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Play it Again, Sam

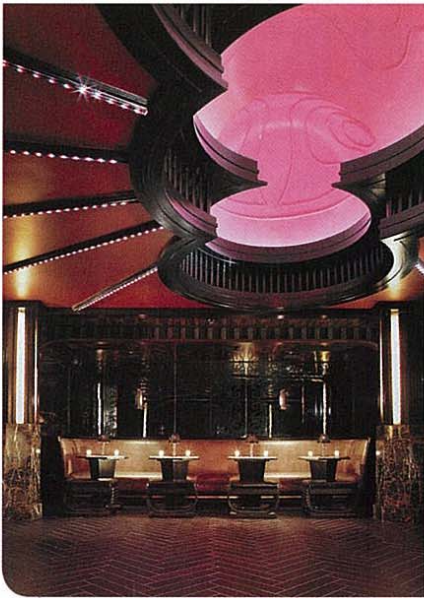
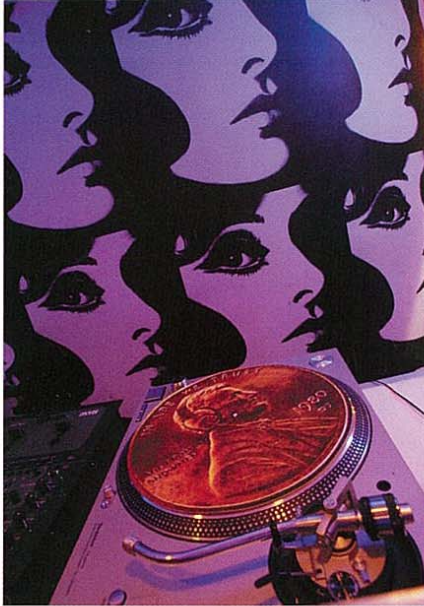
**Sam Nazarian
expands his
nascent SBE
empire from clubs
to projects with
grown-up appeal**

Any self-respecting young clubgoer in Los Angeles has spent time in a Sam Nazarian hotspot. In rapid succession since 2002, the New York-educated Iranian entrepreneur opened Hyde, Area, S Bar, and Foxtail. Though owned by Nazarian (as opposed to a consortium of investors), they're under the aegis of SBE. That's the multifaceted company, encompassing hospitality, film production, real estate development, and event production that he founded in 2002 under the name *Samy Boy Entertainment*. Not bad for a 27-year-old. Now 33, Nazarian's been upping his hospitality ante with projects for a slightly older set. "I'm using myself as a demographic," he says.

That self is one design-savvy businessman. He's hitched his star to Philippe Starck, giving the Frenchman a 15-year exclusive contract. But why go so establishment? "I first reached out to ➤



From top: The founder of SBE. The Philippe Starck-designed Katsuya restaurant in Glendale, California.



From top: The DJ station at Area, a club by Beau Robb in Los Angeles. Franklin Studios's Foxtail, which opened in March in L.A. Starck's S Bar adjoins another Katsuya, this one in Hollywood. The Japanese restaurant's hemlock veneers create a bento-box effect.

Philippe when I was 26," Nazarian counters. "He was awe-inspiring to me. His was the only name we went after." Seems like it's win-win for both. The designer gave instant credibility to a small company. Starck, in turn, holds a financial stake in the shared projects, which so far tally six.

The first of the Starck-designed SBE projects is the three-outpost chain of Katsuya upscale Japanese restaurants. Located in Brentwood, Hollywood, and Glendale, they are perennially hopping, their design incorporating pale wood, white-lacquered furniture, and geisha supergraphics. Most recently, SBE's formerly hip club Privilege has been transformed into a Starckian wonderland of a restaurant called XIV. A study in minimalism on the outside, only a huge topiary logo hints at the opulent interior, a witty mix of exaggerated Louis XIV and my-other-residence-is-a-chateau influences, inspired by the Hot el Costes in Paris.

These projects come as prologue to SBE's main event, SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills. The three-year, \$230 million renovation of Le M ridien has just opened and is green-minded: Programs are in place for energy conservation, recycling, and locavore produce. "After staying at places like Chateau Marmont, I made sure we have the same amenities," Nazarian continues. But at SLS—which is an acronym for almost anything, Soft Like Silk, Sam Loves Starck, etc.—things are big: The spa is 5,000 square feet, the Tecnogym-equipped fitness center 2,500 square feet. Even the 300 guest rooms average 450 square feet, outfitted with Starck's custom furniture: tufted-leather window seats, teacup-shape stools, lush faux-fur throws. ➤





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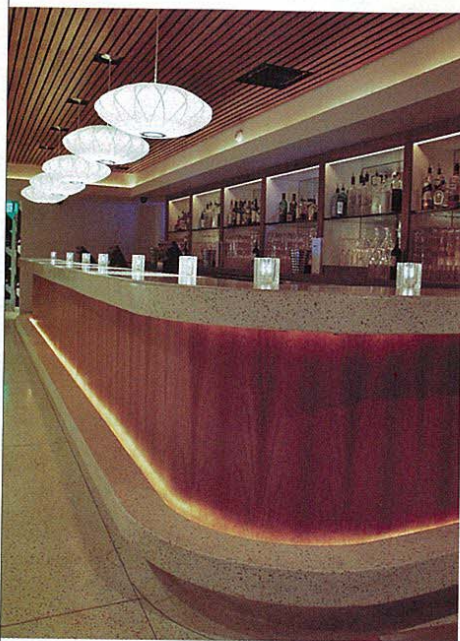
Circle 49

movershaker

Naturally, Nazarian goes large on entertainment aspects, too. He's lined up stellar alliances for the Bazaar, the lobby's dining-retail souk. Spain's top chef, José Andrés, piques the palette with a glorified food court of cross-cultural tastes. Murray Moss's namesake emporium, the second in L.A., offers real shopping in a store without walls; items are in display cases right next to the bar area. "Why can't a gift shop be part of the dining experience," Nazarian asks. "I'm questioning fundamental concepts."

When guests opt for off-site nightlife, SLS will provide luxury transport via a Maybach or Bentley. "The idea is to use L.A. as a playground." Next to sport the SBE label will be Miami Beach's Ritz Plaza and the Sahara Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, slated for 2010 and 2012 completions, respectively.

Then there's L.A.'s true bread and butter, the movies. Through Element Films, SBE functions like a mini studio handling production, financing, advertising, and distribution. Soon to be released under Element are *Still Waiting* and *Kill Theory*, and talk is underway with Kevin Costner for a *Mr. Brooks* follow-up. Perhaps a Golden Globe nod will be the next feather in Nazarian's cap. —*Eddie Cohen*



From top: George Nelson pendant fixtures over the bar at Area, which opened in 2006. **Below:** A guest room at Starck's SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills.

