

TIKI LIFESTYLE

Immersive, Entertaining and Addictive

By Don Logay

The term “Tiki” is fascinating. As a word alone, historically it traces back many centuries to the Southwestern Pacific Ocean, New Zealand and ancient mythology of the island’s Maori tribe that carved various forms of the first man, a god, they called “Tiki.”

As such, Mister Webster simply defines Tiki as “A wood or stone image of a Polynesian supernatural power.” Yes... and no.

In reality – and over nearly 100-years here in the U.S. – Tiki has morphed into a cultural phenomenon... ranging from a fun theme and entertaining escape to a full-blown immersive lifestyle and tantalizing subculture that is totally addictive.

Mickey and Tiki

The best way to understand the lure of Tiki, is spending a day at Disneyland. The minute you pass through the gates you’ve entered Walt’s Magic Kingdom. Cares of the outside world no longer exist... and before you know it, you’re wearing Mickey Mouse ears, donning a Disney character T-Shirt and singing along to “It’s a Small World” (which both Time magazine and the Library of Congress note has been played more than 50 million times since 1966

making it the most played song in music history).

To better understand how vast and lucrative such an immersive lifestyle can be, consider that over three million pairs of Mickey Mouse ears are sold annually at Disney World... and (proving this Disney stuff is not just for kids) another \$3 billion worth of licensed Mickey Mouse goods are sold every year to adults and outside of Disney properties. Keep that in mind the next time you see a 65-year old wearing a Mickey Mouse shirt at Walmart.

And so it is, as well, with the surprising and burgeoning world of Tiki Culture. It too is instantly immersive, thoroughly entertaining and equally addictive.

Anatomy of the Tiki Lifestyle

For most, it begins with visits to a local Tiki-themed bar and/or restaurant. Today, every city (big or small) has one, maybe two or even more. Here in Las Vegas, we have famed tourist stops – like the The Golden Tiki and Frankie’s Tiki Room – as well as popular local spots like Tiki Di Amore and the Red Dwarf.

Each has its own distinct character: The Golden Tiki is a blast-a-minute fun-filled experience of lavish

tropical drinks and live entertainment in a colorful Pop-Polynesian setting... while Frankie’s Tiki Room is a darker, quieter and more authentic vintage Tiki vibe. Both are great, equally popular and 24-hour Vegas. The local spots are gaining in notoriety and popularity as well.

While each of these famed Vegas locations are quite different, like hundreds of other Tiki-themed bars and restaurants all over the U.S., they are similar in that they are “individual” within a given spectrum of eclectic Tiki décor and mysterious tropical atmosphere that traces back nearly 100-years to a talented visionary named Ernest Raymond Gantt.

The Beachcomber and the Trader

Known as the “founding Father” of Tiki culture, Ernest Gantt envisioned and opened the first quintessential Tiki bar – Don the Beachcomber – when prohibition ended in 1933.

Located at 1722 North McFadden Place in Hollywood, as his place became successful, Gantt himself became known as “Don the Beachcomber” and later legally changed his name to Donn Beach.

Shortly afterward, a second trend-setter named Victor Jules Bergeron, Jr. opened a similarly-themed

competitive Polynesian style bar and restaurant in Oakland, California – called Trader Vic’s – and in the years that followed, these two dueling pioneers continued designing and refining wonderful island atmospheres, creating proprietary classic tropical drinks and opening nationwide chains of namesake Tiki bars and restaurants that reigned for decades... and that, in turn, launched the vast Tiki culture we know and enjoy today. Vast you say? Yep... read on.

The Tiki Subculture

Nearly 100-years later, the immersive and entertaining aspects of all things Tiki comes into play... and underscores the word “addictive.”

Going back to one’s first visit (or visits) to a cool Tiki bar and restaurant, the fun atmosphere and sense of escapism – fueled with awesome custom tropical drinks and Polynesian style fare – generally triggers a desire for more... and the “more” leads to return visits, often with friends, and the wearing of Hawaiian shirts, Muu-Muus and (not long afterward) adding leis and flowers in the hair to the mix. And so it goes.

A key element in one’s introduction to all-things-Tiki are the luscious tropical drinks designed and served

Adam Rains, Chief Mixologist at The Golden Tiki in Las Vegas, creates deliciously layered custom Tiki drinks served with showmanship.



Photo courtesy The Golden Tiki

up by the skilled individuals behind the bar. One such person is, Adam Rains, Chief Mixologist and the “face” of The Golden Tiki in Las Vegas.

“Since 2015, The Golden Tiki has been a whimsical gathering place for all types of people,” notes Adam Rains, “and I strive to enhance their visit to our world of pirates, shrunken heads and animated parrots with beautifully blended custom Tiki drinks, that are deliciously layered, artfully complex and served with a dash showmanship... which often means flaming.”

“Today, there is definitely a Tiki Renaissance,” he adds, “and we’re right in there.”

Out and About – and at Home

The “Tiki Renaissance” Adam Rains alludes to is much larger than one might think. For example, there are a number of popular online sites that just chronicle and report on all things relating to the Tiki lifestyle. One such well known blog is “Tiki With Ray” hosted by Ray Wyland.

“When I started I had no idea how big the Tiki culture was... I assumed there might be a handful of home Tiki bars in various cities across the country. I was pleasantly surprised to find there was so much more.” He states, “So far, I’ve featured over 100 amazing home Tiki bars and that number is still climbing! I’m finding people everywhere living the Tiki lifestyle... at local Tiki bars and restaurants, in Tiki clubs and gatherings... collecting Tiki art and mugs... and dressing up in their best Aloha wear.”

Ray Wyland observes, “There are three things I’ve noticed in recent years... First, there are more and more beautiful Tiki bars and restaurants opening everywhere, border-to-border and coast-to-coast... Second, the quality of today’s drinks have gone from simple Mai-Tai’s to an incredible array of beautifully crafted Tropical cocktails with custom blends of quality liquors... and Third, there is a proliferation of individual home Tiki bars that are truly amazing.”

“The Tiki culture in America is growing,” he adds, “and I’m proud to be part of it!”

There are three outstanding home Tiki bars located here in Las Vegas that Ray recently featured... and they represent the types most commonly found.



In, Out and Holy Cow!

The first is “indoor” and generally tucked into a corner or popular focal spot for entertaining. It can be a simple DIY set-up with a few stools and some island décor... or a lavish pro-designed beautiful and expansive Tiki environment that often spills into an adjacent room (or two) like the “Aristocrat Tiki Lounge and Hash Bar” seen in the home of Perry Hitechew.

Second is an “outdoor” Tiki environment located on a patio or deck and/or as a self-contained free-standing Tiki “Hut” like the fascinating “Smoking Monkey Tiki Lounge” behind the home of Lola and Jimmy Nielsen. There one finds both a large Tiki bar on the patio and nearby, a fully decked-out lavish Tiki “room” – filled with artwork and eclectic treasures – that began as simple pre-fab Tuff Shed.

Third is an “indoor/outdoor” pervasive Tiki environment that extends floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall in every room and dominates virtually every nook and cranny in one’s home – as seen in the fully-themed residence of Angela and Michael Klingenmeir... complete with a cozy indoor



The Indoor “Aristocrat Lounge and Hash Bar” in the Home of Perry Hitechew, features a warm and inviting floor-to-ceiling Tiki theme and extends to an adjacent area for relaxing and entertaining. Photos courtesy Billy Crud



The outdoor “Smoking Monkey Tiki Lounge” behind the home of Lola and Jimmy Nielsen is a fully-decked out Tiki room, entertainment-ready and filled with eclectic treasures, that began as a simple pre-fab Tuff Shed. Photos courtesy Jimmy Nielsen.





The lavish indoor/outdoor Tiki environment in the home of Angela and Michael Klingenmeir extends floor-to-ceiling and wall-to-wall in every room and includes a cozy “Enchanted Klinki Room” with adjacent seating cove inside and an expansive pro-built Tiki bar outside.

Photos courtesy Angela Klingenmeir



“Enchanted Klinki Room” (a tribute to Disney’s Enchanted Tiki Room) and a pro-designed, custom-built expansive outdoor Tiki bar facing the pool.

To see write-ups on these three outstanding Las Vegas home Tiki bars, visit www.tikiwithray.com and select: Home Tiki Bar Spotlights #100 Perry’s Aristocrat Lounge and Hash Bar, #99 The Smoking Monkey Lounge and #85 Enchanted Klinki Room.

But wait... There’s More!

You’ll find today’s Tiki culture extends far beyond just the realm of commercial Tiki bars, enticing Polynesian-themed restaurants and lavish home Tiki bars. Take a peek and you’ll find there is also a vast array of intriguing Tiki products and supplies offered online and in dedicated specialty shops, as well as a host of skilled professionals that will design, build and create the Tiki environment of your dreams.

There are even a handful of professional Tiki “carvers” who specialize in recreating authentic Tiki images and designs in many forms. One such talented wood carver is located here in Las Vegas... and Billy Crud (yes Crud) has gained notoriety for his many beautiful works of art seen in both Frankie’s Tiki Room, The Golden Tiki and home Tiki bars all throughout Las Vegas... including two of those featured by Tiki With Ray.



Skilled local wood carver, Billy Crud (yes Crud), has nearly 20-years experience creating Maori inspired works of art seen in many Las Vegas Tiki bars.

Photo courtesy of Billy Crud

Billy Crud got this nickname many years ago from a 1980’s TV Beetlejuice cartoon featuring a surly bovine named “Bully the Crud.” As Billy is also a bit brash and loveably outspoken, the name stuck... and today, owners of his prized work might be overheard to say, “This Maori inspired masterpiece was artfully carved by the one-and-only Billy Crud... yes Crud.”

Take it From Me

By sheer coincidence, today is Donn Beach’s Birthday and many Tiki establishments are offering his famous “Zombie” drink created back in 1933. The Zombie is a challenging tropical drink that combines four types of premium rum with a proprietary blend of fresh juices, cinnamon syrup and grenadine into a sneaky stealth cocktail that he cleverly offered to patrons with a strict two-per-person limit (for one’s own safety)... and the legend of his infamous trademark creation continues on to this day.

Author’s outdoor home Tiki bar, on a 12’ x 26’ wood deck, is a never-ending work in progress... and there’s always time to pause for a cool tropical drink with friends. Photo courtesy Don Logay.

So do be forewarned, the Tiki lifestyle is indeed immersive, entertaining and addictive... and I am living proof.

I’m about to put on my favorite Tommy Bahama Hawaiian shirt and head over to The Golden Tiki for a Zombie (or two) in honor of Don the Beachcomber’s birthday. I’m also enclosing a photo of my outdoor home Tiki bar... yep, I’ve got one too.

So, as you can see, the Tiki lifestyle is... well, you know. Just beware – and only check it out if you’re up for some fun and adventure.

Don Logay is an award-winning journalist and former Editor-in-Chief of three national magazines. Today he writes luxury lifestyle articles for numerous publications. He can be reached at (949) 240-4444 or press@donlogay.com.

