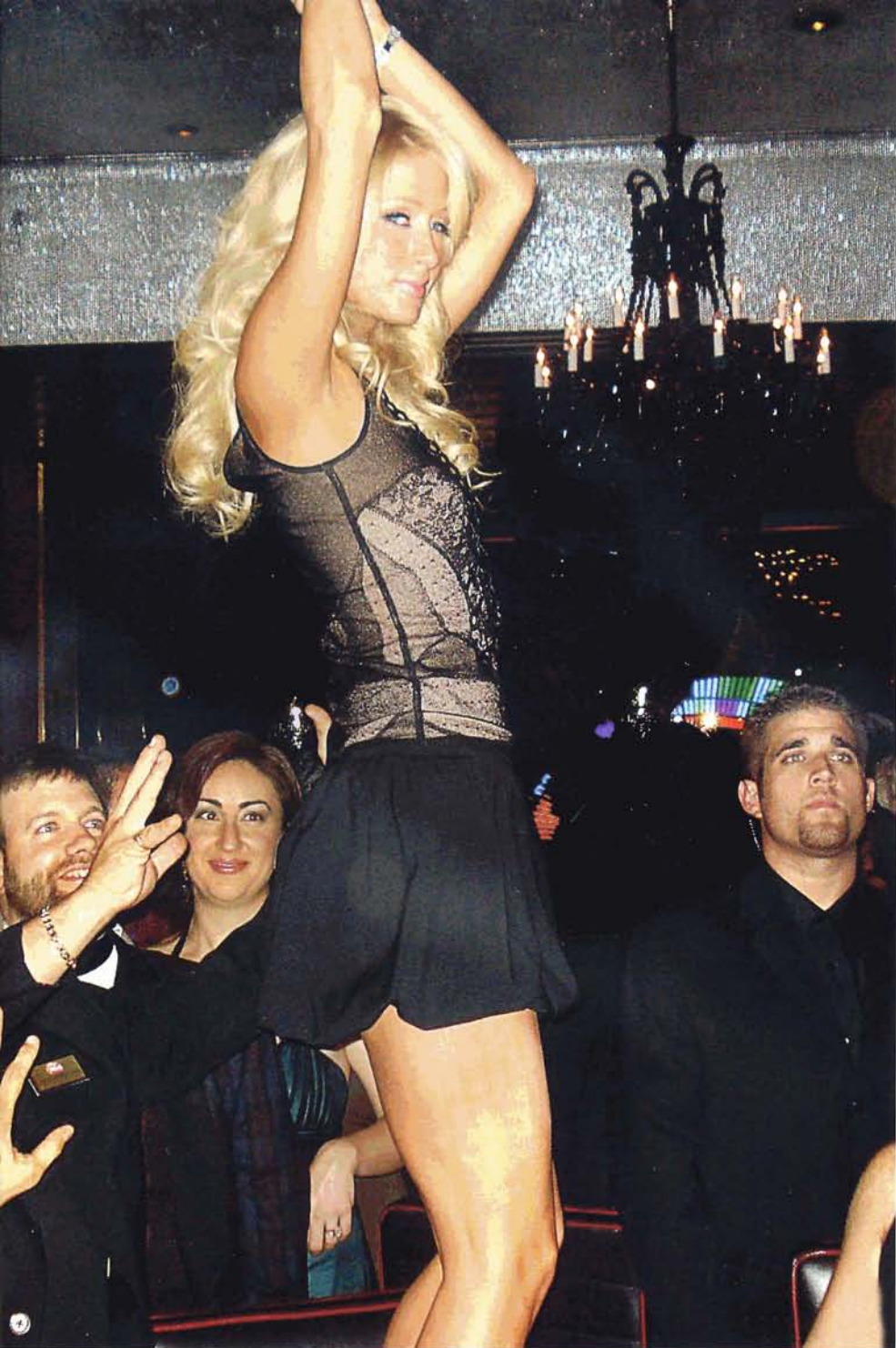
## THE PLAYBOY CLUB IS PURE VEGAS, IT'S ABOUT BREASTS, BLACKJACK AND BOOZE

Otherwise the entrance fee is \$20 during the week and \$40 on the weekends."

In my days as a cocktail Bunny – as opposed to a croupier Bunny – we had a two-week training period to learn from the "Bunny Manual" how to use the right glasses to garnish drinks, and serve Tom Collins, Singapore slings and old-fashioned to men in suits. Today the drinks (vodka and Red Bull seems the most popular) have changed along with the dress code.

"Vegas is a very casual town but we will ban shorts, baseball caps, sleeveless shirts and rubber flip-flops," says Morton, dressed tonight in a J Lindeberg black and navy pinstriped three-piece. "If a guy is wearing





## NAKED AMBITION: A PLAYMATE PIONEER

*Playboy* had an impact far greater than Hugh Hefner could ever have imagined when it launched in the sexually repressed America of the Fifties. The magazine reported and accurately reflected a fast-changing world and, alongside the Pill and rock 'n' roll, it would become one of the pillars of the sexual revolution of the Sixties and Seventies.

In January 1971, I left my mum and dad's house in Portsmouth, where I had been working in a railway station coal yard, and fled to London to become a Bunny Girl at the Playboy Club. My discovery as a potential Playmate was by Victor Lowmes, CEO of the company, then my boss and now my husband. Victor sent me to the magazine's Chicago HQ to test for a Playmate. Playmates are the nude ladies who grace the magazine's centrefolds, and the Playmate of the Year is the lady adjudged best from the previous year's 12. The day I went publicly pubic as the first-ever full-frontal *Playboy* centrefold (above) in the January 1972 issue, I became, like all Playmates, a nude image frozen in time. MCL

Paris Hilton is on the dance floor (above) and on the money (far left) at the Playboy Club's black 'n' red gaming tables (left)



► As the party starts to get into full swing, Hefner and his girlfriends place their first bets, thereby officially opening the Playboy Club and its gaming tables. "This is a special moment for me," admits the softly spoken Maloof. "Hef and his girlfriends will make the first bet and then me and my brothers – the four of us – will play."

Being single and the second-youngest son from a family of five, prominent in business ranging from sports to hotels and casinos, Maloof has been coming to Las Vegas since he was young man. "I think that because I live the lifestyle of a playboy, and am myself a gambler, I understand what people want here. I've always been fascinated with the town, with the energy, with the lights and with the women. So when I heard that Playboy was seriously considering doing something in Vegas, I picked up the phone and called [Playboy CEO and Hef's daughter] Christie Hefner and we worked something out."

As the DJ pumps up the crowd with Nelly and Gnarls Barkley, guests pour into the club and men crowd every available table. They are lounging, leaning, sucking on cigars, yelling to place their bets, knocking back shots and turning around to pop dollar bills into the nearest available cleavage as Bunnies serve and dip, preen and flirt. It's pure Vegas, where it's all about breasts, blackjack and booze. Only this is better: it's the perfect Playboy Club 21st-century version.

girlfriend, Kendra, wearing cut-off denims and a halter-neck top, chats and laughs with the crew of their hit reality television show, *Girls Next Door*, in which all three girls star alongside Hefner.

"When people talk about being old-fashioned, they miss the point," Hef is telling me. "They don't understand that Playboy was always old-fashioned. It's that wonderful retro-cool romantic connection to the sexes that Playboy's all about."

"When we planned the first Playboy Club in Chicago in 1960, many of my friends were guys who owned clubs and I identified with Bogart in *Casablanca* – I wanted to be Rick and have my own bar. And I didn't think very much beyond trying to bring the magazine concept to life. We put together a very nice club, with the beautiful Bunnies, a great buffet, wonderful ambience, good food and drink, a jazz combo in the 'living room' and good cabaret shows."

The concept took America by storm, with more than two dozen clubs opening across the country from New York, New Orleans, Phoenix and Cincinnati, to San Francisco before going global. In June 1966, the Playboy Club in London opened its doors at 45 Park Lane.

Asked how he feels a Playboy Club fits in with today's generation, Hefner is understandably upbeat regarding its relevance: "Vegas is the beginning and a rebirth of the legend – it is my hope that we will be doing it in London and in a number of other places."


High rollers: the 52nd floor of the Palms' Fantasy Tower is home to the Playboy Club



## 'PLAYBOY HAS A RETRO-COOL ROMANTIC CONNECTION TO THE SEXES' **HUGH HEFNER**

I love the club, it's retro cool and camp," Hugh Hefner tells me at the pool the following afternoon. "I just find myself walking through that club and getting a huge smile on my face." Dressed in a Fifties-style short-sleeved shirt covered in images of black and white movie classics, white trousers, a white naval cap and Ray-Ban shades, he's sipping a strawberry daiquiri served in a foot-long plastic bottle shaped like a bikini-clad girl. His three girlfriends are nearby (and, yes, one of his girls says they do all have sex together). Holly Madison, his favourite, is sunbathing in a black bikini, her platinum hair bright in the desert sunlight. Bridget is playing at being pool Bunny, wearing a neon turquoise bikini, complete with bunny tail, ears, collar and cuffs, reminiscent of those costumes worn by the Bunnies at Playboy's Ochos Rios Club and Hotel in Jamaica back in the Seventies. His youngest

"It may be appropriate for Michael Morton to say Vegas changes itself every five years, but it looks to me like they are trying to recapture some of the mystique of yesteryear and that's what makes the timing perfect for us. With Playboy, the only reinvention it has been involved in is simply modifying. The reality is that people are fascinated by a phenomenon they think they might have missed. A whole new generation grew up who feel they missed the party."

I suggest that if Hefner had not protected his brand so fiercely we might not be sitting here today: "The concept of Playboy from the very beginning was so powerful – with my friends I joke and say, 'There are three great inventions in the history of man – fire, the wheel and Playboy.' It's so natural." 

Playboy Club, Palms Casino Resort, 4321 West Flamingo Road, Las Vegas NV 89103. 001 702 942 6832, [www.playboyclub.com](http://www.playboyclub.com)





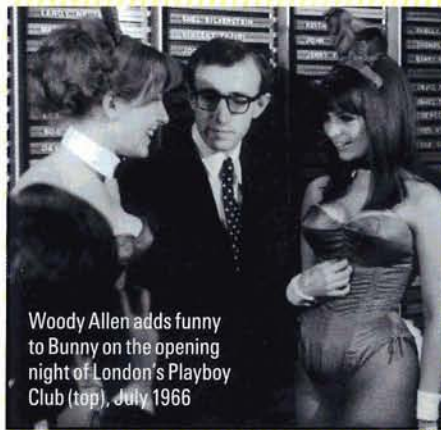
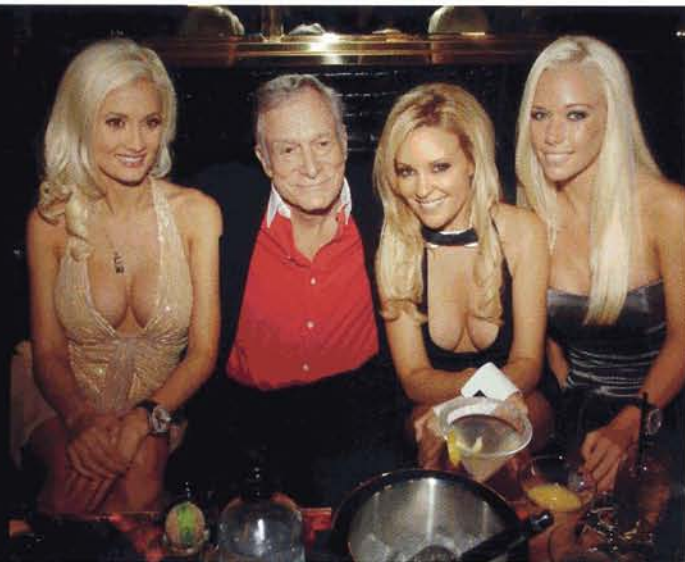
## WHEN THE BUNNIES CAME TO BRITAIN

In 1966 the Playboy Club opened its doors at 45 Park Lane, London. Limousines lined up outside for the opening party. Movie stars including Ursula Andress, Julie Christie and Terence Stamp came to the party along with assorted earls and dukes. Ringo Starr chatted to John Paul Getty and Margot Fonteyn came on the arm of Rudolph Nureyev. Woody Allen, in London filming *Casino Royale*, opened the cabaret room, and Sammy Davis Jr added a few songs. The club closed its doors in 1981.

So what happened? According to Victor Lownes, then managing director of Playboy UK: "I think I made a major mistake when I challenged Ladbrokes Casinos' right to exist after it started a campaign of taking down the licence plate numbers of our patrons and then tracing the owners so that it could invite them to its club.

"The upshot was that Ladbrokes lost its gaming licence and understandably embarked on a programme to avenge its loss by challenging Playboy. Playboy panicked and fired me but they then lost their licence for breaching the one basic agreement with the British Gaming Board, that Playboy's casinos would always be managed from the UK without interference from the US." MCL

Clockwise from above: 21st-century Bunnies are all ears as Jamie Foxx takes the mic (above) at the Playboy Club; while Hugh Hefner plays the host with the most (girlfriends) – (from left) Holly Madison, Bridget Marquardt and Kendra Wilkinson; Vegas vixen Jenna Jameson is out on the (home) town



Woody Allen adds funny to Bunny on the opening night of London's Playboy Club (top), July 1966