

# About Town

People, Places, Preoccupations

## L.A.'s Club Twins Have a Flashy New Trick

Mark and Jonnie Houston bring a little magic to Hollywood nightlife  
By Gary Baum • Photographed by Spencer Lowell

Mark (left) and Jonnie Houston were photographed Jan. 31 at Black Rabbit Rose in Hollywood.

**M**ark and Jonnie Houston, the fraternal twin club impresarios whose vision of L.A. nightlife has become the lodestar of industry millennials (assistant and A-list alike), will debut their latest on Hollywood Boulevard on Feb. 8. Known for thematic fantasies — pre-Castro Havana at La Descarga, Parisian boudoir at Pour Vous, '80s MTV at Break Room 86 — the native Angelenos, 38, who grew up in the kitchen of their mother's Thai restaurant, now have conjured Black

Rabbit Rose. This new-school answer to the exalted if hoary Magic Castle brings to 10 the number of Houston venues, known to draw the likes of **Joaquin Phoenix**, **Robert Pattinson** and **Thom Yorke**.

"The question is always, 'How do you constantly create things that are worthy enough for people to actually get excited?'" says Mark, who with Jonnie started out investing in commercial real estate. At Black Rabbit Rose, bartenders serve complicated cocktails with a side of sleight-of-hand tricks. A classic

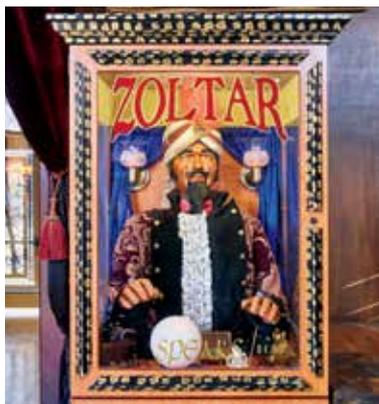
Zoltar machine is rigged for staffers to tell fortunes remotely. And in the back, a 40-seat theater has been engineered with shaking floors, false walls and trick lighting for performances (\$25 to \$35) booked by magician **Rob Zabrecky**, whose show *The Brookledge Follies* inspired **Ryan Gosling** to cast him in his directorial debut, *Lost River*. "It's amazing, the trouble they went into with this space — the details permeate every beat," says **Paul Reubens** (he and friend **David Arquette** consulted on the project).

Join the Houston brothers for a sneak peek of their new magic-themed bar at [THR.COM/VIDEO](http://THR.COM/VIDEO)

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“These days people are looking for experiences — they want to make memories,” says **Steven Soderbergh**, who in 2016 hosted a series of events at the *Houstons’ Dirty Laundry*, situated in the basement beneath *Black Rabbit Rose* in a historic apartment building, where actors including **Clara Bow** and **Stan Laurel** once lived. Adds noted burlesque performer **Dita Von Teese**, who christened *Black Rabbit Rose’s* then-unfinished theater with a New Year’s Eve party: “People aren’t showing them storyboards. You can feel that these are their hands on it and their enthusiasm when you walk into



Mark bought the vintage Zoltar machine, famous from Tom Hanks’ *Big*, at an event he was invited to by Elvira.

their spaces.” **Andrew Zabler**, CEO of the *Sydell* boutique lodging firm, who with partner **Ron Burkle** recruited the *Houstons* for *Koreatown’s Line hotel* (home of *Break Room 86*), says simply, “The word I like to use for them is ‘theatrical.’”

Next act: the rooftop terrace and bar at the forthcoming *Exposition Park soccer stadium* of the *Los Angeles Football Club*, co-owned by *Mandalay Entertainment* CEO **Peter Guber**. (The *Houstons* say they passed on a similar approach from the *Rams*.) “Peter is a partyer — great energy,” says *Jonnie*. “He knows what he wants.” As do the *Houstons*, which is why magic, which might elicit eye rolls from the self-styled savvy, is a trick they are confident they can pull off. “People who want to go to [*Houstons’*] places,” notes *Zabrecky*, “are predisposed to suspend their disbelief.” **VIR**



## How Trump Could Shake Up Santa Monica Airport War

With an agreement to close the star-friendly facility by 2029, the pro-airport faction is hoping for intervention by a higher power By Peter Kiefer

**T**hough none of the protest banners bore his name, the specter of the new president nonetheless hung over a Feb. 4 rally at the Santa Monica Airport. An agreement between the Federal Aviation Administration and the City of Santa Monica — calling for the closure of the airport by 2029 — was supposed to provide resolution, but it didn’t stop hundreds of anti-airport protesters from gathering to effectively say, “This is a bum deal.” The consent decree provides for a reduction in the length of the runway, which would cut back on jet traffic and charter operations and address a primary complaint of the anti-airport faction. It also allows for the city to select its own fixed base operators, which provide services like



Ford

refueling. But pro- and anti-airport factions are united in disgust with the deal — cut behind closed doors and announced abruptly with few specifics. “Keeping the airport open for 12 more years is wrong,” L.A.

↑ Protesters gathered at the Santa Monica Airport on Feb. 4.

Councilman **Mike Bonin**, whose district surrounds the city of Santa Monica, said to cheers at the gathering. Some activists now are hoping that President **Donald Trump**, who has made infrastructure a priority, will weigh in on the fate of the 227-acre airport, regularly used by such luminaries as **Harrison Ford** and **Angelina Jolie**. “We are pushing on the federal level to get an answer to what the Trump administration’s definitive position is on this,” says **Christian Fry**, president of the pro-airport Santa Monica Airport Association. “Donald Trump is a big user of general aviation, and I am fairly certain that at some point he has landed one of his aircraft at Santa Monica Airport. I would hope he would be a supporter.” Bonin was circumspect about potential involvement by the commander in chief. “I think there is a risk that is inherent in this 12-year timetable,” he says. “Who knows who will be president then?”

## HOLLYWOOD ICONS, BEHIND THE SCENES

Glamour  
Shots

Previously exhibited only at **Charles Finch’s Hotel du Cap** filmmakers dinners during the 2015 and 2016 Cannes festivals, “The Art of Behind the Scenes,” featuring 61 rare set photos from such iconic films as *High Society* and *Pulp Fiction* (**Harvey Weinstein** purchased a few, and **Julianne Moore** viewed one of her on the set of *The Big Lebowski*), will be seen publicly for the first time at *KP Projects Gallery* (170 S. La Brea Ave.) starting Feb. 11. **David O. Russell**, **Brett Ratner** and **Lee Daniels** will be on hand for a VIP event Feb. 21 with proceeds from the pieces (\$1,500–\$6,000) going to their educational nonprofit *Ghetto Film School*.



A 25-year-old Elizabeth Taylor on the Spain set of 1959’s *Suddenly Last Summer*.