Dear Members,

This issue of Mercury focuses on our different generations and on the connections we feel through the continuum of LAAC’s past, present, and future.

From our past, we draw inspiration. The story of Duke Kahanamoku celebrates a life of extraordinary athletic achievement played out against a backdrop of beautiful beaches during a time of remarkable historical transition. The story of Frank Garbutt follows an innovator’s various ventures as they lead him to a lasting legacy in the film industry. These people and many others have left indelible marks on our Club and on our lives. The History Room houses countless artifacts from LAAC’s past, providing tangible representations of our intricate ties to past generations.

In the present, we find ourselves and our community. We strive to build connections. We have fun, and we face challenges. We push ourselves to improve. We revel in the “now-ness” of life by throwing dance parties, enjoying passionately prepared meals, and achieving success as part of a team, a club, a community. Whether it’s through a group exercise class, a women’s club, or a champion basketball team, LAAC helps us seize the day.

We look to the future with hope and wonder. We build friendships, networks, and organizations that not only fortify ourselves, but also lay foundations for future generations. As we spoke with members of all ages about the Club’s effects on their lives, a prominent and common theme was that of camaraderie. The bonds that members form, feel, and treasure seem to cross all kinds of cultural boundaries, but particularly remarkable was the way Club participation fostered camaraderie that crossed generational boundaries.

Looking back in awe at the 139-year history of the Los Angeles Athletic Club, we can’t help but wonder what the next 139 years will bring. And we cannot even begin to imagine. But there are some things that we can know. Because the raw elements of the human experience that unite us and drive us and draw us toward one another—these things don’t change.

Over the years, each generation has witnessed remarkable and unpredictable changes: huge technological advancements, extraordinary world events, and dramatic cultural shifts. But, as generation after generation passes the baton of membership, we remain hopeful that sweat will still land on maple floors, hands will still clasp after competition, and glasses will still be raised in celebration as we continue our “lifelong pursuit of health-giving amusements.”

— LAAC Editorial Team
06 First Break Surfer
The Life of Duke Kahanamoku

12 Let's Dance
Duke's Becomes Dance Haven for Members

16 Mercury Rising
Makeover Takes Sports Shop from Convenience to Coolness

24 Frank A. Garbutt’s Paramount Role in Motion Picture History
How LAAC’s Former President Played a Key Role in the Founding of an Iconic Film Studio

31 Class Act
A Guided Tour Through Five of LAAC's Group Exercise Classes

42 Reciprocally Beneficial
A Photo Essay of the Vancouver Club

48 A Room for the Past
Touring the History Room, Where the Club’s Past Inspires Its Future

54 They’re Not Tired of Winning
LAAC’s Masters Team Opens a Can of Domination on the Club Basketball World

60 Manifest Destiny
Restaurant Empire of Chef Timothy Hollingsworth Spans Everything from Comfort Food to Experimental Dining

68 Generation Why
LAAC's Eternal Appeal to Members of All Ages

78 A New Wave
A New Community of Female Entrepreneurs Blossoms at LAAC
First Break Surfer

The Life of Duke Kahanamoku
Of all who have earned the right to have their ashes scattered over Waikiki Beach at First Break, Duke Kahanamoku certainly holds the top honor.

Duke was named after his father, Duke Halapu Kahanamoku, who was named "Duke" in honor of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh. He was christened by Bernice Pauahi Bishop of the Royal Family of the Kingdom of Hawaii, so, though "Duke" was not a title, it did come from one. The younger Duke was born in 1890 at the Bishops' residence in Honolulu. He was the first of nine children born to Julia and Duke Halapu Kahanamoku, a prominent family in the Kingdom of Hawaii.

Duke grew up swimming and surfing at Waikiki. He always preferred the traditional Hawaiian Olo wooden boards — he called his, "Papa Nui," which was 16 feet long, meaning "big flat." Duke attended local schools, including his Kamehameha Industrial School, but left to help support the family.
The Outrigger Canoe Club formed in 1908 and promoted surf riding at Waikiki Beach. Both surf riding and the outrigger canoe competitions were held in early 1910, and Pathe Freres of Paris planned to film it. They shot some ‘B’ roll of surfers taking their boards and paddling out — Duke was one of the first surfers in the film. In January of 1911, the new Mid-Pacific Magazine wrote:

“Duke Paoa was born on the island of Oahu, within sound of the surf, and has spent half of his waking hours from early childhood battling the waves for sport. He is now 21 years of age, and is the recognized native Hawaiian champion surf rider. Duke and the members of the Hui Nalu, an organization of professional surfers at Waikiki, have supplied the material for this article on the national sport of Hawaii.”

Later that year, the Hui Nalu were accepted into the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU). In August, Duke swam the 100-yard freestyle in the Harbor of Honolulu with a time of 55.4 — faster than the existing world record by 4.6 seconds. He also set records in the 220-yard and 50-yard freestyle. However, the AAU did not initially register his wins, believing that his times must have been inaccurate. That September, Duke was one of the crew in the Hui Nalu canoe races when the swells at Waikiki were the highest in nearly a decade.

The Hui Nalu held a dance in January of 1912 to pay Duke’s way to attend the Olympic trials in Chicago. After winning both the 50-yard and the 100-yard freestyle trials, Duke was chosen to join the U.S. team competing
in the Stockholm Olympics. With Hawaii now a U.S. Territory, Duke stepped out wrapped in an American flag. He won the gold medal in the 100 and the silver in the 200 relay. He would return for the next four Olympic Games, winning a total of three gold medals and two silver. There was no 1916 Olympics, scheduled for Berlin that year, due to World War I.

Duke toured the world and began teaching his "Kahanamoku kick" to other swimmers. In June of 1913, on the heels of his first gold medal, Duke came to San Francisco for a swimming meet at the Sutro Baths. In July he came to Long Beach to surf during the day, and he still won the swimming events at night. It was on the 11th of July that Duke Kahanamoku swam for the first time at the Los Angeles Athletic Club. The next year Duke led the first surfing contests in Sydney Australia, giving his freestyle stroke the name "Australian Crawl."

It was here at LAAC that Duke met many of his future friends: Al Jolson, Buster Crabbe, Johnny Weissmuller, Dutch Smith, Mickey Riley, Paul Wolfe, Georgia Colman, and Viola Hartmann. It was with Viola that he appeared in that famous tandem surfing shot. Literally a half–dozen beaches claim it as their own; however, Viola always said it was at Laguna.

The swimming coach for many of these famous athletes was Fred Cady, whom Duke met in Philadelphia during a 1918 at a swimming meet. Fred Cady went on to coach Duke in swimming and water polo at LAAC.

In the 1920 Games in Antwerp, Belgium, Duke won two more gold medals. At a swimming event in the 1924 Paris Olympics, Weissmuller won gold, Kahanamoku won silver, and Kahanamoku won bronze. Yes, Duke's brother Sam Kahanamoku swam there as well, winning the bronze medal for the family.

Duke became a lifeguard at Coronal del Mar, where he saved eight fisherman from an overturned yacht. Duke made three trips that day in 1925, to bring them all in safely. Three years later Duke was invited to the 1928 National Surfing Championships at Big Corona Beach through the Corona del Mar Surfboard Club. Duke didn't compete, however; he felt it would be unfair for him to do so. At the time, Big Corona Beach was considered one of California's best surfing spots. Duke was considered one of its best lifeguards. That year, 1932, Los Angeles hosted the Olympic Games, and, for the first time, Duke did not win.

By then "The Duke" had started pursuing a film career. He often played Polynesian natives, but he also played a pirate, an Indian chief, an animal trapper, and a lifeguard.

After losing at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, Duke returned to Hawaii and was elected Sheriff of Honolulu—just like his father had been. Duke had lived in Southern California for a decade and, in his own words, had become 'haole-fied.' "Haole" is a word for a non–Hawaiian native. Back in Hawaii Duke was even more popular. He became the unofficial host for famous visitors, including Amelia Earhart, who, in 1935, posed for a photograph in which Duke is showing her how to open a pineapple.

Nadine Alexander came to Oahu in 1938, having been hired as a dance instructor for the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. She was from Boston and had married right out of high school, traveled Europe, divorced, and danced and taught in Europe. Returning to the U.S. as a dancer, Nadine was spotted in New York and was offered the job in Hawaii.

After her arrival in Honolulu, Nadine met three of Duke's brothers, Sargent, Louie, and Sam. It was Sam who introduced her to Duke — the most eligible bachelor on the island. Nadine had seen a picture of Duke Kahanamoku in a movie magazine when she was in high school and said, "What a gorgeous hunk of humanity!" They dated for some time and married in August of 1940. She was 35, and he was 50. They tried to keep the ceremony a secret, but while driving to the church in
Kona Mokuaekau, their wedding was announced over the radio—and it had not even happened yet. Duke’s sister Bernice attended the wedding with her fiance, Gilbert Lee. A few days later, Duke and Nadine attended Bernice and Gilbert’s wedding.

They were living at Black’s Point when the attack on Pearl Harbor came. Duke was put in charge of civilian defense during the rest of World War II. After the war, Duke did a little more film acting, and Hawaii became a state, eventually phasing out the office of Sheriff of Honolulu.

After his retirement from Sheriff, Duke traveled with Nadine throughout the world. Duke passed away at the beginning of 1968; he was 77. Nadine carried a torch for Duke for the remainder of her life—another 29 years. She only wanted three things for Duke: a statue on Waikiki Beach, a postage stamp in his honor, and to be buried with him.


Nadine, however, did not live to see it. She passed away in 1997 at the age of 92. The couple had no children but were survived by numerous nieces and nephews. That year, Nadine got her last wish: Her ashes were scattered over Waikiki Beach at First Break. She’s with her Duke now.

Douglas Westfall is a National Historian and former International Educator.

In school he served as lifeguard and was on the swim team and water polo team.
Let's Dance

Duke’s Becomes Dance Haven for Members
The historic Los Angeles Athletic Club often impresses visitors with charms from a bygone era. But at the first Duke’s Dance Party in February, that era was closer to 1990 than 1900.

The event was “Be Mine in 1989,” a 1980s-prom-themed dance party for Valentine’s Day held in Duke’s Sports Bar. Attendees in their shoulder padded prom dresses and Miami Vice suits were greeted by a DeLorean parked in Mercury Court.

The sold-out party kicked off a new spirit of programming for The Club that reflects the resurgence of downtown’s youthful nightlife. The second Duke’s Dance Party in 2018 was a tropical summertime bash, “Tiki Disco Dance.” Next year, LAAC will have three dance parties on the calendar.

The Club pulled from one of the hottest local resources for DJ talent, radio station KCRW-FM (89.9) in Santa Monica. Jeremy Sole headlined "Be Mine in 1989," Marion Hodges headlined "Tiki Dance Disco," and longtime LAAC member and downtown favorite Tone Too shared his DJ talents by opening for both.

Inspired by the Hijinx events hosted by LAAC’s exclusive Uplifters club, Duke's Dance Parties are continuing in the long tradition of late-night good times at Duke’s.
Mercury Rising

Makeover Takes Sports Shop from Convenience to Coolness

The messenger god himself brings the good news: The renovated fifth floor is an Olympic paradise worthy of the divine. The ancient hero’s huge new statue is not only welcoming and dramatic, but it also symbolizes LAAC’s unique union of past and present.

“The importance of combining old and new is reflected throughout LAAC,” says Assistant General Manager Cory Hathaway. The challenge of the massive renovation is to update everything while keeping rooted in tradition.

The completion of Phase Two of the Club’s three-part, $10 million renovation saw many exciting transformations, but the redesigned Mercury Sports Shop takes the fifth floor to a whole new level.

According to Hathaway, “It’s not just about updating and broadening the apparel options. The new direction of the sports shop embraces art and culture as well as sports in a major revamp inspired by the history of the Club.”

The big change was no small task. Moving the women’s locker room from the sixth floor to the fifth, redesigning both the men’s and women’s lockers, and creating a single curated sports shop with unisex sex appeal meant months of inconvenience, confusion, and “please pardon our dust” moments, but, wow, was it worth it!

To combine two sports shops, supply convenience items and sports merchandise, give it identity, and just plain make it cool, there was only one man for the job: Chris Hooks.

Chris Hooks grew up at LAAC learning about its history and is now shaping the Club’s future with the Mercury Sports Shop.
Hooks was born and raised in L.A. and grew up in the LAAC. He became a junior member at age eight when his father joined the Club back in 1990. Hooks recalls following the rule of having to wait for the adults to finish — or to invite him — before he could take a turn on the basketball court. He also recalls experiencing less waiting and more inviting as he quickly became a better ball player than most of the adults.

Hooks graduated from Harvard-Westlake School in 2000 and straightaway started his own entertainment management company — even as he attended USC. A man of obvious drive and considerable talent, Hooks saw a need and spoke up. As plans for the second phase of Club renovations were getting underway, Chris Hooks knew he wanted to be part of rebranding, re-merchandising, and revitalizing of the little store that would become the Mercury Sports Shop.

“My goal was to change the store from need-based to want-based,” says Hooks. “In the past, everything in this space was need-based,” he explains, acting out a typical scenario: “’Oh, no! I forgot my T-shirt. I guess I’ll just buy this thing, use it for today, and never wear
it again.’"

“Now it is want-based.” Chris points to the cool and comfy shorts he’s wearing. “Like these. I want to wear these.”

His feel for fashion could be a side effect of working with artists and entertainers. Or it could be that he just has an innate sense of style. Either way, Hooks has his finger on all the pulses of pop culture.

He observed that the old store just “stocked blank products with the Club logo slapped on them.” Hooks wanted to offer clothing and other items that were exclusive to the Los Angeles Athletic Club. He has a keen eye for design and a knack for creating products that engage his fellow Club members. Chris Hooks has been teaming up with graphic designer Marc Santarromana to make must-have merchandise inspired by the Club itself, taking archival images and making them fresh, fashion-forward, and fun.

“All the merchandise is completely new,” says Hathaway, “with Chris spearheading the designs.”

In addition to his professional expertise and personal insight, Hooks brought the unique perspective of his
LAAC upbringing to the sports shop remodel. “The Club is historic,” Hooks noted. “The redesign needed to be modern — but not too modern.”

According to Hathaway, “The new store fits with the new-school Downtown L.A. Arts District vibe that has been growing in and around LAAC.”

The Mercury Sports Shop not only fits that revitalized DTLA vibe, it supports it — with a display for capsule collections highlighting local products and designers.

Besides creating original LAAC-branded apparel and promoting fellow downtowners, Hooks has projects and partnerships in the works with a number of his favorite big brands. Members can look forward to future company collaborations, sponsored classes, and special events held through the Mercury Sports Shop. And even though it’s a few years off, a project is already underway for LA’s hosting of the Olympic Games.

Like Mercury himself, Hooks has messages to deliver. The instant success and bright future of the shop has inspired him to roll out the concept as a sort of template to other private clubs across the country.

Here at home, Chris Hooks continues to create new collections for each season, keeping the store updated and fresh. Whether you’re buying yourself workout wear that you’re proud to wear or getting a loved one a gift that you can’t get anywhere else, the Mercury Sports Shop is a must-stop for simple luxuries and new discoveries.

Launched in the spring of 2018, the redesigned Mercury Sports Shop did more business in its first two days than the old store did in over a month. The feedback has been positive. Everyone is proud. Hooks reflects on the journey with gratitude: “The opportunity has been fantastic. As I think back on having grown up at LAAC and having my roots in the city itself, I’m grateful for the opportunity to work with such a prestigious institution, grateful to them for putting their trust in me to explore my vision, and grateful for the chance to bring something new and fresh to the Athletic Club.”

As the deity of sports and protector of athletes, Mercury has always been a symbol of the Los Angeles Athletic Club — part of our proud past. Now he’s leading the way toward a future full of more good things to come.
This page: (Left to right) Jesse Lasky, Frank Garbutt, Adolph Zukor, & Milton Hoffman look at plans for the new Famous Players Lasky Studio on Marathon Street.
The oldest surviving Hollywood film logo is a study in continuity, refurbished over the years but still offering a picturesque snow-capped mountain, above which 22 stars hang in a rainbow-like arc. Cursive script still dots the mountain's peak; “Paramount,” it reads. The logo’s on-screen presence lasts but a few seconds before a feature film, but in that timespan, Karen Hathaway can be transported back to her childhood — to afternoons on the film studio’s lot, or, even more fondly, to San Fernando Valley trips taken with her siblings to the set of the Western television show Bonanza.

“Everybody was family,” Hathaway warmly recalled recently. “The people were so nice.”

In fact, they were family, in a historical sense, for Hathaway’s family, which has long run and managed the Los Angeles Athletic Club, played a key role in founding the Paramount Pictures powerhouse many decades before. The connection between the Club and the studio is one that may exist more in history than in the memories of those associated with either entity. However, the central figure in that connection can be seen in a portrait on the Club’s third floor, located just outside a lounge named for the studio he helped manage, which would later become Paramount: The Famous Players.

There hangs the indelible image of Frank Alderman Garbutt. His snow-white hair is parted down the middle, and he wears a grey three-piece suit, a navy tie, and a wry smile.
Born in Illinois in 1869, Frank would arrive in a budding Los Angeles in 1882 with his father, who built a fortune in Colorado mining and who would soon join the Club, a place that the esteemed Charlie Chaplin later observed was “a center where the elite of local society and business gathered at the cocktail hour. It was like a foreign settlement.” Frank also joined the Club at the age of 14. By his 20s, he had become a millionaire, having invented oil-drilling tools that he sold for profit and used to tap into the ocean of black gold sitting beneath Southern California's soil. At the turn of the century, though, the Club was suffering financially and soon closed its doors entirely.

Frank dearly loved the Club, considering it vital for the connections that aided his success, and he swore that he would re-open it. Ever the innovator, Frank had a revolutionary idea. Instead of having members pay dues and then pester them for more funds when the Club needed upkeep, he would instead form a corporation, inviting members to buy stock in order to be members so that, hopefully, the club could be self-sustaining. He twisted the arms of some good-standing citizens around the city, and his plan became realized. Now called LAACO, Ltd., that company is still in existence today. Its current president and managing partner? That would be Karen Hathaway, Frank’s great-granddaughter.

Frank possessed the ambition of 10 lives in one. He enjoyed chess, handball, duck hunting, and boxing, and he became deeply involved, not only in the Club, but in many other ventures as well. He helped establish the city's aerospace industry, the Union Oil Company, and the Automobile Club of Southern California. He also wrote a column for the Los Angeles Times, and sought to create a chewing gum that would top Wrigley’s. Frank served as president of the Club and helped found the California Yacht Club and the Riviera Country Club. All along, he preferred bankrolling projects from behind the scenes rather than being in the foreground. But there was one budding business in Los Angeles that especially caught his attention: motion pictures.

The Club has long had deep connections to the film industry. Chaplin, arguably its most famous resident, moved to LA at the age of 25 and stayed at the Club in 1915 for a mere $12 per week. “There was a camaraderie about the Club which even the declaration of the First World War did not disturb,” Chaplin later wrote.

Frank first became involved with the film industry in the summer of 1911 when he loaned his schooner-rigged yacht, the Skidbladnir, to the Selig Company for the filming of the pseudo-historical drama The Wild Man. Intrigued by the industry's technical and financial possibilities, Frank accompanied a troupe of nearly 30 actors and actresses to Santa Rosa and the Santa Cruz islands. He marveled at the details of the process and the daring of the actors, who leaped from cliffs, ran barefoot over jagged rocks, and warded off seasickness until the cameras stopped rolling.

In May of 1912, the Selig Company filmed The Lion and the Hatpin in the Club’s gymnasium, and that very summer, with two other Club members, Frank formally launched his own career as a motion-picture executive by setting up a production firm — the Bosworth Company — to film a series of movies based on stories by author Jack London. During negotiations, London visited Los Angeles and the Club for several days, enjoying time on Skidbladnir, as well. Frank built a studio in 1913 for the filming of The Sea Wolf and invested $10,000. The first showing of the seven-reel feature — then the longest film made and released in the United States — was held at the Club in 1913. Frank also assisted his wife’s nephew by placing the teenage boy behind the camera for Bosworth Company in 1915. That boy, Farciot Edouart, would go on to win 10 Academy Awards, largely in the category of visual and technical effects.
A series of mergers between eight film production companies formed the Famous Players–Lasky Corporation, which eventually became Paramount Pictures, the most powerful film studio of its day. Frank served as Paramount’s West Coast manager for 15 years and held considerable Paramount stock, helping build offices in conjunction with the 1920s Paramount Theater in Downtown Los Angeles. Paramount helped further elevate actress Mary Pickford — one of Frank’s dear friends — who would later become the highest paid woman in the world. And Frank also helped his son, Frank E. Garbutt, into the film industry, and in 1925 he would become the manager of the Famous Players–Lasky Corporation.

When Frank died in 1947, at the age of 78, his family received many kind letters of condolences from all over the city — including from Pickford and several at Paramount. He was considered not only one of the most important figures in Los Angeles history but in American history. Frank’s image still keeps watch in that portrait outside the Club’s Famous Players lounge, where the walls inside are lined with photos from his many diverse achievements, ranging from patents to a copy of a stock certificate from 1920 for the Famous Players–Lasky Corporation, the company that would one day become Paramount. From then to now, as stories were passed down, Frank’s descendants “looked upon Paramount as if it had been their baby,” according to Frank Garbutt Hathaway, who recalled his grandfather as a brilliant man who saw potential in almost every direction he turned, in a way that few others ever did.

Frank Alderman Garbutt: inventor, industrialist, movie pioneer, and president of Los Angeles Athletic Club from 1937 to 1947.
Group exercise can be intimidating, at least to me. I consider myself competitive — competitive enough to know that I don’t need to play sports because I know I’ll lose. Give me solitary activities like running or pilates or yoga and I’m golden. I prefer to be in my own little world to get fit.

So that’s why it felt like a whole new world to step into the Los Angeles Athletic Club not to cocoon myself in playlists, but to put myself right in the middle of the action. With strangers. And water bottles.

Prior experience with (other) gym membership classes had taught me to be wary. You don’t take those, most likely, to learn from the best; you need to find the highly specialized and laser-focused studio to get that.

But this Club, as anyone would gather immediately upon entering the lobby, is different. That’s why I agreed to take five of LAAC’s group exercise classes and chronicle my experience here. What I found tilts my sports-apathe on its axis: instructors who don’t just show up to clock in, regulars who are quick to welcome a new face, and, dare I say, fun.

Ziza boxes, swims, jumps, and plays her way through LAAC
In a deviation from the group setting, I schedule a morning one-on-one squash session with Brett Newton. For those looking to get in on The Game Played Behind Glass Doors (my title), this is the way to do it.

Typically associated with East Coast ivy leagues and private clubs, squash has a stigma that Brett, who played with the squash world tour for 13 years and was ranked 18th in the world, says is slowly changing, thanks in part to clubs like LAAC.

“[Squash] a good way to meet people, one of the best urban games,” he tells me. “We get a lot of businessmen who leave work, come down here to play for 45 minutes, and [then are] ready to kick ass. It’s very quick, a really efficient workout.”

It’s also straightforward. With a squash racket, a ball, and protective eye gear, I’m ready to play. The premise is simple: hit the ball against the wall and within the red boundary lines. The trick is that the ball doesn’t bounce like you’d expect it to, making for sprints, reaches, and swings-plus, there’s the mental strategy involved to make it your opponent, not you, running the court.

“It’s the best workout. It takes your whole focus, so you can’t think of anything else,” Brett explains. “This is physical chess.”
On first glance, you’ll think they must have rackets. There’s just no way a human palm can whack a ball that hard and fast.

You’d be proven wrong, as I was when I arrived for Monday night’s 5:30–6:30pm handball class.

I’m still shaking the hand of instructor Jorge Guevara when another member urges me to come back next week — so I can interview the players who are away competing in the world championships. It’s not long before co-instructor Robert Oregel joins Jorge and me, and together they relay the impressive 50-plus-year handball history that’s embedded, quite literally, into the walls of LAAC.

We haven’t even started playing yet.

Once we do, it dawns on me how special this place is. (Also, how good of a player Jorge is. He can play handball with his feet.) You need a lot of things to play the game well: hand–eye coordination, speed, strategy, and possibly dead nerve endings in your hands.

Most of all, though, you need mentors, and that’s where this class really delivers. Out of all the classes I’ve taken, this one is most primed for those looking for community. Any and all are welcome, and it’s a welcome that is readily felt. "Handball players are always looking for new handball players," Jorge explains; "they want to keep it going."

Robert adds, “There’s a lot of camaraderie that happens here [with LAAC handball]. Friendships that cross ages and generations.”
Don’t let the Styrafoam weights fool you. Once you dip them underwater, the resistance kicks in. It’s a nice reprieve from the 40 minutes you just spent kicking, twirling and leaping through the pool, sweat conveniently disguised as water droplets.

Instructor Zhanna Waterman spent much of her life dancing with the Russian ballet — and you can tell. As she glides across the edge of the pool, you follow along in the water, mimicking her effortless salsa moves. Before diving in she explains to me how the “dancing body is best,” meaning that when you dance, your body uses all its muscles; this helps with overall tone, balance, and appearance.

However, that’s not the only reason to take her class. “I think this is the best for senior people and younger people,” she says. “It’s like stretching, massage, resistance... and you burn twice the amount of calories. In a normal Zumba class, you burn 400, maybe 450 calories. Under the water, [you burn] 800.”

This feels a bit miraculous, like something you’d want to do far more often than just Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9-10am. I can see why the class has its regulars. One of them, mid-way through the workout and with rhythmic beats booming, shouts, “Let your body say yes!”

Who doesn’t want to emulate that?
Admittedly, this was the one I was dreading. As someone who made it through gym class on the excuse of her athletically-induced asthma, having to shoot baskets with a group of strangers did not sound like my ideal Saturday morning.

But then I meet instructor Alek Petrossian. Despite his 30 years in basketball and a career playing with Iran’s national team, he immediately puts me at ease. This isn’t a class to impress anyone. This is time to impress yourself.

Petrossian, who also runs the Club’s basketball leagues and does a lot of one-on-one training, says he structures each group class — which meets every Saturday morning from 10–11:20am — based on the level of the clients who attend.

“I come up with different kinds of drills that the beginner, the intermediate, and the advanced would enjoy,” he explains. “So the advanced won’t feel ‘too good’ and the beginner won’t be left out.”

The morning I’m there, we start with footwork and some stretching, then transition into ball handling, shooting, and passing. Thankfully, I quickly realize that no one is focused on me or counting how many times the ball rolls out of my hands and off the court. Everyone is in practice mode — focused, determined, but communal. When I make a basket, there’s even a cheer.
“Anger; it’s a good thing! Just kidding,” Javier Flores laughs. He quickly follows up his punching drills with a charge to run to the 12th floor.

I’m in the middle of Javier’s Saturday morning boxing class, held from 9:30–10:45am on the 9th floor of LAAC. I’ve just switched my baseball cap so that it’s on backwards; I’m thinking this will help me tap into my inner tough girl, as I slip my hands back into my gloves and Javier holds up his mitts.

Boxing here isn’t just about the bag, though. You’ll get in plenty of swings, but be prepared for an intense hour of jump rope, push-ups, crunches, and circuit work. Javier, who previously taught studio cycling and whose father was a professional boxer, has been teaching this class for three years, and it’s easy to see how much he loves it. You’ll want to hate how little down time he gives you between burpees and jumping jacks, but just channel it into your next punch.

“We get a lot of professionals [here] — doctors, architects, and whatnot — so there’s a lot of aggression built during the week,” says Javier. “I think coming here and taking it out on me is totally cool.”

He’ll work the sweat out of you, so it’s only fair to give him your best shot. You’ll feel it — and be grateful for it — come Sunday.
Reciprocally Beneficial

A Photo Essay of the Vancouver Club

The Los Angeles Athletic Club offers its Members reciprocal benefits to over 250 clubs around the world. The Pacific Northwest is home to some of our favorite clubs to visit. In this photo essay, we feature a stay at the Vancouver Club in British Columbia. The Vancouver Club, centrally located in the city, offers overnight accommodations, a rooftop garden, billiards room, fitness center, bar, and restaurant.

Illustration by Tiffany Jan
Photography by Peeled Media
Modeling by Matthew Chambers & Chelsey Reist
Clothing by Emil Clothing Co. & RYU Apparel
Hair & Makeup by Ana Viseroiu Allen (Ana V Beauty)
For the complete list of reciprocal clubs, visit laac.com/reciprocal-clubs
Established in 1989, The Vancouver Club has deep roots in the young, vibrant city. The club is a place to dine, play, relax, and connect with other professionals shaping the very fabric and creative energy of the West Coast.
Words by Oren Peleg
Photography by Antonio Diaz
I am taking the stairs into the basement of the Los Angeles Athletic Club with Cory Hathaway, the organization's Assistant General Manager. "It's a maze down here," he says over the roar of the various machines heating, cooling, washing, and otherwise servicing the Club above us. "It's a graveyard for everything" — lockers, old sports equipment, and miscellaneous detritus discarded and built up over the past 106 years. After going down a few hallways and around some corners, we arrive at a vault door. "Stand on this side," Hathaway says to me as he gets ready to open it. We enter to find a space no bigger than 15 by 30, stuffed to the gills with filing cabinets, trophies, memorabilia, and more. "See how crazy a mess it all is?" he continues.

This was one of several identical rooms that functioned as storage units for the storefronts lining the streets of 7th and Olive above. From 1917 until the 1960s, this particular unit was the storeroom for the Silverman & Slavick jewelry shop (which would explain the vault door). Since the late 1960s, it has served as the history room for the Club — housing documents, certificates, photographs, and other invaluable items that tell the tale of the Athletic Club through the years.

"Everything we do is inspired by the history of the Club," Hathaway explains. "So, when we do a renovation, or when we look at some of the graphic design work, or some of the other stuff that we've done, we go into this historical room and pull from these archives of the last 138 years."

A recent refreshing of the Athletic Club's logo took shape down here. "The logo that we reinstated a few years ago is based on the actual trademark document [from around 1905] that we had stored down in the archives," Hathaway says. "The first thing we did was we brought [the graphic design team] here and showed them all of the different identity pieces that we had back in the day — and the Mercury magazine. They took a
bunch of pictures and built those into their inspiration boards. "When the logo was identified, they scanned and traced it," he said "We didn't modify it. We exactly duplicated it."

Hathaway points out a few random artifacts pushed into a corner. "This is an old stock ticker machine," he says, showing me a waist-high brass box that has lost its shine. "Downtown was pretty oriented around the financial industry — a lot of the bank headquarters were down here." The machine is from the mid-1920s and was kept in the lounge on the third floor of the Clubhouse. A more modern stock ticker stayed in there into the '90s.

Though the Club held on to certain analog technologies, it was also an early adopter of computerized systems. In late 1974, the Club hired two computer programmers to design and build the data infrastructure necessary to computerize the organization's billing and management systems. "It was pretty early in the Club industry to do that," Hathaway notes. "It took a lot of effort and resources to develop these projects." (Especially a system customized to the organization's four different clubs.) He adds that John Wolff, the Athletic Club's current Vice President and CIO, had been a systems software engineer with Hewlett-Packard from 1968 until 1974. When Wolff returned to Los Angeles, he set out to modernize the infrastructure of the organization's accounts receivable. He ultimately developed two in-house programs, including one of the first point-of-sale systems to be used in the Club industry. As Wolff explains, the system had "many automatic features that enforced club policy and eliminated manual tasks that saved personnel costs, which helped to justify internal development."

"This is all — wow, I didn't quite realize what this is," Hathaway says opening one of the original issues of *Mercury* as we continue rifling through the room. "We've reprinted covers as artwork because there are some really cool illustrations. We used some of those, for example, in the locker room renovation." The old photos have even given inspiration for events at the Club. "We did one where we recreated this old Irish dinner where everyone was wearing tall hats and drinking beer. The original event was in the early 1920s." Old menus have also been sourced to recreate special dinner events and celebrations.

On a shelf across the back wall we find some old glassware and china dating back a century. "It's kind of an odd story that I keep coming across," Hathaway will later tell me. "Frank Garbutt was obsessed with picking out the silverware and china. So, he would spend hours and hours and hours looking at every single design and material and all that."

Frank Garbutt, in addition to being Hathaway's great-great-grandfather, helped revive the then-defunct Los
Angeles Athletic Club at the turn of the twentieth century. By the end of 1900, LAAC had become associated with drunkeness and fighting, and it officially closed its doors in January 1901 due to falling membership and a lack of funds. Garbutt led a group of investors in reincorporating the Club in December of 1905, and by May of 1907 the new Athletic Club had purchased the Hotel Baltimore property at 7th and Olive for $450,000. The twelve-story, Beaux Arts-style clubhouse that stands today finished construction and opened in 1912.

Beyond working with the Club, Garbutt was deeply involved in several industries. He was an early columnist for the nascent Los Angeles Times and helped found the Automobile Club of Southern California. (He was known to race his cars around Agriculture Park, where the Coliseum stands today.) He created Union Oil Co. and was a close friend of Glenn Martin of Lockheed Martin. He started Famous Player film studio which later merged with other studios, to become Paramount Pictures.

"Over here, this is kinda cool," Hathaway says, leading me back to the center of the room. "In this cabinet here are all [Frank Garbutt's] personal files." He pulls out a large envelope. "When we were looking through here, we found a collection of patent documents. It has every flying machine invented up until 1907. So, those would be the winged bodysuits, the wheeled bicycle ones." (And the first patents of the Wright brothers.)

Garbutt and Martin were likely working on some new designs for a flying machine and submitted an inquiry to the U.S. Patent office, which then sent back a packet of all relevant patents up to that date. "So, that's where we came up with the name for our bar, which is called 'Invention.' And we put framed versions of all these patent documents up." As for Garbutt's Hollywood connection, it "became the name for the restaurant, which is 'Famous Players.' So, those both got named based on stuff from this room."

As remarkable a resource as this room is for those inside the Club, it also serves as a valuable research tool to others outside. "We get requests all the time where someone's writing about someone, and they want to see one of the Mercury issues," Hathaway says. And though the Club's administration doesn't have the capacity to handle all the requests, there are plans to digitize most of the History Room's archives to make it more readily available.

Preserving the room while opening access to it might be the biggest challenge facing the archives today. Over the last 50 years, few but a handful have been let down here to organize or research. "One of the projects that we're working on is having an archivist come in and either [reorganize the room] so it's all visually on display like a museum or store everything [properly]," Hathaway explains.

"This room is the physical resource that we take inspiration from," he concludes. "One of the core values of the Club is tradition. So, it links us up, and it's why we use it so much. We're always trying to put a spin on the old things." As the Athletic Club faces the future and continues to evolve, maintaining the roots of the organization becomes as important as ever. This "room represents a collection — the most thorough collection — of what has happened in this building, and in this organization going back to 1880. To be an LA-based organization that's actually been documenting its history in great detail — and has it all accessible like this — is pretty rare."
They’re Not Tired of Winning

LAAC’s Masters Team Opens a Can of Domination on the Club Basketball World
Two years and thirty-five indictments ago, then presidential candidate Donald Trump boasted to a packed campaign rally, “We’re going to win so much, you’re going to be sick and tired of winning!” Cue rousing cheers.

Win fatigue. Is that really a thing? Not for most of us; certainly not for the men of LAAC’s Masters basketball team. They have won a lot. And they plan to win more. This past April, these chairmen of the boards, an all-star team of Club members ranging in age from 45 to 54, absolutely steam-rollered the competition at NACAD’s national basketball tournament in Las Vegas. They won their semi-finals and finals by a combined forty-five points. Determination generates domination.

Once a year, the National Association of Club Athletic Directors (NACAD) assembles the best club basketball teams from across the U.S. for a backbreaking weekend of round-robin championship play. LAAC’s Masters team has brought back national title laurels four out of the last five years. While every sports team dreams of a dynasty (but few achieve it), the gentlemen of the Club’s Masters team are bonafide blue bloods. Hapsburgs of the hardwood. Rothschilds of roundball.

Notably, this dynasty began with a big man-sized serving of humble pie. Sometime in 2011, power forward Kevin Holland started playing pick-up ball at LAAC. The Club is one of the few places in L.A. where mature men can still play
competitive basketball. This Mr. Holland had an opus of a resume: D1 ball at DePaul. He’d been to The Big Dance. And in total defiance of the overwhelming odds against it (1% of all college players go pro) he enjoyed a thirteen-year professional career that took him all over the world, including stints with the Clippers, Portland, and the CBA.

His friend Paul Weakly had an equally impressive pick-and-roll provenance that was cut short by knee surgery. Weakly played four seasons in the NBA with Sacramento and Omaha. The brevity of Weakley’s career only stoked his hunger to continue playing, even with only half a meniscus left in his injured knee. At first, Weakley and Holland expected to dominate the Club’s local and the national NACAD leagues. It would be a lights-out, Katie-bar-the-basket slam-dunk. Or not. Initially, they found themselves out-gunned, out-sized, and just not particularly good. Weakly admits, “We thought we’d walk right through these 45-and-older teams. Instead, we took a whooping.” But it was this humble pie, served up with a cold scoop of comeuppance, that propelled the Masters program from obscurity to a destiny of dynasty.

Weakly and Holland woke up to the reality that they lacked the essential ingredients for a championship program. They needed to recruit more/better players. They needed structure and support. They had to get into better shape. Otherwise, LAAC would continue to be — in Holland’s words — “that team that everyone else beat up on.” Little did they know that the answer to their prayers would come in the form of an erstwhile restaurant manager.

Alex Petrossian was the top rebounder in Iran for two years running, played in two Middle East championships, and was selected for his country’s Olympic Basketball team. He spent thirteen years as an undersized big man (6’6”) in Iran’s professional basketball league. Then he met his future “trophy wife.” Except the trophies belonged to her; she’d earned them as a member on the Iranian National Tennis Team. When they immigrated to Los Angeles in 2008, Petrossian considered the move an opportunity to hang up his high-tops. A grown-up, regular-job life that did NOT involve basketball was the responsible thing to do. So he went back to school to learn restaurant management.

But soon Petrossian was restless. This was L.A., after all; basketball was everywhere. “I tried to get away, but there’s something about the sound of that round ball hitting the wood floor. It’s amazing.” So he came into LAAC to interview for a job that wasn’t an actual job... yet. He offered his services to Athletic Director Marlene Wiscovitch, who fortunately, recognized the gold-wrapped gift that had wandered into her office. She cleared a spot for him as a club trainer. Soon after, Petrossian was brought on as Basketball Director to basically re-invent the Club’s basketball program from scratch. His mission: bring championships back to LAAC.

Meanwhile, Holland and Weakly went talent scouting. They knew where to find it, but there was a caveat: Players joining the Masters team could not be glorified hired guns; they had to actively participate in life at the Club, as well as shoot. “Not everyone off the street was both a good player and a good fit for the Club,” adds Weakly. One of their first blue-chippers was Ronnie Winbush, who had played for Weakly’s dad at Crenshaw High. He was a problem; a match-up problem. As a 6’9” shooting guard, Winbush was an all-day headache for any opposing team. Then they brought on Robert Biggs. “If something is coming into the paint, (Biggs) is gonna kill it,” Weakly quips. They’d assembled a deep bench, but talent alone does not induce championships. Weakly muses, “It’s not enough knowing how to win; you have to have the will to win. You have to be like, ‘I can’t breathe, but I got this.’”

As it turns out, Petrossian’s expertise included building basketball wills of iron. Weakly cites Petrossian’s killer conditioning regimen as a critical component of the team’s success. The NACAD championship format is a meat grinder. Taking place over a single weekend, teams play as many as two games per day with only a few hours of rest in between. Petrossian personally designed an unorthodox conditioning and agility program to address the need for stamina among guys NOT in their twenties. He taught players to run on a treadmill — sideways. He had them navigate rope ladders beneath their feet while dribbling and shooting. During the season (September–April), Petrossian required three two-hour practices a week, plus a Saturday basketball conditioning class, plus regular playing in the Club’s leagues. This was a significant sacrifice for a group of guys who already had substantial career responsibilities as educators, lawyers, and administrators. But lo and behold, the return on the investment quickly became real. The Masters team not only started to out-play opponents, they began to outlast them.

But if there is a secret sauce to the Masters’ success, it is definitely chemistry. Most guys on the team played with or against each other at some point, so they trust and respect one another. They developed a constructive system of accountability. “We know how to motivate each other without taking
Teamwork makes the dream work, especially when teammates have years of experience together.
it personally,” explains Holland. Woe be unto the player who fails to show up for practice. He’ll get a phone screen—full of pointed messages on the team’s texting thread. Such is the way of winners.

LAAC regularly faces bigger elite players from other clubs. 6’10” and 7-footers are not unheard of. But the Masters’ competitive advantage isn’t size or speed; it’s their unspoken — virtually unconscious — communication with one another. On the court, Weakly describes it as “high basketball IQ.” “We don’t even need to say anything (to each other). We just know,” he says. As a result, defending against LAAC’s motion offense is extremely challenging. Having played together since they were tykes, the team members know if a player prefers a chest pass to a bounce pass. They can precisely gauge the amount of time it takes a player to get into shooting position so he gets fed on time, on the dime. Whoever has the hot hand is getting the ball over and over again until the other team puts a stop to it. Selfishness is an invitation to the bench.

The real problem with winning isn’t fatigue; it’s revenge. Lighting up other teams tends to laser a target on your back. “We had no close games (in 2018). That leaves a bad taste in our opponents’ mouths,” Weakly observes. But being at the top of the hoops heap is nothing new to these guys. In fact, the team is already gunning and running to climb the next rung towards dynastic domination: a 2019 NACAD championship. No win fatigue here.
Manifest Destiny

Restaurant Empire of Timothy Hollingsworth Spans Everything from Comfort Food to Experimental Dining

Chances are that if one has been dining out in Los Angeles these days, the name "Tim Hollingsworth" rings a bell. At present, he's the owner and executive chef of Otium, the contemporary restaurant directly adjacent to The Broad on Grand Avenue.

Hollingsworth, who often enjoys playing basketball at the Club, was the chef at the Be Our Guest chef dinner in August 2018.

"It was a great event," he said. "The demographic was perfect for us because the guests were really into the food and the idea of what we were doing, and we think they enjoyed the execution. There were many people I spoke with who had been to Otium before, too. The kitchen team at the Club also did an excellent job at helping us and were very accommodating."
After receiving numerous accolades, including a James Beard award, Hollingsworth brought two new projects to 2018: C.J. Boyd’s, which is a fried chicken joint that opened in August at The Fields LA, and Free Play, which is slated to open by the end of the year in the same location.

“I want Free Play to be really approachable,” Hollingsworth says. “I want it to be a place for people to come and go and have a great experience in multiple capacities. There’s gaming, there’s a DJ booth. The food is pretty eclectic but in an approachable way.”

He adds that he’s excited to be in that specific neighborhood because he believes it’s an unique opportunity to provide all-encompassing experiences to both those who live there, those who go to school there, and those who catch soccer games at the nearby Los Angeles Football Club stadium.

For Hollingsworth, both Free Play and C.J. Boyd’s — named for his grandfather in honor of his fried chicken prowess — are returns to his roots and inject quality into neighborhoods that lack of good dining options.

“I left the house at a young age and went right into cooking fine-dining cuisine because of the opportunity that I was given at the French Laundry,” explains Hollingsworth, referencing the career-defining stint he had before moving to Los Angeles in 2012.

“That was a unique opportunity — I fell in love with it, dove in and explored food in multiple areas, but it was always elevated cuisine. As I get older, I think about the way that I grew up, the amount of food that I ate, and the options that I have for food when I go home to the area where my family lives,” he adds.

“And it can be pretty frustrating. Some people open restaurants — they’re not good operators, and the food isn’t very good. So you settle for that, or you’re forced to go to a chain restaurant. And the quality is not that great. So, for me, it’s the food I grew up on and food that I think is approachable — food I think my family would enjoy. It’s a different kind of challenge — but one that excites me right now,” he continues.

Hollingsworth says that when coming up with a concept restaurant, he tries to think about what the community wants, explaining, “You can’t say, ‘Oh, I really want to open up a Spanish restaurant — this is what the concept is and this is what the idea is.’ I mean, sometimes that happens. But, for the most part, I think it’s easier to see a space and then imagine what’s around me. What’s the demographic? What kind of people are going to come here? What does the neighborhood need?”

Hollingsworth adds that he thinks many restaurateurs fail because they don’t take those factors into consideration, often pushing a passion or vanity project through that doesn’t adequately address needs
of a community or appeal to diners. "Putting the wrong space in the wrong part of town," he calls it.

Besides adding new projects, Hollingsworth also challenges himself by constantly being on the hunt for different ways to innovate. From the way he describes it, he has almost infinite sources of inspiration.

“I could be looking at art, architecture, or, of course, traveling,” he says, describing things that influence his cooking. “Whenever you're introduced to a different type of cuisine that maybe you're not terribly familiar with, it’s pretty inspiring to be able to take traditional ingredients and realize how to use things differently because you didn't grow up eating it. Maybe you don’t understand the history behind it, but you try to interpret and understand it and learn about it, so you’re able to apply new knowledge to a new dish. You make it your own, which is a fun process.”

I asked him to give an example, and Hollingsworth followed with an avalanche of dishes, each one sounding more delectable than the last. One creation he pulled from his memory recalled Syrian cooking, which he learned from a friend’s family that was originally from Aleppo. It’s a beef tartare that is currently on the menu at Otium.

“It’s not a traditional beef tartare at all,” he says. “It’s basically a lavash cracker, and on top of that you have muhammara, which is a walnut, molasses, Aleppo pepper, and pomegranate spread. Then there’s beef tartare, bulgur, and dollops of labneh, mint, more Aleppo pepper, and lemon fleur de sel.”

Hollingsworth goes on to describe the myriad of influences that go into one single dish, highlighting a sad fact: Most diners probably have no idea how much work often goes into one plate of food.

“If it’s neither a traditional tartare, nor is it a traditional Middle Eastern dish,” he says. “It's not things that people would typically put together, but as I was exposed to muhammarra, I was inspired by the flavor of the pepper. I was inspired by the newness of the spread — I had never had it before. Another aspect was another raw beef preparation I had with bulgur mixed in with minced onion and formed into little football shapes. Those two aspects were different and new for me, and bringing it all together resulted in a fun and unique dish.”

Listening to him spout off about dishes, creations, and inspirations, I had to wonder: Does Hollingsworth prefer being behind the stove, as a chef, or does he relish his newer role as an owner and businessman?

“I like that things are different day-to-day. Having those multiple roles gives that ability,” he explains. Cooking on the line can get repetitive because you make the same thing over and over again. But you also get a rush when you have seven things come in at once and you need to get them out at the same time. I also like the craftsmanship of cooking, like with butchery or making pasta, it has an artisan feel to it. And I like to be creative, take different flavor profiles and come up with new dishes, and being inspired by different things.”

He continues, “But I also like teaching. I like picking apart dishes, asking people why they’d serve a certain thing a certain way. How did you make that? What about trying it like this instead of like that? So, that creative mentorship and helping people develop — I really love that. And being able to open up restaurants, being hands-on, and having that sort of creativity.”

For Hollingsworth, ultimately, balancing those two sides of his career is what makes him feel successful.

“For me, success has to do with my career and the ability to manage different aspects of it. It's enjoying what I want and being creative while being able to profit and do more. If I’m able to branch out and do different things, other than just cooking in restaurants, that's something that I’ve been working towards throughout my career. And I think it's a fun thing to not be limited and to be able to diversify a little bit.”

Knowing that, it seems like Hollingsworth may have already found what he's looking for.
To err is human, but to ask “why” is uniquely human. We enter the world pre-loaded with instincts to ensure our survival. Beyond that, we observe and we decide based on the answer to that one question: why? “Why would anyone mix tomato juice and beer?” or “Why does my iPhone’s battery drain like a leaky bucket?” or “Why is Goat Yoga a thing?” Witness the evolution of our species.

Humans originally clanned together out of primal necessity; now we do so out of choice. We co-mingle via social, religious, and civic organizations. Why? The answer varies greatly, especially when it comes to an idiosyncratic organization like LAAC and its one-of-a-kind blend of offerings. What follows is a survey of club members spans five generations, ages sixteen to eighty-two, from the Silent Generation to Generation Z. The objective is to understand why the Club appeals to such a broad array of individuals: men and women, developers and artists, fashionistas and athletes. The overarching lesson gleaned from interviewing these five club members is that their personal “whys” are as diverse and multi-faceted as the membership itself.
LET’S HANG

As the axiom goes, if one doctor says you’re sick, get a second opinion. If a second and a third doctor tell you the same—for God’s sake—lie down. After a similar real-life scenario, Ghazzi Kitmitto chose to stop worrying and just hang out. Literally. A beloved forty-year veteran of the Club, Kitmitto personifies the Silent Generation’s “attitude of gratitude.”

A perpetual smile radiates beneath his beaming, light blue eyes. As he gesticulates with thick fingers, his speech is animated and his unfiltered joie de vivre spreads like benevolent contagion.

His is the quintessential story of the American dream lived by immigrants from countries that barely cast a shadow on a world atlas. Kitmitto emigrated from Lebanon in 1958 with small change in his pocket and hardly a word of English on his lips. After a humble trade education, his business went on to become L.A.’s largest parts supplier for exotic foreign cars. His brother’s immigration story was essentially a repeat: start at zero, get an education, become one of the youngest executives in the history of UPS. “America is the greatest country in the world,” Kitmitto announces. And he means it.

Kitmitto’s devotion to the Club is rooted in an incident that nearly crippled him for life. A casual vacation ride through the pyramids of Egypt turned deadly when his horse bolted into an uncontrolled gallop. That was 1975. He would not walk again until 1976. The third and fourth lumbar of his spine were fractured. One of his discs shattered. Bone shards spread like shrapnel through his back, agitating his sciatic nerve and causing ceaseless pain. Egyptian doctors insisted surgery was Kitmitto’s only hope for a normal life. Identical second and third opinions came down from doctors in Beirut and UCLA. But Kitmitto knew that the invasiveness of the prescribed repair would forever hamper his agility and movement. For a man who played racquetball at LAAC nearly every day for thirty-seven years, this was an unacceptably Pyrrhic solution. Luckily, quiet fortitude and intrepid problem-solving are hallmarks of the Silent Generation.

Kitmitto was determined to find a non-surgical solution. He swam every day. He took up yoga when most still considered it a practice exclusive to seed-eaters and moon-cycle worshippers. He corrected his posture at all times, even when waiting for the pedestrian street signals to change. But most remarkable of all, Kitmitto began an intense regimen of self-directed traction therapy. The gravitonic traction machine that has since disappeared from the Club once resembled a giant, chain-set swing that hung between two steel supports. Kitmitto hung inverted, feet-up, for two to three hours every single day for several consecutive months. He made friends with discomfort. He adopted a consistency and discipline normally reserved for computer scripts, not humans. But the payoff was very real.

Kitmitto never underwent surgery. Aided by this unorthodox routine, his back literally healed itself. He took up racquetball again and basically “did whatever I wanted to do.” His continuing gratitude for the Club is palpable. “I will go to the Club until last day of my life,” says the man eighty-two years young. LAAC members hope that day lies far in the future.
Hal Bastian, the self-proclaimed “Mr. Downtown” keeps a rolling calendar in his head to calculate “the streak,” or the precise number of days he has consecutively exercised. Today’s count is 3,636. That’s nine years, eleven months, and four days. But when it comes to his age, Hal is less precise. “We’re all the same age relative to infinity,” he says wryly.

Hal is a fixture at the Club, dressed nattily in his trademark dark suit and tie. His conversation style is akin to a slingshot. There’s a long wind-up of finger-tapping contemplation followed by an intense forward volley of insight. Eyes silently narrow behind his black horn-rimmed glasses, indicating that his brain is spooling up for a statement. The phrases that follow are often indirect and aphoristic, such as, “We crave things that are bad for us” or “wheat is a white drug.” But the shot that eventually lands after his long wind-up often bullseyes the heart of the matter, particularly when it comes to LAAC. When asked what drives the appeal of the Club, Hal muses (wait for it), “The secret to becoming a powerful person is not doing it all by ourselves. We can’t live well individually.”

His generation — the Baby Boomers — is iconic and exerts an outsized influence on American life. Seventy million strong, these children of the nineteen-fifties forever changed the way we think, act, and feel. Self-analysis was not a preoccupation of his parent’s generation. Growing up, “Nobody went to therapy; we just had nightmares,” Hal notes darkly. Exercise as a habit was much less common. Those “healthful amusements” the club cites in its motto were mostly for the city’s privileged and wealthy. Boomers democratized health and wellness in a way no previous generation had done before. So, Bastian will not let you get away with any excuses for skipping your workout: “If you don’t make time to be healthy, you’re going to have to make more time to be ill”.

While “the streak” is a marker for Bastian’s life mantra of “one day at a time,” his attachment to LAAC is not solely driven by physical fitness. Humans are social creatures after all — Bastian especially so. He comes to the club daily because, “other members uplift me.” Bastian also thrives within the Club’s growing diversity. There are always opportunities to swap experiences with members of all ages, races, cultures, and religions. “You can learn so much from anyone,” Bastian observes. Accordingly, he isn’t attached to the idea of belonging to a specific generation. Perhaps that explains why he refuses to celebrate his birthday on the actual day of the event. Instead, he celebrates the annual tick on his life clock the day before or after his actual date of birth. This makes perfect sense in Bastian’s world, because birthdays shouldn’t be a big deal, “They’re just about rounding up.”
(left to right)
Ghazi Kitmitto, 82 • Silent Generation
Hal Bastian, 58 • Baby Boomer
Polly Wales, 43 • Generation X
Ashley Urban, 30 • Millennial
Arik Billings, 16 • Generation Z
"There are two great days in a person’s life: the day we are born and the day we discover why."

- William Barclay
CASTING CALL

If Bastian’s style tends toward control and self-modulation, GenX-er Polly Wales basks in the unpredictability of artistic chaos. Her generation invented punk rock: raucous, angsty protest music that was raw and unpredictable. Kids who never touched an instrument were suddenly inspired to pick up guitars and teach themselves how to play. Passion and authenticity mattered more than musical mastery. In a sense then, children of the '70s were pioneers of DIY. Flash-forward to the present day. GenX-ers represent the largest contingent of successful entrepreneurs in America. (Sorry, not sorry, Millennials.) Like the iconic Nike campaign of its day, this generation blew past social norms and pushed themselves to Just Do It.

Wales is no Wendy O. Williams (the mohawked punk performer known for chain-sawing through her guitar on stage). She’s soft-spoken, heady, and highly articulate in the manner of a politically active English University lecturer with a sense of style...which she actually is. After studying art at the Royal College in London, Wales wandered way off the beaten path for her first job. She taught arts and crafts to incarcerated women. “Everyone should see the inside of a prison,” Wales insists. “It strips you of any judgment once you hear their stories.” Today, instead of convicts, she oversees thirteen business partners, six jewelers, two children, and one husband. Migrating from London to L.A. just three years ago, Wales etched her name on the door of a successful artisanal jewelry design shop on Sixth and Olive. She built her business like a Jenga tower: slowly, carefully, and one piece at a time. She assembled a following through social media, one “like” at a time. She hauled her wares to trade shows. But the grind of bootstrapping her own line from scratch was well worth it to Wales. Jewelry isn’t just her business, it’s her means of artistic self-expression. “Intimate objects like jewelry communicate something very specific and more direct than words ever could.”

Her signature “cast-not-set” jewelry manufacturing process can best be described as regulated anarchy. She hand-crafts wax molds to house precious stones and a gold base. When subjected to extreme heat, the wax melts away, and sapphires, rubies and diamonds float and move within the molten gold. A stone’s path through the softened metal naturally creates unique textural impressions. Unlike traditional “set” jewelry, a stone may not even end up facing forward. The unpredictability of the process is meant to portray the indivisibility of the jewelry and the person wearing it. “I try to make jewelry part of you so that it portrays a sense of history and narrative as you wear it,” explains Wales. For her, jewelry is an expression — not of archetype but of the imperfect, winding, and unforeseen narrative of human life.

Given her interest in design and story, it’s not surprising that Wales was drawn to LAAC’s quirky but marvelous 1912 clubhouse. She can usually be found doing laps in the pool. Her two young daughters are learning to swim here too. Wales is inspired by the long-time female Club members who made her feel welcome while she was still settling into her new American life. The Club provides Polly Wales and her whole family that sense of belonging so elusive in many cities.

Apparently, anarchy needs some down time too.
URBAN BRIGHT

The newest Club member in our survey takes the gig economy to the next level...wherever that may be. “I do anything I can to keep from being behind a desk,” Ashley Urban insists. For this Millennial, who is both a fine and commercial artist, that might mean sowing seeds on a sustainable farm in Serbia or picking apples in New Zealand or wrangling bees in India. Don’t like your big-girl job shilling real estate? No problem! Pick up some work as a model or a photographer (she’s great at both). Next, fly out to oversee your solo exhibition in Colorado, then promote your wearable art line in Tokyo. But there’s a catch. Constructing your life around your art sometimes means not knowing where the next rent check will come from. Urban shrugs, “Life is so short. I just want to do things that inspire me.” From design to fashion; from architecture to photography, life is art and the world is a gallery where Urban is master curator.

Urban came of age in a tiny, one-stop-light town in Colorado. Her Jill-of-all-trades mother, who counted water sourcing with a divining rod among her talents, encouraged Ashley’s free spirit and exploratory nature. She was constantly outdoors and active. Today Ashley tours the classic buildings of downtown on foot with a sketchpad and camera, always looking to record her experiences. For Urban, the Club is a locus of meditation; a replenishing repose that enables daily artistic experiences to sink deeper into her pores.

Urban personifies the distinct characteristics of a generation that’s simultaneously starry-eyed and ruthlessly savvy. She wears her brand. Her vintage clothing and jewelry are thoughtfully styled and assembled, not simply copped from a couture catalog. She’s informed and opinionated, railing against the “slave labor” that supplies clothing brands. But she doesn’t always side with her generational peers. Urban decries the tacky, gratuitous display of nudity on Instagram. Urban insists that “women can be alluring and sexy without showing any skin.”

But a creative life of meaning requires being creative with one’s means. We associate curation with art museums or Instagram feeds, but for Urban, the concept is unequivocally utilitarian. Her diminutive loft space (200 square feet) demands ingenuity. It functions simultaneously as art studio, design lab, and fashion cache. The hope is, at the end of the day, there will be a spot to sleep. “My life is like a Tetris game,” laughs Urban. The Hobbit-sized accommodations require constant, physical rearrangement to make everything fit. On the other hand, she considers this ongoing adaptation of her life/work space purifying: “It forced me to carve my life down to the things I absolutely love or absolutely need.” Seems we could all use a little bit of curation.
"I like beating people at stuff," admits sixteen-year-old LAAC member Arik Billings with a grin. Unlike the Millennials before them, Generation Z doesn’t seem too interested in moral victories or participation trophies. Perhaps this new generation — larger than both Boomers and Millennials — just wants the “W”. Well; sort of. As the social media cliché goes, it’s complicated.

Arik literally grew up at LAAC. He learned to swim in the pool. He went to Kids’ Camp on the ninth floor while Mom worked just three blocks away. He learned to refine his jump shot on the Club’s court. Arik’s parents (both LAAC members) have always fostered and channeled his competitive nature, even when it wasn’t convenient for them. This is not a young man who will be satisfied with a casual pickup game against neighborhood kids. Arik has big sports dreams and is looking to go up against the best so that he may constantly improve. “I want to get better—always,” he insists.

His life in team sports began at just six years old when he earned a spot with a traveling soccer team. But Arik never found his true position in the sport and injuries curtailed his interest. Next, he joined a traveling squash team but struggled to compete with kids who had four to five years more playing experience than him. It was Arik’s lifelong ties to the Club that prompted his decision three years ago to drop all other sports and focus solely on basketball. He works out regularly with basketball trainer/program director Alek Petrossian. Of LAAC’s Patron Saint, John Wooden, Billings observes philosophically, “You really need to ponder his message.” It’s clear this GenZ-er has already internalized Wooden’s bedrock principles of consistency and grinding hard work. He spends two to three hours a day on the court, working on his shooting, dribbling and footwork. Standing 6’ 1” and projected to grow to 6’ 4,” he has already drawn interest from colleges. Did we mention he was only sixteen?

His participation in LAAC pickup games led Arik to observe, “The Club is not just a gym; it’s a small community.” It follows then that the basketball court is the community’s town square. Members ranging in age from twenty to sixty create a competitive Bouillabaisse cooked up with sweat on the hardwood. Arik feels one–hundred percent comfortable with this multi–generational mash–up. “We wouldn’t normally hang out together, but on the court, we talk, joke, and compete.” Unique sports fellowship opportunities like these led Billings to comfortably claim, “Without LAAC, my life would be completely different.” Most importantly, without the Club, there would be no opportunity to, you know, beat people at stuff.
A New Wave

A New Community of Female Entrepreneurs Blossoms at LAAC
In a secret space on the fourth floor of the Athletic Club, on a Monday evening last May, a group of fifteen women poured themselves tea and wine under the glow of a pink neon sign reading, “I have never seen snow and do not know what winter means.” The sign quotes the father of modern surfing, Olympic medalist Duke Kahanamoku, also known as The Big Kahuna. The women, a mix of newly initiated and veteran club members, introduced themselves to one another. They had all come together to establish a vibrant, new community with fellow female members.

The richly designed Kahuna Room, lined with rainforest-themed wallpaper, striped banquettes, and gold embossed café tables, serves as the stylish base camp for WAVE, the new club within the Club. WAVE stands for Women Achieving Visible Excellence. A vision board entitled WAVE BAES occupies a corner of the room, projecting an aspirational standard of female excellence with images of the likes of Amal Clooney, Oprah, and Ruth Bader Ginsberg. Membership in WAVE includes exclusive access to the Kahuna Room as a private co-working space by day.

The group is the brainchild of Simone McAlonen, a marketing and events manager at LAAC, who felt the Club was lacking in feminine energy. Historically, the Los Angeles Athletic Club belongs to the tradition of gentlemen’s clubs designed for men to develop personal and professional relationships with other men. The Club’s recorded creation myth calls itself a community place made for the “best young men,” where “ladies were welcome at social events and exhibitions.” (Women were formally included in club activities in 1914.) When McAlonen pitched her idea to club management as an initiative to help drive female membership, she was met with enthusiastic support.

Prior to the launch of WAVE, there was the philanthropy-focused LAAC Women’s League, which voted to dissolve in 2017. McAlonen’s intuition about the lack of active women’s groups within the Club was on point. Her vision
for the group was inspired by the new wave of women-only member clubs like The Wing, a modern social and co-working club with outlets in New York, D.C., and a fifth opening in San Francisco this fall. One founding WAVE member, a recent transplant from Toronto, chose to join the Athletic Club over the SoHo House because she was looking for a female-oriented community akin to Verity, a women-only club in her hometown.

As established in its mission statement, WAVE is “an intersectional group for all female-identifying or gender non-conforming members of LAAC who are interested in pursuing personal and professional growth to meet their career goals.” The diverse make-up of the founding group of fifteen includes aspiring entrepreneurs like Dana Buchman, who heard about WAVE while she was in the midst of a career change and leaving a 14-year streak in corporate branding. As she moved into consulting with the goal of starting her own business, Buchman fancied a support network to buoy her through the transition.

Mandy May Cheetam, a performer and writer of TruTV’s Mutha, was similarly searching for such a network while treading new territory packaging her first film for financing. Cheetham hoped the group could become like a personal board of directors, an idea first popularized by author Napoleon Hill. Cheetham’s intention was to be a part of a Master Mind collective made up of interesting women who could help each other forge forward and break through the professional and personal issues that were holding them back.

WAVE’s inaugural season included a series of talks facilitated by journalist Ann Friedman, who is a contributing columnist for the L.A. Times and co-host of the popular podcast, Call Your Girlfriend. The talks covered topics such as "Side Hustles" about turning small gigs into money-making ventures or full blown careers, as well as an "Ask and Offer" session, where members lofted out what they needed to the group, like performance space or social media marketing help. Founding WAVE member
Marni Mervis loved this idea of asking for what you need: “I had never seen that in process before. It breaks down networking in its most elemental form of 'here's what I need' and 'here's how I can help you.'”

The founding members of WAVE also participated in an eight-week "Idea Bootcamp," led by career coach Noelle Delgado. The goal of the session was to see an idea through from conception to completion. Nicole Wong, a teacher at Caltech, organized a leadership group for Asian Pacific Islander Women on her campus. Mervis, a photographer and content creator, produced a "Content Creation Lab" for aspiring design professionals. The event was sponsored by local businesses like Suja Juice and Shreebs Coffee and featured a panel with editorial directors Arlen Hernandez and Leo Epstein, followed by video and pitching workshops. McAlonen devised and performed a sold-out run of her one-woman show, "Wild Wild Christian." "I learned a lot about myself through Bootcamp," she said. "It forced me into taking an idea I’ve had for a while and turn it into a reality."

In mid-August, a month after completing the idea lab, the founding fifteen reconvened for a fabulous dinner party celebrating the group's launch. Cocktails were served while WAVE's own photographer, Ms. Mervis, snapped member portraits.

“The through line of WAVE is the relationships,” said Buchman. When McAlonen initially polled prospective participants about what they wanted from a women’s group, the most resonant thread across all the responses was a yearning to get to know other women in the Club socially, growing their networks. “We're living in an isolating city in an isolating time,” said Cheetham. “The more I can cultivate relationships with people and find the threads that unite us, the richer my life will be.” As to the future of the Club, members expressed their dedication to advancing the group and continuing to diversify its membership, particularly for future generations of women at the Club.