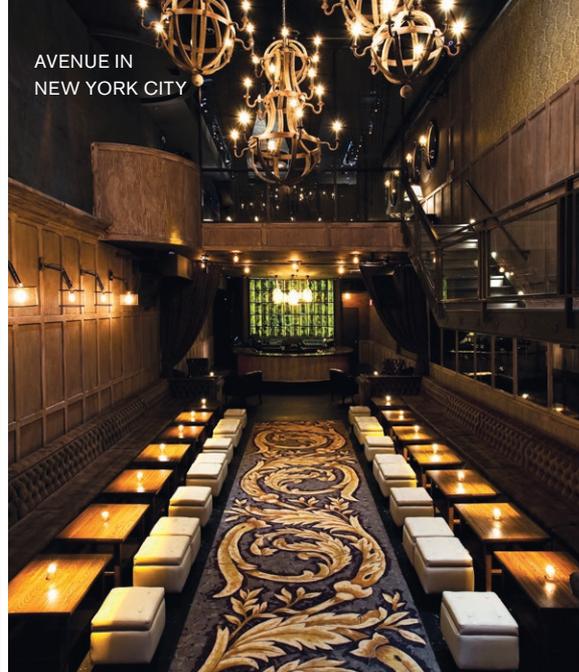


TAO BEACH  
LAS VEGASAVENUE IN  
NEW YORK CITYMARQUEE IN  
NEW YORK CITY

# The House That Strauss Built

By Christina Bohnstengel Photography by Larry Hanna

JASON STRAUSS AND NOAH TEPPERBERG HAVE POSITIONED STRATEGIC GROUP AS THE PREMIER BICOASTAL FIRM FOR MARKETING, BRAND PROMOTIONS, AND SPECIAL EVENTS NEEDS.

**B**efore the breakup of the Seagram Spirits and Wine Group in the late 2000, the powers that be decided it was time for something new. The premium Scotch whiskey brand Chivas Regal needed a makeover. It had to be something fresh and edgy, something that would generate buzz. And even though the luxury liquor was a favorite of Jim Morrison and enjoyed multiple mentions in the world of pop culture—in Tom Waits' song *Downtown*, in Hunter Thompson's bizarre walk on the dark side *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and party-loving Beastie Boys' *Brass Monkey*—the rebranding had to be something that would get the masses talking even more.

Enter Jason Strauss and Noah Tepperberg. At the time, they were the young dynamic duo, 26 and 25 respectively, who had generated their own type of buzz as the ultimate party throwers on the East Coast. Their events earned ink on national gossip columns and their notoriously guarded velvet-roped venues, with \$300 bottles of Belvedere, called to attention-hungry celebrities. From Conscience Point in the Hamptons to Marquee in Chelsea, the Strauss-Tepperberg fingerprint proved to have the Midas effect, and Seagram's wanted to be touched by their golden fingers.

When the liquor conglomerate came to the boys for help, it not only ushered in a new level of branding for Chivas Regal, it was the genesis of Strategic Group, Strauss and Tepperberg's firm that specializes in large-scale marketing, promotion, and special events needs.

"Seagram's said to us, 'You know, we hear all of these great things about you guys. Can you put together a marketing deck and a sampling program to figure out how we can reposition the image of Chivas Regal in New York through event marketing?'" explains Strauss. "After reassuring the client that we could absolutely do it, Noah and I walked out of that meeting and asked each other what a marketing deck was," he says, laughing at the naiveté of their youth. "Even though it was a head-scratcher at first, we were resourceful young guys, and we got with people we knew in the business, did our research, presented an idea, hit it out of the park, and started working on the entire portfolio of Seagram's liquor."

By continuing to over-deliver, Strauss and Tepperberg were able build Strategic Group into a marketing company that now extends into various types of lifestyle marketing, special events, brand promotions, and public relations projects. In 2004, the pair opted to expand their partnership into a trio with the addition of Seth Rodsky, the CAA marketing guru with his own legendary reputation. "Seth was a young gun moving up the pole at CAA at rocket speed," says Strauss. "His intelligence and insight, the way he conducted business, and how he had such a strong grasp of what the client needed to succeed...really led Noah and I to take a breath and realize that we needed to bring in another partner in order to grow. We attacked him pretty hard and convinced him to move to New York, and it's been a great marriage ever since."

Today, Strategic Group differentiates itself from the competition by operating as a multifaceted corporation specializing in several different arenas.



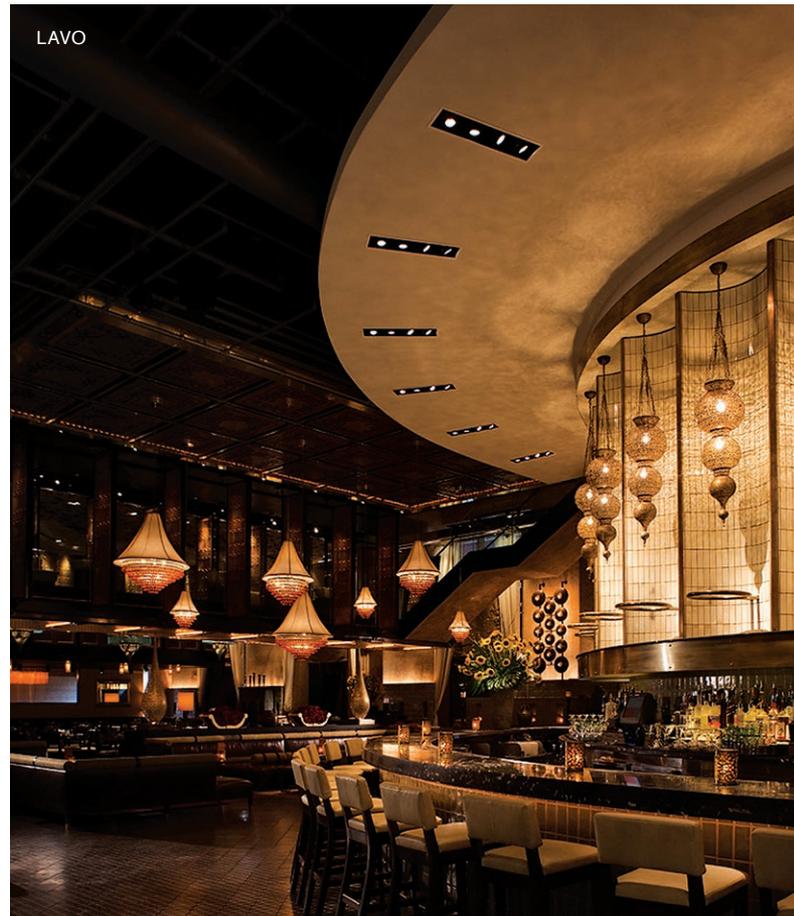
JASON STRAUSS,  
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NOAH TEPPERBERG,  
JASON STRAUSS



DAVID KATZENBERG,  
NICKY HILTON,  
JASON STRAUSS



LAVO

"We are a hospitality company and a marketing company," explains Strauss from his office at Lavo in Las Vegas, a venue that Strategic Group owns and operates (along with partners Marc Packer and Rich Wolf) in The Palazzo Resort-Hotel-Casino. "You'll never meet a marketing agency that has some of the hottest bars and nightclubs across the country as living, breathing, focus groups to really give you answers as to what the cusp of trends are in the marketplace," he says. "On the other hand, the hospitality side of the company allows us to tie in with corporate clients and we can use our own facilities as venues to house these great events. So, it really gives us a competitive advantage on both sides," he says.

Some of the notable clients who have signed up for a slice of Strategic Group's success include Xbox, Nike, and Microsoft, as well as Coca-Cola for the revival of the "Have a Coke and a Smile" campaign and the launch of Sprite Green during the NBA All-Star Weekend in February 2009.

In the past 12 months, the hospitality portfolio has grown as well, on both the East and West Coasts. In June, 2009, they opened Avenue, a gastrolounge which has been hailed as a welcomed addition to New York's Chelsea neighborhood. Their West Coast line up includes Tao and Tao Beach in Las Vegas, which they operate with the owners of Tao New York, Marc Packer and Rich Wolf, and managing partner Lou Abin.

"I could talk about it all you want because I love it," he says. "Tao is the reason I'm out here [in Las Vegas]. We opened up four years ago as a restaurant and nightclub out of New York and had dramatic success. From that, we reinvested in the space three years ago and built Tao Beach, which is essentially the roof deck of Tao nightclub. And business continues to grow every year. We are up 30 percent this year at Tao Beach. It is definitely one

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JASON STRAUSS ON THE TERRACE AT LAVO

of our best growing businesses in the entire portfolio of venues.”

In fact, the Tao brand is doing so well in the New York and Las Vegas markets that extensive plans to expand are being discussed. “We are talking about opening a Tao in Miami, we are currently talking to three or four developers about doing a Tao-themed hotel, and we have investigated opportunities to bring Tao to London,” Strauss reveals.

**W**hile the Tao brand may be what brought Strauss and Strategic Group to Las Vegas, what has kept his interest piqued lately is Lavo, a restaurant and nightclub that the band of brothers opened in late 2008 in the \$2 billion Palazzo. Strauss described Lavo as a baby sister to Tao, with the design inspired by Italian and Mediterranean bathhouses, replete with old stones, domed architectural details, and vintage European fabrics, furniture, and lighting fixtures. Strauss proudly points out that the 300-seat restaurant, complete with a 3,000-square-foot balcony, is one of only a handful in Las Vegas that offers Strip-view dining. Lavo’s lounge is easily accessible through the lobby of The Palazzo, and Strauss’ declared wow factor comes in the form of the 4,000-square-foot nightclub, located above the restaurant. In addition to the positive feedback from local and national media sources, Strauss touts, “We’ve had dramatic success. We’ve been open a year and we’re probably somewhere around the 15th-highest grossing hospitality facility in the country. And Tao is still No. 1.”

Other venues that fall under the Strategic Group umbrella include Dune, a beach-chic nightclub in the Hamptons, and Marquee, the six-year-old Manhattan club that makes as many headlines today as when it first opened. “I credit the longevity of Marquee to the culture that Noah and I try to instill when it comes

to service, management, human resources, the development of people, and the ability to constantly reinvest,” Strauss explains. “We’re not just reinvesting in the décor but in the marketing as well, and that comes in the form of investing in different types of house people, different types of DJs, and really spending a dramatic amount of time to redesign event marketing. We are always trying to create something fresh and new inside the venue that appeals to, maybe a similar demographic, but always a new channel of demographic. We are always aiming to create excitement around the venue and not let it just sit stagnant.”

Whether looking to create that excitement around one of their existing venues, or seeking out fresh ideas for something new, the whiz kids have found one of the best ways to combine research with their penchant for the good life. “Every year, Noah and I go to Europe to see if there’s anything new and relevant going on. This year we went to Ibiza, Barcelona, and London,” says Strauss. “Of course we try to enjoy ourselves, but it really is a scouting trip. We’re hitting around 17 different hospitality venues in two days. We pop our heads in and look at the design, the way the menu is positioned, the fonts, different types of fabrics being used, materials, different ways to introduce bottle service, different ways of standardizing music, lighting, sound, and anything else we can think of.” The best of Europe, blended with the best inspirations from the Strategic Group greats, has delivered unarguably so far. “I live in the hospitality capital of the world,” Strauss says. “In my opinion, no where else in the world are hospitality venues being built with these types of budgets or these types of designs because they’re fueled by casino money. So the stuff that’s going on in Vegas is truly inspiring. I also dive into every design magazine you can buy. So, right now a lot of our ideas are a collaboration of what’s happening in Vegas and what’s happening in the media and then a trip to Europe every year.” It seems to be a winning formula, ensuring that the strategy at Strategic Group is one of full-steam ahead. 🍷