

CELEBRITY PLAYGROUND

BY MICHAEL SHULMAN

A Very Playboy Birthday *Why Hugh Hefner Is Still Cool After All These Years*

In a 1959 interview about his first television series, *Playboy Penthouse*, Hugh Hefner speaks about the production of his ground-breaking series: "If we did the thing ourselves, and the viewers could meet me as a human being every week, then hopefully they would begin to discover—those people who did not read *Playboy*—'Well, son of a gun, this guy isn't a dirty old man.'" Of course, that was the better part of four decades ago. Since that time, the hair has grayed while the pipe and smoking jackets have stayed. Meanwhile, *Playboy* has grown into a multimedia juggernaut including a second television series, *Playboy After Dark* (again a cross between a salon and a sit-in, set in a hip, swinging bachelor pad), which was co-hosted by Barbi Benton and featured A-list guests such as Carol Burnett, Bill Cosby, George Carlin, The Grateful Dead, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Steppenwolf. Hefner had such a blast in Los Angeles that in 1971 he moved his base of operations there from Chicago, and set up shop in the now-iconic Playboy Mansion West (in West L.A.'s luxe Holmby Hills section).

Last October, N9NE Group honchos Michael Morton (whose father, Arnie, advised Hefner on the launch of his magazine as well as developing the worldwide chain of Playboy Clubs) and Scott DeGraff opened the first Playboy Club in a quarter century atop the Palms' new Fantasy Tower, as part of a never-before-attempted combination lounge/gaming facility. Apparently, Hef was pleased with the result, saying, "The Palms is really my new Playboy Mansion away from home." (It's those black Baccarat crystal chandeliers that get 'em every time!)

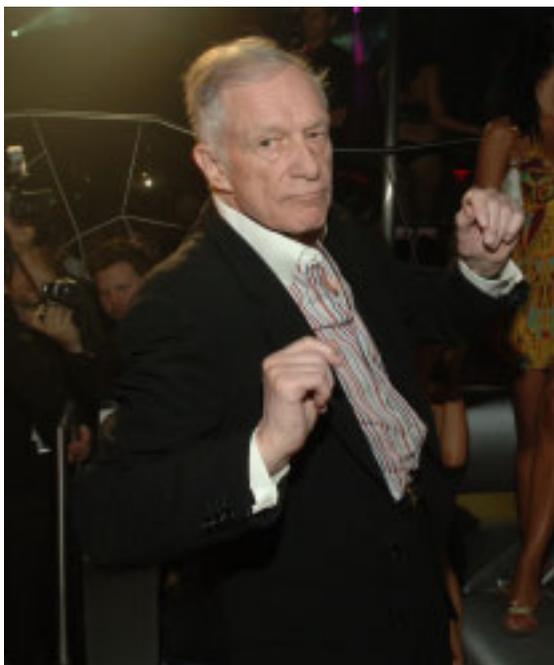
To ring in Hef's 81st birthday, his girlfriends, Holly Madison, Bridget Marquardt and Kendra Wilkinson—the stars of E!'s *The Girls Next Door*—threw the man a three-night weekend of madness, mayhem and merriment, making this the first time in 36 years that Hefner celebrated his birthday outside of the L.A. mansion. It was also the first time he made the soirée open to the public. Assuming my math's right, that's



Clockwise from top: Paris Hilton and Hugh Hefner at N9NE Steak House at the Palms for Hef's 81st birthday; Hefner with David Hasselhoff at Moon; Bridget Marquardt, Giuliana Marino and Holly Madison at the Palms' Playboy Club.

"The Palms is my new Playboy Mansion away from home."

HUGH HEFNER



Guests were given gift bags containing Playboy Club satin pajamas, mini Ketel One bottles, a can of Red Bull, condoms and Enlyten SportStrips (a supplement for athletes and partiers and pro hos everywhere).

one night for each girlfriend.

The birthday brouhaha started on Friday, March 23rd, at Moon, with its globally recognizable rabbit-head logo as the centerpiece of the dance floor. Highlight reels from *The Girls Next Door* played while specialty drinks named after each of the three girls were served. Wilkinson even took to the ones-and-twos for a special DJ set. The next day saw the luscious ladies receiving a celebrity star on the Walk of Fame at Brenden Theatre at the Palms in honor of their show's ratings, which are the highest on E!. Later that afternoon, they made their way to the Forum Shops at Caesars, where they signed autographs at the Playboy Concept Boutique.

The weekend really got kicking when Hefner and his ladies returned to the Playboy Club and Moon Saturday night to officially celebrate the 81st birthday of the man who has personified cool for nearly 50 years. Said Hefner, "Each year gets better, and I can't think of a place I'd rather celebrate my 81st." As midnight rolled around, Kendra, Holly and Bridget presented Hef with his birthday cake as dozens of Bunnies and



Clockwise from top left: The birthday boy at Moon at the Palms; Hef with Holly Madison, Bridget Marquardt and Kendra Wilkinson at Moon; Josh Henderson and Paris Hilton at the Playboy Club for Hef's birthday.

as DJs P and Greg Lopez manned the wheels of steel. Then, at the stroke of 1 (a.m., that is), the 26th floor was opened for the VIP guests, and the sounds of DJ Mark Styles were patched into the rooms, including the g-Suite, the Hot Pink Suite and the Director's Suite. Sponsoring the goings-on was Ketel One. All guests who had rooms were given gift bags containing Playboy Club satin pajamas and robes, mini Ketel One bottles, a can of Red Bull, Playboy Club condoms and Enlyten SportStrips (an electrolyte-replacement supplement for professional athletes and partiers and pro hos everywhere).

While in Vegas, Hefner and his girls snuggled up in style, tak-

ing over his eponymous 9,000-square-foot Hugh Hefner Sky Villa, which includes artwork hand-selected by the man himself, as well as a cantilevered infinity Jacuzzi and a Playboy-themed pool. You've really gotta give it up for the fella: Some folks may have game, but very few people *are* the game. Happy Birthday, Hef, and many more! ♠

Playmates were joined by hundreds of guests in singing "Happy Birthday." Sunday night wrapped up the weekend with The Big Playmate Sleepover, a first-time affair that started at 11 p.m. at Moon with 13 Playmates hosting the party. They all took a table on the dance floor and before long were boogieing above the DJ booth