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STEPHEN LIEBERMAN, SJ LIGHTING

As a lighting designer, Stephen Lieberman, owner of SJ Lighting in Agoura Hills, CA, has consistently struck a balance that many aspire to, but few actually seem to achieve. His artful creations lend an unmistakable sense of energy and excitement to every space, yet at the same time they remain subtly in the background, accentuating the lines of a structure without interfering with its original design. Lieberman performs an equally impressive juggling act when “the lights go out,” balancing the demands of being a busy, internationally acclaimed LD with those of his personal life. In this column, Lieberman, who’s worked on some of the hottest clubs in the world like Liv at Miami’s Fontainebleau and Marquee at the Cosmopolitan in Las Vegas, talks about the basics like family-time, vacations and Coors in “regular brown cans” that make life tick.



In a recent survey we saw of the world’s top ten nightclubs, two of them were venues where you designed the lighting. You’ve accomplished so much at such a relatively young age; it seems like you were born to be a lighting designer – did you always want to be in the lighting business?

“I’m in the lighting business? Just kidding! Actually, I was always drawn to lighting, especially the idea of lighting clubs and being able to use the tools in my work chest along with my vision to create something exciting. My 1st job in a nightclub was when I was 15 years old; I’ve always been fascinated by that world. So, 23 years later, here I am still here doing it and appreciating every minute of it. I’ve been very fortunate do to something I love.”

Did you ever consider another career? What would you have done if you weren’t an LD?

“At the end of my college career, I took the LSAT’s and was applying to law school. I’m not sure if I ever would have gone through with the whole law thing. At the time, I wasn’t really sure about what to do for a career. My other plan was to open a club in NYC – clearly – neither one of those things happened!”

So what was your early influence as far as lighting is concerned? Was there an early lighting application that you saw that really inspired you?

“As far as nightclubs go - I think Webster Hall was the first time I really took notice of a lighting system and how all of the cerebral concepts that go into a great lighting design were applied in the real world. Howard Ungerleider designed the venue. A rather large number of different fixtures were used along with some interesting truss. I won’t even try to recite the different fixtures by name, because I’m sure I’ll leave something out. It was a long time ago, but I can still picture it vividly. That was inspirational.”

You didn’t have any family in the lighting industry or anything like that?

“No, my father was in the telecom business; and my mother stayed home and took care of the kids.”

Where were you born?

“That’s an interesting story. I was born in Springfield, Illinois. I have to say that I am the only one in my immediate family that was born outside of New York. My parents were in Springfield on business – and out I popped! But, I’m really a native New Yorker, though I live in the LA area now.”

Are you a New York sports fan?

“Yes. I enjoy rooting for the Giants, Mets, Islanders, and Knicks. But I’ve been living in LA for 10 years, and I’m trying to give my kids their own home team spirit. So, I’m now also a fan of the LA Lakers, LA Dodgers, and LA Kings.”

You’re known for having a sense of humor; what was the last joke, comedy or generally funny thing that really made you laugh out loud?

"I just watched "super-bad" last night (again) – immature humor never gets old for me!"

On a more serious note, if you could change anything in the world right now what would it be?

"We'll save that one for when you have more space. We'll title that one "the opinions of Stephen Lieberman."

What do you spend most of your time doing when you aren't working?

"I spend time with my wife and kids."

How do you relax after a stressful work day?

"I'll let you know when I figure that out."

Do you have a favorite automobile? Restaurant? Airline? Breakfast? Dinner? Dessert? Brand of liquor or beer? "BMW for the automobile and Matsuhisa for the restaurant. I really wouldn't call it a, favorite airline; it's more like the preferred airline, and that would be American. As far as dinner, it's Steak and/or Sushi. The best desert is Carvel Ice Cream cake with the chocolate crunchies. My favorite alcoholic beverages are Makers Mark bourbon, Stoli vodka and Coors beer – but it must be in a regular brown can."

What are your best things to do or destinations to go to when you're on vacation?

"I like hanging out on the beach, eating, boating and skiing."

What are the best and worst things about traveling for you?

"When it comes to traveling for work, I'm not sure what the best part is. I would always prefer to be closer to home. On the other hand, traveling for pleasure – that's a whole other story."