

(The other) Paris Las Vegas



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We're hanging around Nico Santucci's place with his 12-week-old African serval, Monster, waiting for former All-Star pitcher Chuck Finley to drop in. A European television crew is roaming the grounds, taping a weekend show on Santucci, a bachelor entrepreneur, and his unusual home, for a weekend show about the opulent lives of the world's wealthy.

Taping is common here, especially by Europeans. VH1's *Supergroup* filmed in the home a few years ago, hosting Ted Nugent, Sebastian Bach, Scott Ian, Jason Bonham and Evan Seinfeld for eight weeks. In the past month alone, half a dozen film crews have trekked to this little villa off Jones and Desert Inn for show tapings and photo shoots. On March 14, Santucci says, a crew will shoot the home for Real Housewife of New Jersey Danielle Staub's new show, *Social*.

Finley arrives and the cameraman is at the ready, which means the rest of us need to hide—among the embellished fireplaces, stocked bars, ornate moldings and cherub-heavy murals that cover the walls and ceilings. We've been dodging the camera all afternoon, ducking into

passageways, crossing corridors and landing in darkened nooks of this 14,500-square-foot home, further accelerating the idea that maybe, just maybe, we're in a real life episode of *Scooby Doo*, lost in a manse on a Saturday.

Finley comes and goes. The taping and interviews ensue. With Monster roaming freely, doors must be latched. The cat is, after all, worth as much as a BMW and capable of wandering at high speed.

Santucci likens Monster's presence to watching a *National Geographic* episode every day. I s'pose, however, that life is like a lot of un-Vegasy things when you're living in a two-story brick mansion designed to look like a 17th century Versailles castle. Accented with fountains, statuary, a *porte-cochere*, refurbished antique furniture and a private nightclub complete with custom-built chopper and rock memorabilia, Santucci's Parisian Palace is even rumored to have a treasure built into its eaves. Or maybe it's quintessentially Las Vegas in its being out of place, out of context with its environment.

The home, built in the 1980s by developer William Gohres for his wife, Millie, was originally named Villa de Reve, "Our Dream Home." The millionaires made their fortune in California real estate before moving to Las Vegas, where they developed Rancho del Norte in North Las Vegas. The Gohreses donated the home to their charity, the Gohres-Hohmann Foundation, and lent it out for events, but eventually it sat empty.

The house was foreclosed on in 2005, and Santucci, who had a place down the street, was curious about the unusual find. He'd been eyeing it for some time, wondering how many millions it might sell for. When it hit the market, he bought the neglected house from the bank for \$2.8 million, changing it from a dark European manor to a stylish rock-star getaway and private retreat for celebrity friends wanting to relax in the extravagant sitting rooms, soak in the Indonesian salt pool, play the piano in the rotunda or belly up to the bar while listening to piped-in music. The home's seven bedrooms include ostentatious suites, with floor-to-ceiling murals of countrysides and flowing curtains that were painted by Las Vegas artist Tom Bisesti, originally commissioned by the Gohreses to do the Renaissance-style works, then summoned again by Santucci for retouching.

Santucci refers to the Parisian Palace as his trophy home, a timeless way to showcase interesting possibilities in design. Like everything else he owns and collects, he reworked the original to suit his taste, leaving only one room untouched: a Vegas-themed bedroom with Strip hotels painted on the walls. He's been building furniture since childhood, and started fixing up and reselling old taxis at age 14, which helped when he began converting high-end cars into limousines for his limo service in Los Angeles. He's one of many self-made entrepreneurial types who settle into Las Vegas, where anything can happen.

There was no college for Santucci, whose dad, a “gangster” in Chicago, wanted him to roll up his sleeves and make it his own way. And he hasn’t done so badly. He owns Capo’s Italian Cuisine, with locations on Sahara and Tropicana, and co-owns the Black Door Bar and Grill on Paradise with friend and business partner, rocker Dave Navarro.

Santucci moved to Las Vegas in 2000, and settled his mom into Spanish Trails. She cried, he says, the first time she walked into his Parisian Palace. It was, after all, a long way from “the streets.” His fondest memory in the home: the day he bought the place and imagined what it could be, even in its tattered state.

A fan of midcentury design, particularly Eames’ works, Santucci realizes that some balk at the Parisian Palace, but he shrugs it off. This is his baby, he remembers what it looked like before he bought it (a little zany), and his former Beverly Hills mansion with mid-mod-style furniture that he created himself is on his designer’s resume. His other home, the Zen Mansion, a toned-down, meditative space across town, better suits his tastes, but he and Monster still spend 30 percent of their time at the Palace, a break from the Tuscan-designed beige that dominates parts of the Valley.

Monster bounds up the stairs amid the foyer’s gold-leafed banisters, multiple chandeliers and other sculpted embellishments—even a painted castle on the ceiling. You’d never know this was Las Vegas. The sun breaks into a soft, fragmented light through the lead crystalline windows. The dark-and-carpeted nightclub has only dim spotlights and disco balls. If you wander through, then down past the bowling lane (an interesting blue-collar touch in a multimillion-dollar home), you’ll connect with the small three-bedroom house in which the Gohreses lived while building their dream home. Also dark, it serves as the staff quarters and stripper room, complete with carved mahogany walls, a stamped-tin ceiling and sofas placed on each side of the raised lit platform, from which the brass pole juts.

The neighborhood makes the home seem most unusual, plopped roadside near office parks and a few homes that aren’t part of a master plan. It feels randomly placed, even though the home was here before the businesses sprung up around it. It’s an ongoing curiosity for anyone who sees it from Jones, a two-story, stylized brick palace, popping out of the Las Vegas sprawl, just hinting at the luxury inside.