

NITESIDE

Shedding light on life after dark

NiteTalk: Big Time Design Mind Callin Fortis & Crobar Worldwide

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Mario Alphonso

In a town with more clubs per capita than any place else on earth, it's more and more difficult for a venue to stand out. That's what made Crobar and then Cameo so appealing. The mix of whim and wit had not been seen since the days of Lapidus, and both venues remain legendary staples of what it means to truly do South Beach. The design mind behind the massive creations was one Callin Fortis, head of his own Big Time Design, and Ken Smith, co-owner of Crobar Worldwide. Fortis's latest great creation is the B Bar at The Betsy and Crobar's teamed with WMC for a pair of official pool parties destined to live in

infamy. Niteside caught up with the keen cat on the eve of even more stunning bedlam.

You're the fine mind behind Big Time Design, can you please give us a brief overview about the company and what it does?

Bigtime Design began in **Chicago** in 1999 after a grueling design school battle with kids a decade behind me. My vision as then a thirtysomething design and architecture ball of creative energy was to create a truly collaborative studio reminiscent of the famed masters who really created a conduit with which fresh new ideas, techniques in both design and manufacturing could find a home in a truly unique creative space. Enter, Bigtime Design.

One of BTB's latest projects is the subterranean swing spot B Bar at The Betsy, which has a certain retro-tomorrow feel about it. Was there a single line or theme behind the design? I have been blessed by great spaces. By that I mean I typically work on large if not huge canvases. Bigger moves hide little mistakes. This space was, shall we say, size-challenged. It began as an unusable space in a basement of a historic hotel on Ocean Drive. The first magic move was to create the illusion that you were in a grand space yet small, secret and subtly alluring. The big idea here was the ceiling treatment, which has turned out to be quite a unique feature in that it not only accomplished its goal of soaring volume overhead but it envelopes you in an ethereal fashion delicately underfoot.

What about your designs in general? Is there a consistent theme or idea from which they all spring? Absolutely. I live by this axiom: It is the big things that create the impression and the small things that create the memory. I am of German descent and with that comes a little thing called obsession to detail. There is a social story behind all my design efforts. If I can't tell a story, I don't begin to write. The muse for Betsy was a sultry post modern whip. She could recognize a fine single-malt and beat you at checkers and recite the last paragraph from "Catcher." My kind of gal.

Which designers/architects do you find most inspiring and why? I am forever a student of architecture and design, though I switch up what's on my nightstand more frequently than not. Lately, Zaha Hadid for her experiments with spatial quality in addition to a certain contained whimsy that I find creates a unique tension in all of her work. And **Frank Gehry**. Though obvious yet not present in my work other than deconstructive features when costs promote it, I remain fascinated by deconstructivism -- also known as DeCon Architecture. I am inspired by his legacy and his ability to bend socio-political norms as supplely as the steel with which it is formed.

