



The Conga Room

It cost \$34 million to construct the museum. AEG committed financial support for 10 years, but Santelli and his team have complete autonomy when it comes to exhibitions and artists. He anticipates educational outreach, including collaborations with USC, Occidental College and FIDM.

Brad Gluckstein founded The Conga Room in 1998 on LA's Miracle Mile, partnering with high-profile celebrities such as Jimmy Smits, Jennifer Lopez, Sheila E. and Paul Rodriguez. Gluckstein closed The Conga Room in 2006 with an eye toward L.A. Live, which he considers to be "Times Square West." He retained

“THEY’RE INTRODUCING TECHNOLOGIES HERE THEY DON’T HAVE ANY PLACE ELSE.” — Brad Gluckstein

his original partners and added basketball star Baron Davis of the Clippers, singer-producer will.i.am and actor Amaury Nolasco (*Prison Break*), who was a bartender at the old Conga Room.

The 15,000-square-foot space acts a Latin-flavored performance space, dance hall, event space and restaurant, depending on the night. The new incarnation debuted on December 10, featuring an electric performance by will.i.am and The Conga Room All-Stars,

headed by Grammy winner Oscar Hernandez.

The venue's design is the result of collaboration between contemporary architect Hagy Belzberg and Sergio Arau, who is best known for his Mexican pop art. A honey-colored butterfly pattern backs the east bar and Cuban-American artist Jorge Pardo, who has shown at LACMA and The Guggenheim, crafted the yellow Papaya Bar, which is meant to resemble a cracked-open papaya. A flower-petal ceiling is backed by sound-dampening panels. Arau's murals depict a flying luchador and a showgirl inspired by '60s era Raquel Welch. Boca — the Pan-Latin restaurant with executive chef Alex Garcia — features two walls of soundproof glass, which allow diners to be part of the excitement and still have a separate experience.

When it comes to programming, every night of the week is geared toward a different experience. On Thursdays, The Conga Room All-Stars deliver tropical, salsa and merengue. Friday nights, expect DJs, percussion and video imagery. It's a dance party on Saturday, with an infusion of Latin and American music. There's even a Mariachi brunch on Sundays. "I've been folklore dancing in Cuba, salsa in Cali, Colombia, merengue in the Dominican Republic," says Gluckstein. "I've just always loved the culture. It's a very rich, a very familial culture."

Gluckstein takes pride in giving back to the community, reflected in CongaKids, a nonprofit that brings music education and live performances to LAUSD children. The Conga Room will also produce public events in Nokia Plaza to commemorate Cinco de Mayo and Mexican Independence Day.

By the end of 2009's first quarter, two state-of-the-art ESPN studios will generate West Coast broadcasts of programs like Sports Center. "It is extremely unique, what ESPN is going to be doing here," says Leiweke. "This is a corporate headquarters for them. They're going to have somewhere between 300 and 400 people they're going to move in to this new corporate headquarters. They're introducing technologies here they don't have any place else."

L.A. Live's final cultural cog will turn in early 2010 with the addition of a 14-screen Regal Cineplex. An 800-seat theater will accommodate big-ticket movie premieres.

Leiweke, who is justifiably excited about L.A. Live's prospects, asks, "Where else do you have 4 million people that come in and out of STAPLES Center every year? Where else do you have roughly another 4 to 5 million people that you'll have at the Convention Center every year?"

Club NOKIA | 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Ste. A335, Los Angeles | 213.765.7000 | www.clubnokia.com

The Conga Room | 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Ste. A160 & A260, Los Angeles | 213.749.0445 | www.congaroom.com

GRAMMY Museum | 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Ste. A245, Los Angeles | 213.765.6800 | www.grammymuseum.org

NOKIA Theatre | 777 Chick Hearn Court, Los Angeles | 213.763.6000 | www.nokiatheatrelive.com