

BOHEMIAN

LIFT OFF

Flamingo Resort launches retro-futuristic club [p8](#)

Arts & Ideas



Photo by Deb Leal

THE TEAM (from left to right) Stephen Yang, Anderson Pugash and Benson Wang purchased the Flamingo Resort in 2019 with Rebecca Bunya (not pictured).

Vintage Space

Flamingo Resort's new club brings nightlife to Santa Rosa

BY JANE VICK

THE LONG WAIT for a dance space is over, Santa Rosa.

No longer will we comb the streets after 10pm searching for a spot with a DJ and a dance floor. No longer will we make our party plans in San Francisco.

Moving forward, North Bay revelers need look no further than the towering, pink neon sign on Fourth Street, announcing the historic Flamingo Resort which, last weekend, launched the retro-galactic nightclub Vintage Space, paying homage to the Flamingo's early history and elevating Santa Rosa

nightlife in one astronomical swoop. Peep the details.

Remember the Space Race? That miraculous—albeit fraught—time in global and American history when truly anything seemed possible? The Allies had just won World War II, and America was in a renaissance of socio-political change and revolution. Racing Russia to get to the moon, long hair and go-go boots. James Baldwin. Bobby Lewis. Mod living room sets. And everywhere the promise of *space*. That incredible new frontier of infinite potential.

Enter the Flamingo. In 1957, while Russia launched Sputnik 1 into space and America fervently worked on Explorer 1, an architect, widely believed to be Homer A. Rissman, designed a resort nestled in the Valley of the Moon. When completed, the mid-century modern style building sporting 156 beds, a pool and a whole lot of pink quickly became a Sonoma County landmark,

its signature “Flamingo” sign, with a neon bird at the top, leg gracefully raised, illuminating the night in pink.

The likes of Jane Mansfield and Frankie Avalon were quickly spotted poolside. In 1994, yours truly, as a small girl moving with her family from Tucson, Ariz., lived in two rooms while her parents finalized the purchase of a Northern California home. In 1997, Santa Rosa declared the Flamingo sign a historic landmark. In short, the Flamingo Resort is iconic and central to the Santa Rosa experience.

In spite of all this, the time came for the Flamingo to evolve, in an effort to ensure its relevance into the next several decades.

Enter the new owners. In 2019, Anderson Pugash, Steve and Benson Yang, and Rebecca Bunya purchased the Flamingo from previous owner Pierre Ehret and family, quickly launching into a \$20 million renovation.

Three years and one global pandemic later, the Flamingo has a new lease on life, reimagined with a wooden-and-glass porte-cochere entry and white wicker furniture that showcases the pool's glittering, aqua-colored water.

The lobby is quintessential mod mixed with jungley, tropical wallpaper and features art from Serge Gay Jr. and HYBYCOZO. It's finished with triangle pillows, low couches and gold light fixtures. Tres vibe. While true to the Flamingo's origins—the new owners worked closely with Ehret while reimagining the hotel vibe—there is an evident modern twist.

The desire to strike a balance between history and contemporary styles is what inspired Pugash and Benson Wang to reimagine what used to be The Lounge at the Flamingo Resort into Vintage Space. Those who spent time in The Lounge will be pleased to find the bone structure of the space largely

unchanged, with dark walls, a curved bar, ample dancefloor, and booths for cozy conversation and dance breaks.

But it's clearly a new venue, and the space theme is fully evident. Starry collages featuring astronauts and old automobiles hang on the walls. The drinks menu offers a delightful assortment of "Cosmic Cocktails" including drinks such as the M.A.S.A., featuring tequila, mezcal, peach, habanero shrub and sparkling wine; the Liftoff Espresso Martini, featuring cold-brew coffee liqueur, vodka, espresso, chocolate bitters and mint foam; and the E.TEA, a non-alcoholic option with ice tea, lemon, peach and habanero shrub. The feel is playful, exploratory, cosmic—keeping the sense of exploring new frontiers very much alive.

The retro feel has a surprising innocence, and it's refreshing. The mystery of life and our sense of humanity's boundless exploration have been temporarily compromised by the hyper-developments of technology in the last three years, contributing to a general lack of wonder and curiosity in the current world. Kicking back in all that joyful exploration of the late 1950s is a fun mini-time travel experience and a good perspective refresh. Let's keep that curiosity alive, people!

The nightclub will be open until 1 or 2am—depending on the show and the crowd—with doors opening at a reasonable 8pm. The lineups will be versatile. Friday night shows will feature cover bands, jam bands, funk, reggae, soul, disco and more. Saturdays are DJ nights, with disco house, trap house, deep house and so on.

"We're going for a vibe. What brings fun, what makes people happy," Pugash said during a Thursday morning conversation just before Vintage Space's maiden voyage. "1957 was such a cool time. It was a time of American possibility and ingenuity—this feeling of a limitless horizon. That's the kind of energy we've tried to tap into. That exploratory, fun feeling."

Pugash and Benson Wang—who spear-headed Vintage Space—are no strangers to creating an exploratory, fun feeling. Bay Area natives and EDM lovers may not be surprised to learn that these two are the masterminds behind the San

Francisco establishments Bergerac, a bar with an impromptu house party feel; Audio, a music-driven nightclub; Palm House, a tropical restaurant with vacation drinks; and The Dorian, a neighborhood supper club. Combined, the two are a recipe for nightlife.

Though I've long been chomping at the bit for a hot club presence in Sonoma County, I asked Pugash if he thought Santa Rosa's demographic was ready for this type of socializing.

"The median age in Sonoma County is 38 now, which kind of blew my mind," Pugash said. "I think people are ready for it. Do people like good music? They do. Do they like having fun? They do. Even though we're space-themed, we're not doing any rocket science here. We're just trying to give people a good time."

And Vintage Space, as with the Flamingo Resort in its entirety, really isn't just for the visiting guests; the goal is that Santa Rosans will enjoy it just as much as out-of-towners. Pugash, a North Bay local himself, born in San Francisco and raised in both Marin and Sonoma, is excited to provide locals with more opportunities to get out and have fun.

"With the music program, the concepting and everything, I want to create something that's harmonious to both locals and hotel guests," he said. "It's always about bringing people together in these kinds of spaces. I do think that locals will like this place."

Though music is Vintage Space's primary focus, comedy nights, Sunday salsa nights and other events are also on the docket. While staying focused and bringing in Bay Area musical talent, Vintage Space looks forward to giving local artists space to explore. *Cough cough*.

Last weekend, Vintage Space held two inaugural shows. This Friday the five-piece "roots-reggae" band the Bloodstones takes the stage. On Saturday, All Good Funk Alliance kicks things off before DJ Malarkey spins some dusty electro swing. The lineup is stacked through the end of the month with no signs of slowing.

Get ready to blast off, Santa Rosa.

For more information on Vintage Space visit www.vintagespacesr.com.

Spirit



ALL ABOARD *Life is like a journey aboard a steamship. The journey is the same for everyone, and the point of it seems to be how we choose to spend our time on board.*

Life in Steerage

Finding meaning on a ship of fools

BY CHRISTIAN CHENSVOLD

LIFE IS LIKE a journey aboard a steamship. We did not ask to be here, and we can't get off until the captain says so.

No one has ever seen the captain, and no one knows why this is even happening, but a few can point us in the right direction. The journey is the same for everyone, starting with birth and ending with death, and the point of it seems to be how we choose to spend our time on board.

Some were given first-class accommodations, while others are in steerage. Some rise to a better room through good works, while others are booted down if they prove unworthy of their privilege. We make the best with what we've got, and in the end everyone has a spot to call their own—and this is called having a life.

We can wander the ship and interact with others, who represent the spectrum of humanity. Some

are saints and sages, and others are devils and demons—so remember two pieces of golden wisdom. First, the devil's greatest ruse is convincing us he doesn't exist, and second, vice is never more dangerous than when hiding behind a mask of virtue.

Almost all the passengers spend their time in the bowels of the ship, where the only light that shines is artificial. There are endless entertainments to distract us from the journey, and an all-you-can-eat buffet of bad food to gorge upon gluttonously. Many have never even been on deck before to experience the wonder of the starry night and vast ocean.

A few solitary souls, however, like to visit a special observation deck at the highest point on the ship. In the morning, they greet the sun, bringer of light and life, and at night, the moon, which points the way to the eternal realm beyond the confines of the ship. If we ask, they will tell us of a secret compartment on board the ship, a library of sacred books from around the world and a place to receive illumination. Those who find it are never the same again, and one look in their eyes shows that they know something others do not.

Most of the passengers mock these quiet solitaries and call them fools. But when someone finds the sea too stormy and the entertainment too empty, they ask about the secret chamber, and they are always told the same thing. No one can tell us where it is, because it's different for everyone. But if we seek it, we will find it, and if we knock, the door will be opened.