



Mondo - From photographer of the stars to founder of world-famous bars and pubs, David Jacobson's story

Dal nostro corrispondente a Bangkok - 12 dic 2022 (Prima Pagina News) David Jacobson after years of commercial and celebrity photography, founded the famous Q Bar Saigon and later Q Bar Bangkok. Today he is the beating heart of a venue that is already eight years old: Smalls

Soi Sukhumvit 26 is known to Bangkok residents for a typical spartan Thai restaurant, where you find only chairs, tables, refrigerators, pictures of the royal family and a few patron patriarchs, and especially for its noodle soups. A location outside the international tourism catalogs trumpeted by the media and social platforms-save then finding yourself in front of dishes with no particular exceptionality but with disproportionate prices. It is, in short, a popular restaurant because -very simply- you eat well. And at very low cost. Word of mouth works much better than any advertising campaign pumped up by big money. In Soi Sukhumvit 26 you also find the multifaceted spirit of the entire Sukhumvit District, the Thai tradition and typicality of a Bangkok of yesteryear and simultaneously, the modernisms of skyscrapers, high-end residences, a la page establishments, cafes with Parisian spirit. It is precisely in one of these neat, ultra-modern style locations where one can enjoy good coffee and multicolored, sweet cakes that we meet a man of absolute charm, an extremely interesting person full of human wisdom. At the Unconscious Café we meet, in fact, David Jacobson, guiding spirit and founder of one of the most highly rated jazz clubs in Bangkok but also in the entire Asian and international jazz scene: SMALLS. David Jacobson is 75 years old and -in the account he gives of himself with great naturalness and simplicity- this is a time spent truly on the top of the entertainment and film world of all time. Much of his professional career, in fact, has been drawn from his experience as a photographer-he has photographed many famous people from the worlds of music, entertainment, and film. Also large and vast was his primary activity as a commercial photographer. However, his bright smile, tinged with irony and light, seems to show a physique that is far from unscathed by old age and passing Time. Do you frequent any gyms assiduously, do you follow any particular diet or lifestyle criteria to keep yourself so fit? No, I eat everything, drink and smoke. I think it's just and exclusively a family genetic heritage. In his words and recollections, you hear mention of Robert De Niro, Mariel Hemingway (granddaughter of writer Ernest Hemingway), Dustin Hoffman, Andy Warhol and Muhammad Ali among many others, and you feel like all of them are old friends you meet to have a drink together, to remember certain good times you experienced together. There is never affectation, never a snobbish attitude in David Jacobson's words, and of each of these characters you hear their true humanity told. Believe me, the bright world of Hollywood does not always give you the best version of itself and of humankind. There are often dark worlds, controversial passions, existential unravelings that do not appear in the spotlight but in an intimate, confidential interview appear in all their



power. With some of them, however, you have managed to establish good professional but also human relationships, haven't you? He shows me, among other photos, the one where he plays with the camera lens with Dustin Hoffman on the set of the film "Tootsie," a photo that went around the world and shows how well they both worked together. Yes, with David Bowie, for example, everything was wonderful from the beginning, on the photo shoot he knew his way around and above all he knew what a photographer needs. He made you comfortable and you could work at a high professional high level but always respectful, polite, kind. In another case (we do not report the name, ed.) that certain VIP character showed up at my studio-home late at night, outside of any scheduled appointment, with a lot of alcohol and other things in his system. I invited him to leave because it was totally impossible to work under those conditions, and-despite his name at that time being so high-sounding-I preferred to maintain my standards of professionalism. But then how did you decide to leave Los Angeles, your city, at that time (David was born and raised in New York City) your world and move to Asia? In 1990, I was with my Vietnamese girlfriend, who had fled to the United States as boat person facing her own personal tragedies-the boat had wrecked, her sister had drowned- but she and the rest of her family eventually made it to California. In 1990 I was given the opportunity to photograph healthcare for children in Vietnam and Cambodia for the WHO and the two of us went. At that point Saigon was a very poor city, depressing and isolated. The only foreigners were Russian who controlled much the oil industry. Being on a journalist visa I was greatly restricted by what I could see or visit. We decided to return as tourist in 1991. What a difference! The Russians were gone. The city was now teeming with Asian and European businessmen eager to get in on the new economic boom. In all this, there was not a single decent bar around. I had been told during various dialogues that in Asia, including Vietnam, any occasion was good for celebration or celebration. Alcohol then, could be a good way to make money. As an American, I was uncertain how I would be seen in Saigon but with the help of my girlfriend I was amazed how kindly I was treated. I decided to sell my cameras and with an amount of about 30,000 U.S. dollars, my girlfriend and I built a bar. Thus the Q Bar was born. Its location in the urban area may be crucial to the success of any such venture, but the timing of Q Bar's launch also played a significant role in its success. The bar opened in 1992, just before the 20th anniversary of the fall of Saigon brought back to the city all the foreign correspondents who had covered the Vietnam War. This notoriously discerning group of people gathered and coagulated at Q Bar. Word of mouth from the journalists spread like breaking news in the media. An important role in the promotional phase was played by all the big names who gradually began to come to you at Q Bar, right? Of course, it was a very rapid progression, everyone I had worked with in the U.S. came to visit. Before long, Time magazine named Q Bar one of the best bars in the world. My girlfriend and I appeared on the cover of the New York Times Sunday Magazine. Gary Trudeau drew the bar and its rotating cast of colorful characters for about fifteen Doonesbury cartoons, with a Hunter S. Thompson-like reporter named Duke. The list of celebrity contacts I had cultivated in Hollywood added further luster to the bar's rising star. The first visit was from Matt Dillon. All the girls in Vietnam wanted to be with him but Matt Dillon only had eyes for my accountant at the time, who, however, did not even know who he was and was not interested in him at all. Dillon was followed by such notables as John



Kennedy Jr with Daryl Hannah, Robert DeNiro, Kate Moss, Norman Mailer, Oliver Stone, Jean-George Vongerichten, Michel Palin, Tracy Ullman and many others. How did that wonderful experience of world relevance then come to an end? Late one evening, I found the government officials knocking on my front door. In their eyes, to see an enterprise led by a Westerner, by an American, thriving in Vietnam was not welcome. So, with a hard face, they made me a proposal, a proposal with no alternative, "We want 51 percent of the Q Bar and -let's be clear- without us putting a single dollar into it." That wasn't going to happen. In 1998 my visa was not renewed and no reason was given. I moved to Bangkok. The Saigon Q Bar was open from 1992 to 2008, and David Jacobson opened its new version under the same name in Bangkok in 1999 with partner Andrew Clark. It was now a nightclub. It was a roaring success that was voted best nightclub I Bangkok for 8 straight years. It was credited with bringing hip hop to Bangkok with such DJs as Ice T, DJ PREMIER, DJ Jazzy Jeff as well as such notables as Danny Rampling, Todd Terry, LTJ Bukem, John Digweed, Rodger Sanchez, Slipmat, Norman Jay, Goldie, Derick May and Demetri from Paris. Bangkok's Q Bar changed hands in 2012 and closed in 2015 due to high expenses. Dillon, and other high-profile customers such as Director, Michael Mann and Harry Styles of One Direction, prefer, instead, the relaxed atmosphere of Smalls, David Jacobson's next venue in Soi Suan Plu, Bangkok, opened in collaboration with artist and designer, Bruno Tanquerie in 2014. Today, Smalls, with eight years of experience behind it, is a small, magical place where Art, Music and the whispering of customers are the hallmarks that have made it the de facto navel of the world of prestigious live music throughout Bangkok, especially Jazz has its home at Smalls. This bar-restaurant-art space recalls the spirit-if not the look and ambiance-of Q Bar Saigon, "a small bar about good conversation, good drinks, good decor and art," says David Jacobson. Smalls was a big hit at the Bangkok Bar Awards, with five nominations. Jacobson won the best hospitality ambassador award and his bar hosted the after-hours event. Smalls has been listed on ASIA'S 50 BEST BARS numerous times. Smalls has a bright future ahead of it; David Jacobson is an extraordinary person.

di Francesco Tortora Lunedì 12 Dicembre 2022