



HOW THE

# SUNSET TOWER

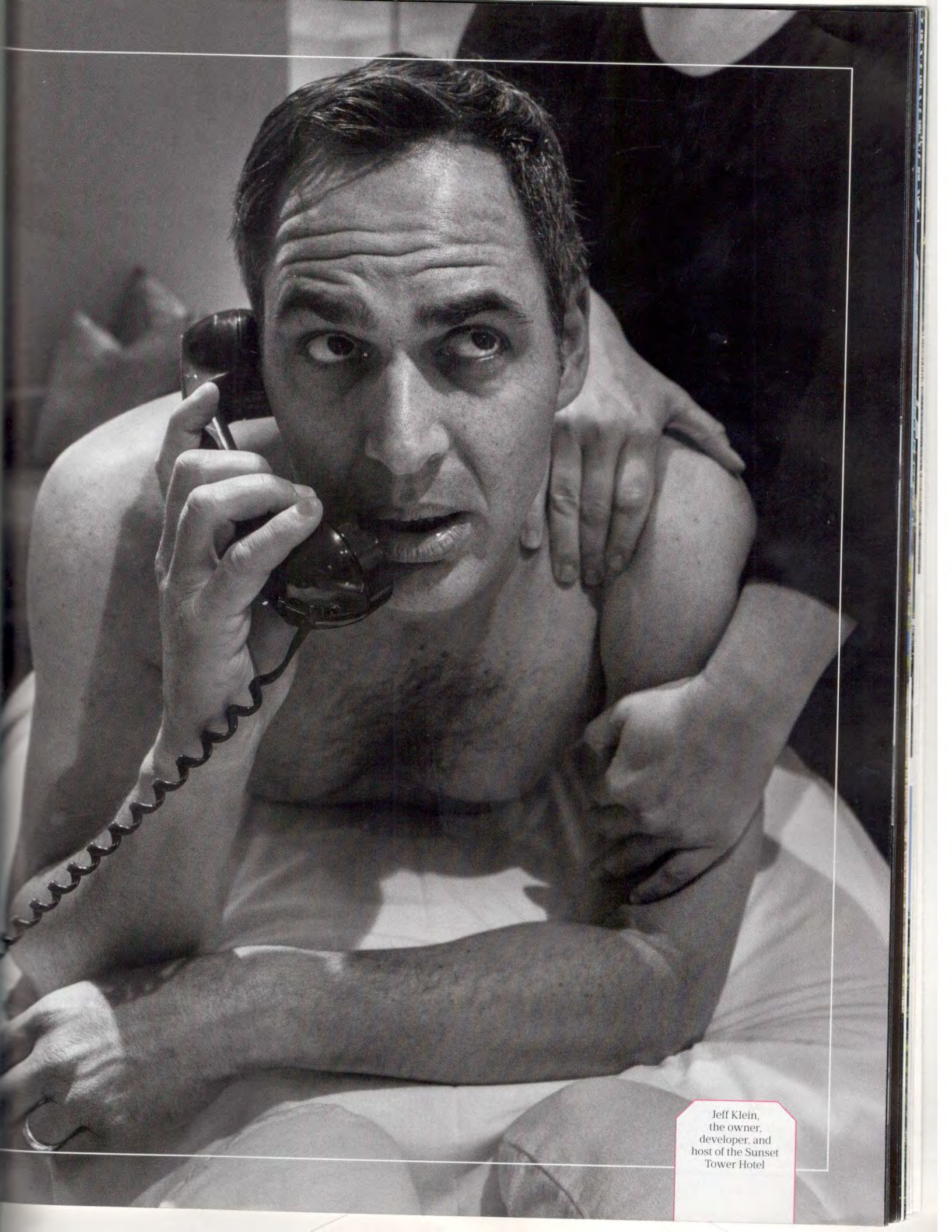
*Got It... Right*

STARRING

*Jeff Klein*

A PORTFOLIO BY  
LARRY FINK





Jeff Klein,  
the owner,  
developer, and  
host of the Sunset  
Tower Hotel



I want to be up front about two things regarding the story you are about to read. ❶ DEPARTURES is not in the habit of doing anniversary tributes. We think they're tacky and...who cares? That said, the Sunset Tower Hotel turned ten this year. ❷ Jeff Klein is a contributing editor. Now that all of that is out of the way...

**B**ack in 2007, DEPARTURES was preparing a story on the just-recently opened Sunset Tower Hotel, on Sunset Boulevard, in Los Angeles. It was developed by one Jeffrey Klein and our headline was HOW THE SUNSET TOWER GOT ITS COOL. I myself had gotten to know Klein from the City Club Hotel, a nice little 65-room boutique property across from my office, in Manhattan. Klein, in a bold move for a 29-year-old rookie hotelier, had somehow convinced Daniel Boulud to open his first Midtown restaurant, DB Bistro, off the lobby. Eight years later, on the day of photographing Jeff, the Sunset Tower, and Catherine Deneuve, who was then in residence, I got a call from Klein. He wasn't exactly hysterical...but...let's put it this way, he was breathlessly concerned. "Your photographer is here and she's posing naked in the penthouse suite," he said. "She was supposed to be shooting Bill Murray for the story, but her assistant is taking pictures of her buck naked." The point? The early years of the Sunset Tower were always Risky Business. (By the way, we never ran the pictures of Murray or the photographer, who it turned out was "experimenting" with an art project.)

The funny thing is, says Klein, the 45-year-old owner, developer, host, and grand Poo-Bah of the Sunset Tower, "everyone thought it was cool, but I'm not sure they actually believed it would ever work." Some 11 years, many investors and dollars later, the question is, How did cool morph into successful into iconic?

Could it have been that Klein, a New Yorker raised on Park Avenue by parents who collected art, had certain standards? He once said "no way" to Lindsay Lohan, in the middle of her DWI days of court-ordered appearances, who had asked to be seated for dinner; he flat out told Kim Kardashian that there was no room at his inn. ("Can you believe I did that? In all honesty, it was when she was married to that disgusting first husband. I loooooove Kanye. He was just here last night.")

In L.A., where the power table rules, how did Klein manage to power not only the tables but also the bedrooms, lobby, even the teensy-weensy swimming pool? He was obviously smart about attracting the right movers (producer Brian Grazer) and shakers (Jennifer Aniston, "she's a doll"), designing the proper decor (designer Paul Fortune), and keeping things small (there are only 81 rooms) and immaculately managed (most-wanted maître d' Dimitri Dimitrov was hired at the suggestion of Tom Ford and Mitch Glazer). "I was always obsessed with those sort of vague, intangible 'feelings' that give a place its vibe, so to speak," says Klein, who grew up with severe dyslexia. "I couldn't

grasp basic things that other kids seemed to learn quite easily; I cycled through a series of schools and never felt quite like I belonged academically. But I did know how to make and keep friends and had an uncanny ability to whip up a fun, sophisticated atmosphere, which, I would later see, were actually attributes essential for someone in the hotel business."

In 1999, two investors offered Klein a partnership in the City Club Hotel, on West 44th Street—if he would agree to be the general manager. "Hotels were in my blood," he says. "I knew it. I remember when my family went to Rome one summer, we were to visit the private papal chambers. I opted to check out a couple of hotels I had read about. I was 16 years old!" The City Club went on to become a big success, and when the Sunset Tower became available, in 2004, Klein and a partner each took 25 percent; the remaining 50 percent went to investors. The early days were tough. "The hotel was half full and rooms could be had at \$250 a night," says Klein. "The Tower Bar would be lucky to get 30 covers." These days, the average occupancy is 93 percent at \$450 a night, and the Tower Bar does 250 covers a night. The penthouse suite, where Greta Garbo used to decamp, is typical of the hotel's still-in-demand glamour. George and Amal Clooney had stayed there the night before Klein and I talked.

An \$80 million offer last year for the property Klein had bought for \$18 million fell through at the last minute because Klein himself refused to manage it. When that deal collapsed, he quickly mobilized, found new investors, kept his interest in the hotel, and now has the money and the vision for expansion.

Next up is the members-only San Vicente club-cum-hideaway, a former clothing-optional gay hotel in West Hollywood that Klein describes as a hidden acre of modest 19th-century bungalows clustered around a tangle of gardens and a swimming pool. His inspiration might have been the nearby Soho House, but his goal, he says, is not to replicate but to create a smaller, more personalized experience, "with flawless old-world service and atmosphere that's elegant and inviting, a community bound by common friends and interests."

For all that he's grateful for ("I was born into a life of privilege"), he insists that he was never spoiled. "My parents were determined to teach me the value of hard work. The summer I turned 16, my father, who owned a pest-control company, made me get up at 3:30 every morning and exterminate homes and offices. I may have known how to have a good time—and make that for others, as well—but, believe me, I was never some dippy socialite."

—R.D.S.

At the Sunset Tower, the small pool does not detract from the hip glamour that permeates the hotel—whether it be at the Tower Bar for drinks or the Terrace lounge for a sundae. Jeff Klein makes sure of it, inspecting a suite where Calvin Klein will be staying, and welcoming guests with Dimitri Dimitrov, the maître d'hôtel, bottom right.













Sunbathing by the pool and socializing at the Terrace lounge are relaxing pastimes at the hotel, where people can see and be seen—or not.