

TRAVEL

STALWART IN SEVILLE

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

In Spain's fourth-largest city, Seville, the *Juderia* (Jewish quarter) is a vibrant maze of brightly painted buildings, vest-pocket-sized parks, sidewalk cafes, flamenco-show venues and boutiques.

While this should come as no surprise — it is the area's social and commercial epicenter — all of the paint, flower boxes and souvenirs conceal a darker history that, over time, nearly rid the city of Jews entirely.

According to the Bible (I Kings 10:22), Jews were in contact with southern Spain during the days of Solomon. Historical records, however, suggest the time of their introduction in Seville — now capital of the autonomous community called Andalusia — was between the fifth and seventh centuries.

When the city came under Moorish rule in 712, a Jewish guard was formed for its

Martinez, launched a campaign of violent sermons against the Jews, and, according to Stephen Birmingham in "The Grandees: America's Sephardic Elite," led an armed mob in 1391 that "massacred more than four thousand Jews, looted and burned their houses." Although many Jews converted, the Jewish problem became the *Converso* problem.

Today, about 130 Jews are trying to restore Jewish life and tradition to Seville. According to local tour guide and historian Moises Hassan-Amselem, the Orthodox community (consisting of Moroccan Jews and more closely resembling the American Conservative denomination in practice) was created officially in 1966. Although some Moroccan-Jewish families had lived there for a couple of generations, others arrived in



Locals and tourists enjoy the day in the Juderia courtyard. Photos by Elyse Glickman

defense, making a harmonious period during which Jews, Moors and Christians co-existed. In the Middle Ages, Seville's Juderia was a bustling Jewish community that was second largest after Toledo. At its peak in the mid-13th century, an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 Jewish families lived in the area.

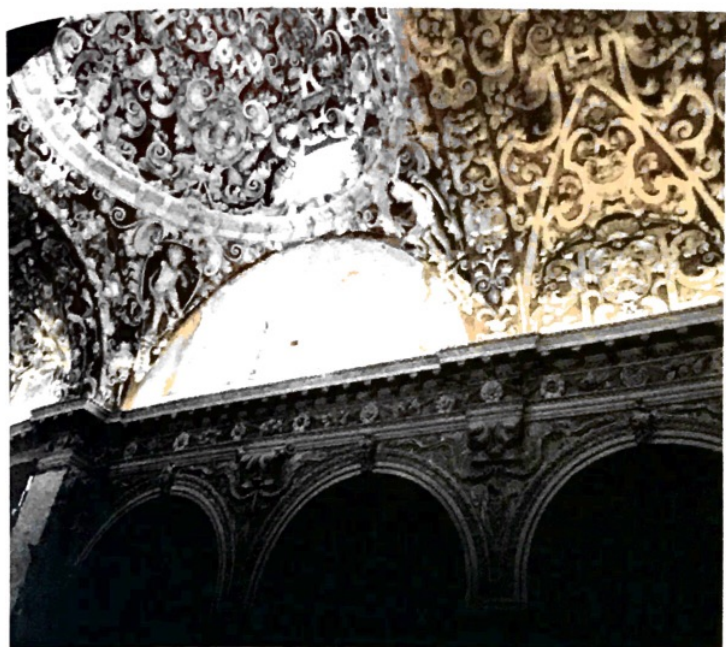
During those times, Jews were engaged in banking, law, commerce, medicine and the dyeing industry. After the 1013 Berber conquest, Seville served as a refuge for Jews escaping from persecution in nearby Córdoba.

The protracted decline of the Jewish community started in 1378 — more than 100 years before the final expulsion from Spain in 1492. Following a Christian reconquest of the city, a local archdeacon, Ferrand

the 1960s and '70s to attend the local university.

This community — about 30 families — stages services for Shabbat, even though getting a *minyan* can prove challenging. There also are services for the High Holy Days.

The Reform community (*beitrambam*), which also identifies itself as Progressive, was organized a few years back by Jews from Andalusia seeking an alternative. Its 25 to 30 families include expats from the United States and elsewhere in the Americas, converts and other members of mixed marriages. They celebrate Kabbalat Shabbat once a month, but do not have a permanent shul, instead using offices and hotel rooms around town as needed. A member of the



Inside the Church of Santa Maria la Blanca, one section of the wall is peeled back to reveal remnants of its previous use as a synagogue.

community teaches Hebrew once a week to children of both congregations.

The Centro de Interpretacion Juderia de Sevilla, a museum in Barrio Santa Cruz, one of the sections that make up the Jewish quarter, houses artifacts from the Juderia's glory days and downfall. But Hassan-Amselem (jewishsevilla.com) prefers telling Jewish history by hitting the streets.

"I take my clients to small corners of the quarter where they can see a piece of history that provokes conversation about how Jews live in Spain today," he explained upon our meeting at the Hotel Las Casas de la Juderia. "My job is to let people know that the strong historical roots of the Jewish community are still important. I want to connect Jewish history to the present and prove to visitors that it is still possible to live a Jewish life here, even if it can be challenging."

Although the hotel lobby is quite beautiful, Hassan-Amselem is quick to point out the building is not representative of the Juderia as it existed 600 years ago. Our tour takes the form of a scavenger hunt, tracking down finds hidden in and around Barrio Santa Cruz, Barrio de San Bartolomé, Calle Santa Maria la Blanca and remnants of the quarter's wall originating from Calle Conde de Ibarra.

Our first stop is the Church of Santa Maria la Blanca, where one wall section embellished with vividly colored and gilded Christian imagery is peeled back to reveal the spare architectural hallmarks of a medieval synagogue. Although there is no signage to point out the building's former use, the architectural contrast stands as a visual reminder of how Martinez galvanized his flock to erase any trace of Jewish presence.

Later, as we walked through a beautiful garden park, Jardines de Murillo, Hassan-Amselem told me it was once the site of a Jewish cemetery. And inside the Church of San Nicolás, he showed me its most visited shrine, memorializing a child, whose signage was changed around 2005 to remove a declaration that the boy was killed by Jews. (Local historians believe, according to Hassan-Am-



Hebrew inscriptions can be found in many places around Seville.

selem, that the story was a myth planted by clerics to support pogroms.)

In addition to these larger landmarks, there are small Hebrew inscriptions posted in random walls and archways around town that remain enigmatic centuries after they were placed. Hassan-Amselem said they may have been written by non-Jews — one captions a picture of the Virgin Mary stepping over a snake, reading "*hu yeshufecha rosh*" ("[S]he will strike you in the head," from Genesis 3:15, a reference to the enmity that is said to exist between humanity and the snake after the incident in the Garden of Eden).

Essential sites beyond the Juderia include the Castillo de San Jorge/Spanish Inquisition Museum in the Triana neighborhood; Plaza de España (built for the Ibero-American Exposition of 1929); Jerez, the cradle of sherry production; and the Tio Pepe bodega, known for its acclaimed kosher sherry. ■



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**BYE
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**WHAT DOES
THE FOXMAN
SAY?**

HEALTH

FOLLOWING HIS GUT INSTINCTS

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

Benjamin Feinstein, by all accounts, was an exceptional young man. By the time he was a high school senior, his grades assured acceptance to numerous top universities. He also excelled all four years on his high school's varsity basketball and golf teams, and had a huge and loyal circle of friends who would become extended family for his parents, Wayne and Leslee.

"He had a Ricky Nelson ideal kind of life," Wayne Feinstein recalled. "Never any problems of any kind until he was stricken with gastric cancer at 17."

Ben's parents earnestly tried to gather as much information on gastric cancer as they could find. Even with the care and support of noted Stanford University School of Medicine oncologist Dr. James Ford, they realized that this form of cancer—compared to higher-profile cancers, such as breast and leukemia—lacked adequate funding for research into causes and possible cures. This ultimately hampered their efforts to save Ben's life.

However, Ben's strong spirit, which endured until the end of his life at age 20, played a big role in how the Feinstein family would cope after Ben's death. It would also inform a secondary vocation with the Gastric Cancer Foundation (GCF) that tapped into Wayne Feinstein's past successes in executive positions at Jewish philanthropic organizations, including CEO of The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles in the early 1990s.

"Part of Ben's strength was an inner calm ... which I have rarely witnessed in other human beings," his father recalls. "He never complained or felt sorry for himself right up until the end. Two weeks before he died, Ben was at home in hospice care, and the two of us were spending the afternoon kibitzing and shmoozing. He said, 'Dad, I hope you're going to stay with this. I mean the Gastric Cancer Foundation, because nobody should have to suffer this disease.' I viewed this as a deathbed commitment. ... Ben's positive legacy, even in the unfortunate way he got sick and passed, is highly motivating."

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) estimates that 21,600 new cases of stomach cancer will be diagnosed in the United States this year. However, stomach cancer receives less than half of 1 percent (0.4 percent) of federal cancer research dollars, and is ranked 27th in NCI research dollars. Out of 923 total currently outstanding NCI grants, there are only 17 stomach cancer grants. Of all cancers, gastric and esophageal cancers receive



Benjamin Feinstein died of gastric cancer at age 20.

the smallest amount of funding and support in terms of federal budgets, large medical foundations and other sources.

Feinstein says that what we don't know about gastric cancers can genuinely hurt us. The prognosis for patients diagnosed with gastric cancer continues to be dismal, with a five-year overall survival rate below 25 percent in the United States. Although there is a five-year survival rate of 27 percent on average for all cancers, the survival rate for stomach cancer is among the lowest.

Without money to support research into possible causes as well as cures, there are limited ways to be proactive.

This is where the GCF comes in. The organization, founded in 2009, is focused on drawing attention to the causes and symptoms of stomach and esophageal cancers, and the critical need for research into early

detection and cures.

"The more awareness and money we raise, the more physicians and top scholars will be able to learn about possible causes and cures for gastric cancers," Feinstein said. "This will, hopefully, lead to greater public understanding of the illness."

When his son first became sick, Feinstein took a proactive stance, despite limited time, money and resources. With the support of Stanford's Ford and J.P. Gallagher (a fellow patient with Ben, who founded the GCF) a comprehensive gastric cancer registry was compiled containing patient data and biological samples, opening doors for more comprehensive research. Simultaneously, Feinstein and his wife contributed to a GCF-funded Stanford Genome Technology Center project that is creating a digital version of the gastric cancer genome based on DNA sequencing.

"When his son passed away, I was tremendously impressed at how he dealt with that," said Dr. Martin Brotman, chairman of the board of the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) and national campaign chairman for the AGA Foundation's endowment campaign. He has also been a personal friend of Feinstein since the 1990s.

"Rather than engage in the usual grieving period, Wayne instead decided to do something about what happened to his son," Brotman said. "He got involved with the Gastric Cancer Foundation, took it seriously, and has risen to be the chair. While he is tremendously admired by the members of the board, he has also cultivated great public support for the foundation. As a result, it has become a na-

tionally recognized and visible organization."

Feinstein credits his background with The Jewish Federation for his ability to lead GCF's board. He says the fact that Ben's cancer returned seven weeks into his freshman year of college after a successful remission, eventually taking his life, drove him to commit to bolstering the efforts and influence of the GCF. When he took over the board in March 2013, he was determined to lead by example, as he had with Jewish community organizations in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Detroit.

"Several things have enabled me to be an effective board member and an effective lay chairman of the board," he explained. "I know

how to raise money for a cause. This is a skill set I learned and honed for almost 30 years running Jewish community organizations. The second is that when you've been a nonprofit executive for 18 years, you learn a lot from both positive experiences and mistakes. Other [useful experience] includes creating a business plan and learning from the successes of other [cancer awareness and fundraising] organizations, in terms of

support research, patient care and so on."

One of his top priorities at the GCF is to address misconceptions about stomach cancer by communicating the importance of greater public awareness.

"Often, symptoms of stomach cancer don't present themselves until the cancer

has metastasized ... so early detection is important," Feinstein explained. "The outlook is poor if the cancer is already in an advanced stage before it is discovered. For too many people, my son included, the tumor is not discovered until it is third- or fourth-stage cancer. ... Common-sense advice is that, until we learn more, if you feel like you are having digestive issues or excessive acid reflux and so on, speak with your doctor."

Although Feinstein and the GCF board still face an uphill battle, great progress has been made in the five years the organization has been in existence. One major step forward was their partnering with the AGA on a \$2.25 million endowment earmarked for research. The first AGA/GCF Research Scholar Award in Gastric and Esophageal Cancer has

been given to Mohamed El-Zaatari of the University of Michigan, whose research focuses on determining the process by which chronic inflammation causes certain cells to become pre-malignant. The award provides \$90,000 per year for three years for his research.

"When I saw what the mission of the Gastric Cancer Foundation was, I sat down with Wayne to see if the American Gastroenterological Association and Gastric Cancer Foundation could partner in funding the Research Scholar Award," Brotman said. "Since Wayne made it clear that the foundation's mission was to change a very bad prognosis of gastric cancer through research to finding causes, treatments and new therapeutic approaches, we knew this fit in with the mission of the AGA to fund young researchers." Several years on, Feinstein remains mindful about the commitment he made to his son two weeks before he died.

"I am in it for the long haul," he said. "I frequently conclude our board meetings by telling the others that I hope the next meeting will be our going-out-of-business party. Given the advances in scientific research, the genomics project and high-speed computing, a lot of researchers now say there's a possibility we may stop this in the next decade. I pray this will be the case. In the meantime, I can't think of a better way to honor the memories of Ben and J.P. Gallagher and anybody else who suffered from gastric cancer."

For more information about GCF, visit this article at jewishjournal.com. ■



Wayne Feinstein, Benjamin's father, is chairman of the board of the Gastric Cancer Foundation.

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CAMP

[CAMP FAIR PITCHES MANY TENTS]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

If there's anything the upcoming "Summer Days" camp fair proves, it's that day camps are as diverse as the kids who attend them.

The second annual fair — featuring more than 50 day camps from 30 ZIP codes — takes place Feb. 23 at Stephen S. Wise Temple in Bel Air from 1-4 p.m. It is sponsored by the Parents Education League of Los Angeles, in partnership with Tips on Trips and Camps, a free summer advisory service. Admission is free.

Jewish camps represented will include Stephen S. Wise's Camp Wise, Temple Akiba Day Camp and programs at the Zimmer Children's Museum, the Westside Jewish Community

Fingerman said the first things families should do is assess their budget for camp enrollment and the child's dietary or physical needs before delving into their preferences and interests.

Desiree Lapin, founder and president of the Parents Education League of Los Angeles (parentseducationleague.org), a resource for parents regarding education and schools, said there was "a lot of community building" at last year's camp fair, where parents could review camp schedules and pricing in one place. Her advice to parents who may come this year: Honestly assess your child's personality to get the



Camp Wise fifth- and sixth-grade campers enjoying one of their many summer field trips.

Photo courtesy of Camp Wise

Center and Adat Shalom. Non-Jewish camps will be on-hand as well.

The variety of camps available means that there's plenty for parents and kids to consider: traditional, multiactivity day camps as well as specialized programs focused on arts, sports, cooking, theater, music, surfing and science.

"The right camp for your child becomes an extension of your home and your family's values," explained Jeremy J. Fingerman, CEO of the New York-based Foundation for Jewish Camp. "First, think about the type of environment in which your child thrives. Think about if you want a Jewish camp, a traditional camp that gives your child a wide variety of experiences or a specialty camp that focuses on a particular activity or skill set.

"Does your child need lots of instruction and structure, or would they prefer to have more choices? What size camp would make my child feel comfortable, and would he or she feel more comfortable in a coed or single-gender environment?"

most mileage out of one-on-one conversations with camp directors.

"You get a better perspective on a day camp's mission when you're face to face with the camp director than you can on the Web site," Lapin said. "While Web sites are helpful, when you can have a two-way dialogue with a day camp director about your child and their program, you'll better determine if that camp is a good match. Also, as some camps at the fair will offer early registration and discounts, this is an opportunity for parents to get their children registered and file necessary forms, as spots in some camps fill quickly." Jill Levin, the summer program adviser for Tips on Trips and Camps (tipsontripsandcamps.com), said fairs such as "Summer Days" serve a valuable function in making the research process easier for those interested in attending camp. However, she said parents should realize the camping experience has changed since their childhoods.

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Camps

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"Camps today are more aware of what trends in culture and technology affect our children," she said. "Camp offers a great opportunity to break away from the computers, video games, iPhones and so on. A camp, no matter what its focus, provides an opportunity to get kids back to the basics, and shows them how full life can be without all the gadgets. "Levin suggests parents ask about food and allergy

magic of camp," Reichenbach said. "Today, the hopes and expectations of the greater Jewish community play a role in the selection of a camp experience. Whether it is a day camp or residential camp, the hope for parents is that the summer will be a [life-changing] experience that will reinforce a child's sense of pride in being Jewish and what it means to be a part of the Jewish community." Reichenbach said parents should ask camp directors and representatives what the camp's specific mission is, and how that mission plays itself out in the staff they hire, the programming and the envi-



A camper samples a climbing wall at the Westside Jewish Community Center's JCamp.

Photo courtesy of Westside Jewish Community Center

issues, bully prevention and safety concerns up front. If parents are considering a Jewish camp, she recommends asking camp directors about what movement, if any, the program affiliates with. There's also the issue of whether the food served is kosher, whether staffers are Jewish and how much Jewish activity can be found in the program. In his 40-year career, Paul Reichenbach, director of camp and Israel programs for the Union for Reform Judaism, has observed how both Jewish summer camps and the way parents go about selecting the right camp have undergone an evolution. "Years ago, parents knew their kids had fun at camp, and they knew there were fun Jewish activities, but they did not understand the

environment they want to create for the campers. Also, he suggests asking them what the camp's mission means to the counselors, how their training integrates the values and how they will be good role models for campers. "When I first started out, I found camp directors were asked by parents, 'How Jewish is your camp?' " he said. "The response sometimes was, 'How Jewish would you like it to be?' Today, Jewish camps are less nervous about what parents are looking for, and are more comfortable today [in their marketing] proudly proclaiming they are proud that their camp is meaningfully Jewish."

For more information about the "Summer Days" camp fair, visit this story at jewishjournal.com. ■

50 PLUS

[WOMEN IN THE MEET MARKET]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, *Contributing Writer*

Women over 50 who are determined to settle down without settling can think of Marcy Miller's memoir, "Rebooting in Beverly Hills: A Wise and Wild Path for Navigating the Dating World" (Bancroft Press, \$22.95) as a sort of boot camp.

The willowy attorney and jewelry designer, whose book came out in June, uses her personal journey as a starting point for offering strategic advice about surviving the minefields of traditional and online dating in Los Angeles.

Miller should know. After two marriages and a bout with breast cancer, she believed her third marriage was the proverbial charm — until she accidentally stumbled upon a correspondence revealing that her husband had a mistress.

So she ended up single again in midlife — she declines to give her age — and jumped back into the dating jungle. Once there, she was ambushed by gossip, online dating Web sites and a series of hilariously horrific dates.

The result? Plenty of advice about what to do — and not do — for other boomers who may follow in her footsteps.

School Is in Session

Miller, who is in a relationship now, says women re-entering the dating pool must first make sure that they are in good emotional shape, especially those who are recently widowed or divorced. Starting too soon is not a

"proper way to heal," the Beverly Hills resident says.

After a woman is ready, the best way to integrate into the dating world is to do it slowly and choose one specific method of meeting prospective dates.

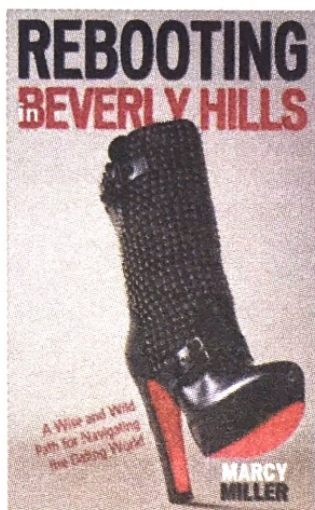
"I have divided the search in my book into four parts — pickups, fix-ups, Internet dating and matchmaking," Miller explains. "Before you start, figure out which method [of introduction] you are most comfortable with. Though you can meet people through a combination of these methods down the road, doing too much too soon can be overwhelming. If you are proficient with Internet dating, go for it, but if you prefer personal contact and introductions, the fix-up may be more your style."

Whether you are filling out an Internet profile, trying speed dating or asking friends to fix you up, Miller issues a stern commandment: Thou shalt not lie. Being truthful will weed out a lot of weaker candidates, she says.

"Who wants to start a dating relationship based on a lie?" she asks. "In a good relationship, everything is based on trust and integrity. Also, omission is just as bad as lying. If something key is missing from the other person's profile, you should see this [as] a red flag. If your date lies in the first encounter, the universe is telling you that you need to move on to the next person."

Another key step is getting a precise grasp

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Marcy Miller

In the Meet Market

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on the qualities you are looking for in a prospective partner. Are you looking for a casual companion or a long-term relationship? Somebody to go to the movies with or something deeper?

Fine Strokes

Dating can be a detail-oriented business, but it's important to know when to get specific and when to broaden your expectations. When creating an online profile or talking about your interests, for example, it's best to carve out a niche, says Miller, who is a member of Temple of the Arts.

"You need to establish pastimes that are not obvious or typical, such as 'food' and 'travel,'" she says. "Establishing less-familiar interests, like visiting very specific kinds of museums, following politics and doing certain kinds of volunteer work will weed out some candidates who don't share your interests."

However, Miller also believes many women make age specifications too limited when chronological age does not always tell the whole story. There are youthful, active men in their 60s and geriatric 45-year-olds. She

also suggests being open-minded about how far away a potential date can live — instead of five or 10 miles away, consider those who live as many as 25 or 50 miles away.

To make a good impression on a first date, steer clear of flashy jewelry and provocative clothing, Miller says. Think neutral, pretty and well-groomed, especially as most women would hope to see the same thing in the men they are meeting for the first time.

As details in dress are important, so are the subtle aspects of where you go and what you do on the first date. Creative locations — as in, not Starbucks — and the content of the conversations will provide valuable clues about your date's tastes, intentions and interests.

Working It

Think of dating as a second job, Miller suggests.

"Dating involves business strategy," she says. "Put yourself in a networking situation where, when you go shopping, you talk to every woman you meet and make it known you are looking to meet new guys. Pick the longest line at the post office. Do [your] deskwork at the neighborhood Starbucks. Go to the movies by yourself. Do a vision board, cutting out pictures and words that depict the positive things you want to bring

into your life."

Miller also believes you are the company you keep. If you associate with friends who encourage you to settle for any guy you meet because of your age or imperfections, real or imagined, trust your gut — not them — and take the time to cultivate new friends who will support you emotionally.

Miller hopes readers of her book embrace the single life as she did, recognizing that even as they seek a companion, there are benefits to being independent and free to make choices without inhibitions.

"Single women today seem so much healthier than [some married women]," she says. "The friendships with each other are stronger, and they can live life as they please. Furthermore, many smart single women today looking for committed relationships want to establish with their partners up front that they need alone time as well as opportunities to enjoy activities with their friends."

All of her other advice aside, Miller says there are two main tools that will prove invaluable for anyone re-entering the dating world: humor and patience.

"You have to see dating as a marathon and not a sprint," she insists. "There are funny episodes that are all part of the fabric of your life. You can't take everything so seriously, or your journey will be miserable." ■

ARTS

[DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER HAS A SONG IN HER HEART]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

"Hava Nagila" is one of those songs, like "Celebration" and "Auld Lang Syne," that brings back memories and gets stuck in one's head. In fact, "Hava Nagila" is so ingrained in American pop culture that many non-Jews can readily identify it, and high-profile non-Jewish recording artists, including Harry Belafonte, Connie Francis and Glen Campbell, count their renditions as a career highlight.

As filmmaker Roberta Grossman discovered, the circumstances that brought "Hava Nagila" to such widespread recognition are complex. With wit and scholarly research, she takes viewers on "Hava Nagila's" journey, from its semi-tragic origins in the 19th century Ukrainian village of Sadigora to its nearly worldwide renown as a Jewish anthem today, through "Hava Nagila (The Movie)."

Opening in L.A.-area theaters on March 15, there will be a March 7 screening and question-and-answer session with Grossman presented by the L.A. Jewish Film Festival and the Jewish Journal at Laemmle's Music Hall 3 in Beverly Hills.

The film introduces a cast of characters, including a direct descendant of the Ukrainian rabbi who planted the seeds for the song among his followers and two families who argue that it was their grandfather who composed and wrote the song.

The San Fernando Valley-bred Grossman describes her first "happy" documentary as an autobiography of Jewish identity for people of a certain generation who came of age in comfortable, middle-class environs, such as Tarzana and Encino. "Hava Nagila (The Movie)" hits close to home for diverse audiences because it means different things to different people, even those with similar upbringings, she said.

"The section of the movie covering the suburbs in the mid-20th century is, at its heart, about a Jewish 'Valley girl' and the identity she grew up with," Grossman said. "[This was a time when] large suburban temples became the center of Jewish life, and bar

and bat mitzvahs became as important as weddings."

Although Grossman grew up in the shadow of Hollywood and the film industry, she did not find her calling as a documentary filmmaker until her college years. After the history major spotted an advertisement for a National Endowment for the Arts documentary filmmaking youth grant program at the University of California, Berkeley, she

Award, broadcast on PBS and nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award.

But when Grossman's young daughter asked her to "make a happy film next time," that led the filmmaker to consider making a substantial but entertaining documentary about "Hava Nagila" as a Jewish cultural milestone.

"While we were making it, I realized those 'Hava' moments at events like weddings,

been searching doggedly for a descendant of Friedman to discuss the role of Chasidic life and how it shaped the song's beginnings.

"My grandmother said the meeting ... was *bashert*, or mean to be," Grossman said. "Besides the fact that he spoke eloquently about Jews in Sadigora in the 19th century, he had a foot in the non-Chasidic world and graciously allowed us to film and interview him and to use the footage."

One of the most profound revelations Grossman experienced while making the film came from interviews with klezmer musicians.

"At first, I could not understand why they expressed hostility toward the song," she said. "I eventually realized 'Hava Nagila,' for some, represented the disenfranchisement of the old Yiddish klezmer tradition in the way the Hebrew language displaced Yiddish."

Although Grossman's next project will focus on the more somber topic of the secret archives of the Warsaw Ghetto, she makes the point that the widespread embrace of "Hava Nagila" in the '50s and '60s was ultimately a direct response to the Holocaust along with the determination of a people to endure and carve out a better life.

Even with the exploration of the Warsaw Ghetto in progress, Grossman insists she will return to a cheerful topic. In much the way she did with "Hava Nagila," she plans to examine the cultural impact of "Fiddler on the Roof," Norman Jewison's 1971 film adaptation of the Broadway hit.

Almost like the song that inspired it, "Hava Nagila (The Movie)" has already made a big splash on the film festival circuit both nationally and internationally, including opening the 2012 San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.

"From the first frames on, people were clapping, singing along and laughing," Grossman said. "There were 1,400 people in the audience at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, as well as three more sold-out screenings. Between July 2012 and March 2013, 55 Jewish film festivals included 'Hava Nagila (The Movie),' and about half of these had it open or close their program.

"No pun intended, but this film is really hitting a chord with viewers."

For more information, visit this story at jewishjournal.com. ■



Above: Bride and groom in chairs Photo by Jenny Jimenez



Left: Director Roberta Grossman Photo by Robert Zuckerman

secured a grant and returned to Los Angeles to study at the American Film Institute. Her career took off from there.

Grossman's early writing and directing credits include "Women on Top: Hollywood and

Power," a special for AMC, and the episodes "Heroines of the Hebrew Bible" and "Judas" for the A&E series "Mysteries of the Bible." Her filmmaker profile was heightened when she served as series producer and co-writer of "500 Nations," the eight-hour CBS miniseries on Native Americans hosted by Kevin Costner. Her most recent film, "Blessed Is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh," was shortlisted for an Academy

bar mitzvahs and other family gatherings stamped my soul," Grossman recalled. "I did not know what the words meant, or know if it was a written song or traditional hymn. While researching and shooting, we encountered fabulous scholars who studied the origins and impact of 'Hava Nagila.' This, in turn, made us realize that the song is a window into more than 150 years of Jewish history, culture and spirituality."

Grossman and her team found some of the best material for the film by accident. For instance, while shooting footage in Sadigora, Grossman ran into the great-great-great grandson of Rabbi Yisroel Friedman, the Ruzhiner rebbe, who is credited with originating the song as a Chasidic *nigun*, or wordless melody, in the mid-19th century. (The lyrics were added in 1915 by composer Abraham Zevi Idelsohn.) For more than a year prior to that chance meeting, Grossman had

TRAVEL

[BERESHEET: A DESERT DREAM]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

The two-year-old, five-star luxury resort not only raises the stakes for Negev Desert tourism but also puts visitors in touch with the Israeli south's past and future.

When the Beresheet hotel opened for business two years ago in the Negev Desert, Israeli President Shimon Peres was reported to say at the grand opening gala, "For me, this is a dream come true. As I travel a lot in the world, I can tell you this is the Taj Mahal of Israel."

Except the five-star Beresheet has one

four-star hotel, was hatched, and the budget was initially 100 million shekels. When funds to support the ambitious undertaking rose to 220 million shekels, the property plan was reconfigured for a five-star hotel.

In order to make Beresheet stand alone as an entity that could literally spell the beginning for Mitzpe Ramon's emerging community, Lewis traveled to resorts around the world, from Morocco to Thailand. He visited other five-star resorts in areas that were not highly developed that found unique architectural and aesthetic ways to tap into the



The five-star Beresheet has a breathtaking view of the Ramon Crater, a geological landform that extends for miles. Photos by Elyse Glickman

thing that the Taj Mahal doesn't: a breathtaking view of the Ramon Crater, a geological landform that extends for miles.

The view is only one of the "wow" moments at this resort that not only puts the emerging community of Mitzpe Ramon on the map, but straddles the ancient and modern worlds at once. Architecturally, this is literally true; at certain times of the day, the structures of suites and rooms almost resemble a gold chain winding around the hills.

The resort takes its name from the first word of the Torah, which means "the beginning." Its own genesis goes back to Isrotel founder David Lewis, who is widely credited for helping to transform Eilat into a destination resort. Interested in building something that would help make the remote Mitzpe Ramon into a tourist hot spot, he invited Peres, a friend who at the time was prime minister, for two visits, according to Sylvie Cohen-Gabay, general manager of Beresheet.

Lewis proposed he could open up a property that would provide jobs and other economic opportunities to the community. A few weeks after that, the concept, originally a



natural, unspoiled appeal of its surrounding geography.

While the locale might be described as "God's country," inside the building, no detail of a perfect civilized vacation is overlooked. Unlike many of the resorts in the Dead Sea region, the food is on a par with top Jerusalem and Tel Aviv destination restaurants. Most of the ingredients are painstakingly sourced from local producers.

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Beresheet

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ingly culled from local farms, collectives and purveyors like Kornmehl Goat Cheese Farm. The guest rooms and suites are luxuriously appointed, and most boast heavenly views.

The hotel offers early-morning photography lesson hikes, empowering guests to capture the drama of the location for posterity. The outdoor yoga classes are as breathtaking as they are restorative.

There is also a wellness aspect to the experience, and Cohen-Gabay explained that the room amenities and products used for the spa are, for the most part, fashioned by local companies. In other words, there is a "here" there.

Staying at this resort, whether you are an adventure traveler or a luxury enthusiast, puts visitors in touch with the soul of Mitzpe Ramon, which is just starting to come of age as a community and population center in the Negev. Cohen-Gabay says the environment can't be duplicated within Israel or elsewhere.

"The whole Beresheet philosophy encourages people to go out, see the crater and experience elements of the environment that will make their stay different from anything they experience in Israel," she said. "To make the destination as attractive to locals as to visitors, we are working with local businesses to pick up in developing the area where the government left off. More needs to be done to develop this as a tourism area, so our mission as a hotel is to bring our region up to a higher standard. When we source local products for the Beresheet experience, everything is crafted by hand, from meals to amenities, which appeals to both the locals and luxury travelers."

Ramon Crater and the Negev are fertile territory for extreme sports, including hiking, biking and power walks. Those less athletically inclined will find plenty to see and do among the area's historic sites and fossils, wildlife, wineries, cheese farms and alpaca farms. Furthermore, the concierge service can arrange a variety of activities such as a jeep safari, cooking classes, wildlife tours, group bike rides, helicopter tours and even day trips to Eilat.

While there are no theaters or boutique shopping a la Tel Aviv, Cohen-Gabay points out that when you come to this resort, the point of it is to get you back in the thick of nature. She says that Beresheet is ideal for conventions, as attendees tend to stay close to the resort and are more inclined to take advantage of group activities and guided excursions.

Management has instituted all kinds of eco-conscious practices to ensure that the last great frontier of Israel is lovingly cared for. While the cheeses on their expansive breakfast buffet are sourced from local cheese farms, barramundi fish are farmed in the area along with cherry tomatoes and other vegetables from organic facilities. The hotel has a complex trash separating system to whittle out oil, paper, plastic, glass and food waste. Oil goes to industry or a safe place for removal.

Although most of the visitors come from within Israel and from Europe, and many of those visitors are non-Jewish, Cohen-Gabay

predicts the number of U.S. visitors will increase in the coming years. In their first year of operation, they were fully booked well in advance for Passover and the High Holy Days. Additionally, they have played host to a handful of bar mitzvahs and weddings. One bar mitzvah family staged the actual ceremony in the crater.

"I believe Americans will discover things about the Negev and be moved by them in unexpected ways," she said, "perhaps forever changing any preconceived notions they may have about the Negev beyond Ben-Gurion University, whose technologies and programs have helped local businesses serving the hotel grow and create interest in their products among people living outside Israel." ■



**We fight
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touchdown**

CELEBRATIONS

[FOR RICHER, NOT POORER]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, *Contributing Writer*

Tying the knot doesn't have to be synonymous with fastening a financial anchor around newlywed couples. It just requires great care, sufficient research and attention to detail.

Even with the best planning, however, it might be hard to believe you could pull off a dreamy wedding on a smart budget, given the average cost of a modern wedding. According to a recent report in *USA Today*, couples spend an average of \$26,989 for their weddings. *CostofWedding.com* notes most couples spend between \$19,223 and \$32,039, not including the honeymoon.

"Couples need to weigh their fantasy wedding against the financial realities of the fantasy wedding," warns L.A.-based wedding planner Wayne Gurnick, who specializes in Jewish and kosher weddings. "We find that we are financial planners as much as event planners."

Gurnick advises couples to engage in comparison-shopping for products and services, as the real goal should be getting the most value for the money. Even when couples have put together a budget, he points out that costs can still add up quickly if couples have not done their homework thoroughly.

Here are several money-saving ideas to give couples a stronger start, according to Gurnick and fellow event planners Michele Schwartz, creator of *TheModernJewishWedding.com*, who boasts many L.A. clients; Los Angeles-based planner Sarajane Landun; and chef Jason Collis, an Oxnard resident and owner of *Plated Events*.

Food for Thought

Whether you choose to go the glatt kosher or kosher-style route with catering, there are several ways to stick to a budget without sacrificing flavor or being stingy.

Many hotels will allow wedding parties to buy the use of the entire kitchen, ideal for couples who have an affordable kosher caterer or a caterer through a family connection. In these cases, Gurnick says, the hotel provides the service staff, dishes and facilities, but allows outside caterers to use and prepare in their space.

Foodwise, consider serving heavy appetizers at the reception or stick with a dairy-based meal. Also, seated dinners are often less costly than buffets, as the hotel or caterer can account for the exact amount of food they need to prepare, Schwartz explains.

Instead of going the traditional cake route — which can run from \$800 to \$2,000 — Collis suggests trying a dessert table with a range of options for guests, along with a very small cake for the cake-cutting ceremony.

Edible party favors that are part of the centerpiece can save money, too, according to Schwartz. A cupcake bar and homemade party favors, such as preserves in pretty jars, are popular right now. Other examples of tasteful takeaways include personal cakes, teas and coffee, which can be packaged in do-it-yourself mason jars for added savings.

Location, Location, Location

Just as good movie-location scouts can sniff out ideal places to impart production value to an independent film, couples can find perfect backdrops for their nuptials and receptions without breaking the bank (after determining the size of the guest list, of course).

Look into city- or state-run venues, such as local beaches, parks, recreation centers, civic gardens and zoos. As each couple has its own unique personality, one of these nontraditional venues could be a perfect fit, Landun says.

Also, find a space that doesn't require a lot of rentals and décor in order to spruce up the room. Be able to work with what the venue already has in terms of chairs, linens, stage, etc., she says.

As for backyard weddings, they can save lots of money — if you get creative. Be forewarned, rental and décor costs may add up, and the backyard wedding can end up being more expensive due to the cost of bringing in tables, chairs, linens, dishes and other items, Gurnick says.

No matter where the reception ends up, consider changing the "when." Weekdays are less expensive than weekends and may be easier to negotiate with the venue, Landun says. Think about getting married during non-peak times of the year instead of during peak season, which is generally the summer months.

Setting the Stage

Rather than go for broke on the décor — literally — with flowers, custom dance floors and pure silk linens, look for unusual alternatives.

One hot new concept, Gurnick says, is a sophisticated picnic-style wedding where tables and chairs are replaced with beautiful, handcrafted quilts; elaborate gourmet picnic baskets take the place of a traditional sit-down meal. This also allows guests and the wedding party to dress in more casual attire.

According to Landun, reusing floral arrangements from the ceremony (chuppah, aisles) by putting them in the main reception area is cost-effective and eco-friendly. Collis directs couples to local growers and points out that neighborhood farmers markets can provide seasonal blooms.

Bridesmaid bouquets can be used to line the edge of the sweetheart table, and the chuppah used in an outside ceremony can be recycled as a decoration for the bridal party table.

It's possible to save money on dance floors, too. Companies that provide custom portable dance floors may have a floor in stock made for another couple that can be rented at a fraction of the cost, Gurnick says.

Hidden Costs

Unexpected services beyond décor and food are just as important — and often expensive if they are not tracked carefully. That's one reason why Schwartz says it's

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For Richer, Not Poorer

Continued from page 33

worth it to invest in a planner who will help couples sniff out hidden costs, ask the right questions and negotiate contracts so there aren't any surprises.

Also, see if the venue can offer a self-parking arrangement. Self-parking costs typically run half that of a valet service, according to Gurnick.

Finally, he urges couples to keep in mind: Every 10 people added to a guest list incrementally adds a significant amount to the final tab. That's 10 more people who will require newlyweds to spend money on meals, centerpieces and chairs. ■

CELEBRATIONS

[DESTINATION BAR MITZVAHS]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

Factor in the enormous guest lists, global cuisine and diversions such as high-tech interactive entertainment, and it is clear that bar and bat mitzvah celebrations have become more sophisticated than they were even a decade ago.

But not every student wants to celebrate becoming a son or daughter of the commandment with a 300-strong guest list and bragging rights at school the following week. Some teens would like their coming-of-age celebrations to reflect a sense of belonging within the Jewish community.

This is where destination bar and bat mitzvahs come in, offering families a wonderful alternative: a bonding experience that is both intimate and larger than life.

Jerusalem comes to mind as the ultimate destination for a bar or bat mitzvah, with other Israeli cities such as Haifa, Tel Aviv and Eilat nearly as popular. But there are less-obvious locations in the United States and abroad that offer a Jewish context. The locations can tap in to a teen's personal interests and studies while enabling the entire family to explore other aspects of Jewish history and culture beyond the Holy Land.

The travel alternative has become so popular, in fact, that companies like Bar/Bat Mitzvah Vacations (barmitzvahvacations.com) and Totally Jewish Travel (totallyjewishtravel.com) offer bar/bat mitzvah trips suited for family groups with destination in the United States, the Caribbean, Europe and South America as well as cruises.

UNITED STATES

Newport, R.I.

Dating back to the colonial era, Touro Synagogue (toursynagogue.org) is the oldest surviving synagogue building in the United States.

Founded in 1658 as Yeshuat Israel, congregants Mordechai Campanal and Moses Israel Paeheco purchased a lot at what is now Kay and Touro streets to build a spiritual home for Jewish settlers in 1677. With the growth of Newport's Jewish community, the congregation turned to architect Peter Harrison in 1759 to expand their home. For the building's exterior, Harrison drew on his knowledge of and enthusiasm for Palladian architecture. For the interior, he relied upon the guidance of the congregation, notably Hazzan Isaac Touro, who had only recently arrived from Amsterdam. The Newport building was completed in 1763 and was dedicated during Chanukah of that year.

A Sephardic Orthodox congregation to-

day, Touro Synagogue — renamed in honor of the hazzan's sons, who bequeathed money for the synagogue property's upkeep — is available to rent for bar mitzvahs and weddings. A must-see destination for Jewish-history buffs, Touro's adjacent Loeb Visitors Center explores the history of religious



The patio of the El Portal Sedona Hotel in Sedona, Ariz. Photo courtesy of El Portal Sedona Hotel

freedom in the United States as well as the synagogue itself, which received visits from Presidents George Washington, Dwight Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy.

Philadelphia

Given that Philadelphia is a city resplendent with both American and Jewish-American history, the arrival of adulthood is well celebrated at the National Museum of American Jewish History (nmajh.org). While the Smithsonian-affiliated museum is a popular site among local Philadelphia families, this standard-bearer will appeal to families throughout the United States because of the way it captures the American-Jewish experience, exploring how Jews shape and are shaped by the United States. The collection displays more than 1,200 artifacts and documents dating back more than 350 years, 2,500 images and 30 original films, and provides visitors with an opportunity to share their own stories. Featuring a view of Independence Mall, the five-story glass-facade museum rents a variety of spaces for private events, accommodating groups as small as 15 to as large as 750.

Litchfield Hills, Conn.

Although the heyday of the Catskills family escape is forever cemented in American pop culture in a variety of films and television shows (most notably "Dirty Dancing"), the private resort Winvian (winvian.com) brings together old-school charm and modern conveniences. Granted, it is in Connecticut and not upstate New York, but it has the preppy East Coast vibe and small-town charm that will stir up nostalgia among parents and grandparents, perhaps inspiring lively evenings filled with stories about "the

good old days." Located two hours outside of New York City, Winvian offers event planning services as well as group buyout for special celebrations. It is also a good choice for those who have retained ties with extended family in the New York metro area.

Sedona, Ariz.

Sedona is known for its Red Rocks, panoramic vistas and hip artists' community vibe as well as plenty of Southwestern U.S. history and lore. However, the spiritual nature of its larger-than-life setting and the popularity of kabbalah among Jewish locals complete the picture. The area's welcoming Jewish community has its home at the Jewish Community of Sedona and the Verde Valley (jcsvv.org), an egalitarian and inclusive synagogue that marries various Jewish traditions in its services.

Located in the heart of Sedona, El Portal Sedona Hotel (elportalsedona.com) can help coordinate an intimate celebration, accommodating a reception of up to 35 people comfortably in the great room or its private courtyard.

INTERNATIONAL

Marrakech, Morocco

Although the historic city is best known for its souks (markets), fashionable riad-style hotels, and its role as an aesthetic muse for designer Yves Saint Laurent (parents of budding fashionistas, take note), Marrakech has Jewish roots that date back to biblical times,

Rabbi Jacky Kadoch (communautejuivemarrakech@gmail.com), president of Community Israelite de Marrakech-Essaouria, notes this exciting city still bears many stamps of its Jewish history, from the *mellah* (the former Jewish quarter) to booths at the main souk where you may just find your next family heirloom. If time allows, side trips to El Jadida and Essaouria are also worth the effort.

Willemstad, Curacao

The oldest operating congregation in the Western hemisphere originated in 1651 when the Dutch West India Co. made an appeal on behalf of Jan de Illan, a successful Jewish-Portuguese businessman, to set up a trade post on the remote Caribbean island during the Spanish Inquisition.

In 1732, Curacao's expanding Jewish community relocated its house of worship, Mikvé Israel-Emanuel Synagogue (snoa.com), to a charming yellow Dutch colonial building, which is now also home to the island's Jewish museum. The main sanctuary is beautifully outfitted with carved mahogany pews, *bimah* and ark; copper chandeliers; and beige sand, which covers the floor for symbolic reasons: a reminder of the great Exodus as well as a means to muffle footsteps of those who practiced their Jewish faith in secret during the Inquisition.

Budapest, Hungary

With many Ashkenazi American families tracing their family roots to Hungary, the Jewish Visitors' Service (jewishvisitorservice.com) has taken a proactive stance in promoting the regal European destination as a bar/bat mitzvah spot that combines Jewish cultural enlightenment with a dazzling immersion into the rich Eastern European urban society where past generations of Jewish families once thrived.

Tahiti

For families who embrace water sports and tropical settings, Tahiti is a great choice. The arrival point is capital Papeete, which boasts a surprisingly rich history in the Jewish community and has an operating synagogue (established in 1993). The community of 200 Jews passionately works toward preserving Judaism through such organizations as the Cultural Association for Israelites and Polynesian Friends, established in the 1960s. Two of the community's To-



Inside the courtyard of a Marrakech synagogue. Photo by Elyse Glickman

through the Spanish Inquisition and into the 20th century. Although many Moroccan Jews migrated to Los Angeles and other cities,

rah scrolls were gifts from the Egyptian-Jewish community of Paris, and a community in Los Angeles, respectively. ■

BUSINESS & FINANCE

[HAIL, CAESARSTONE!]

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

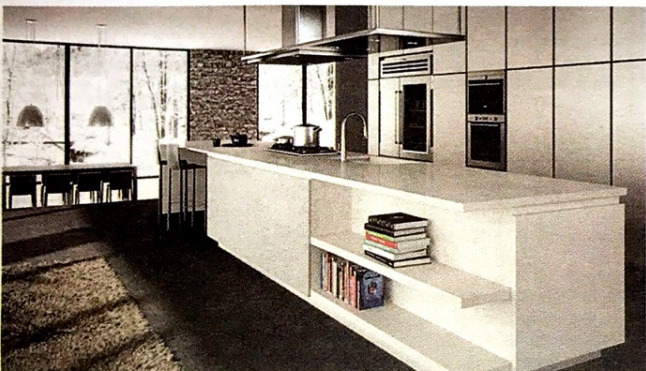
As California's real estate market continues its recovery and spring remodeling season is poised to start, many homeowners are once again looking for enduring ways to rejuvenate their living spaces and add value to their homes. Not surprisingly, the rooms that get the most use — kitchens and bathrooms — are often the first to command attention.

More unexpected is where the materials come from that many are choosing for their stone countertops and vanities: Israel.

Since 1987, an Israeli company called Caesarstone has been a pioneer of the natural quartz surfaces market, producing countertops that forge function and fashion. The firm is owned by Kibbutz Sdot Yam on the Mediterranean Sea, just south of the ancient city of Caesarea, but its U.S. operations are

developing a proprietary formula and process for treating these quartz slabs, paving the way for a new generation of harder, impermeable, stain-resistant counters.

One result is that Caesarstone became one of the first stone companies to certify its countertop materials as kosher. This is possible because the manufacturing process eliminates natural stone imperfections while preventing chipping, cracking and discoloration from heavy use. The quartz is combined with high-quality polymer resins and pigments and compacted under intense vibration, vacuum and pressure. The final product is a surface that resists damage from heat, cold, food, acids, caustic wine spills and knife scratches, which could store bacteria and compromise the preparation and purity of kosher food, Cohen said.



Caesarstone's quartz countertops were among the first certified as kosher. Photo courtesy of Caesarstone

based closer to home, in Van Nuys.

"It's not just the stone itself that consumers respond to," said Sagi Cohen, CEO of Caesarstone U.S., who was born in Israel. "People also appreciate the fact that it is a totally Israeli product, from development of the technology that makes the countertops worth the investment to the state-of-the-art production line, to the fact that it is an Israeli company Americans can get behind in their overall support of Israel."

In the quarter-century since its inception, the company has come a long way. In the early days, according to a report in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Caesarstone nearly drowned in production problems. Now its products are sold in more than 40 countries, including most of Europe and Australia. Nine months ago, Caesarstone experienced a financial milestone by becoming the first stone company to be publicly traded on the NASDAQ.

Don't think of its products as simple pieces of rock. Moshe Narkis, of Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, is credited with de-

Today, the company boasts more than 50 colors of slabs from which to choose, along with a variety of unusual textures and patterns. Some of the most cutting-edge textures include crocodile and lace-embossed designs, while some of the most striking hues in the collection (Ruby Reflections, Chocolate Truffle and Starry Night) are fashioned from recycled stone.

Maggie Amir, Caesarstone's brand manager, is also the company's arbiter of style in guiding consumers and designers in how to achieve looks for kitchens and vanities that are at once trendsetting and timeless. She leans toward bright, vibrant décor schemes incorporating surfaces that enliven and enlarge a room's visual scope.

"A lot of families spend a good amount of time in the kitchen, and cooking itself is an uplifting activity," Amir said. "Therefore, you want to surround yourself in an environment that is uplifting and encourages conversation. ... From my perspective, the countertop colors we offer have a lot to do

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BUSINESS & FINANCE

Caesarstone

Continued from page 39

with creating the illusion of space. To open out the kitchen's look, look to lighter colors to make the impression the room is bigger than it actually is."

Dan Brunn, a Los Angeles-based architect and Caesarstone customer, said the company's product allows him to express himself freely in form, color and texture.

"Every one of my projects has elements born from Caesarstone, from my first restaurant, Yojisan Sushi, to high-end private beach homes," he said. "I can call upon Caesarstone to help in trying out new applications or techniques."

In terms of its environmental commitment, Caesarstone was the first stone company to receive ISO 14001 certification, a global standard specifically for environmental protection. From recycling 97 percent of the water used in manufacturing to collecting dust from shipping, handling, production and processing, Caesarstone has earned high marks.

Cohen, the CEO of Caesarstone U.S., said the company contributes to other causes, too.

"We are fortunate to have been involved in both Jewish organizations and general causes the public can relate to," he said.

One philanthropic effort in which the company is participating is Coasters for the Cause, set up to raise money for the American Red Cross to aid those affected by Hurricane Sandy. One-of-a-kind artist-designed coasters retailing for \$10 are being sold online at caesarstoneus.com, and the company has announced it will match sales up to \$10,000.

Cohen said that the company is a supporter of Larger Than Life, raising money for children with cancer as well as funding trips enabling Israeli children with cancer to visit the United States. Caesarstone also is an active member of the Israeli Leadership Council.

"Jewish consumers look for good products with proven benefits, value proposition and getting what you pay for," Cohen said. "Even in advertisements for rentals and home sales, a lot of the real estate people drop the Caesarstone name in the advertising to the point where the name is becoming a generic term synonymous for quality. We also want this important value attached to our name to carry over into our philanthropic efforts." ■

YOM HASHOAH

Self-styled Historian Seeks Clues to Japan's Holocaust Survivors

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

Akira Kitade is a former Japanese tourism executive who still relishes the opportunity to show a newcomer the cultural sights of Tokyo. He also delights in showing off photos of his new grandchild and extended family.

But it's the aging black-and-white snapshots of seven Jewish refugees dedicated to his late boss, Tatsuo Osako, and a memoir written by Osako detailing his experiences rescuing Jewish refugees, that have inspired Kitade to delve deeper into a little-known aspect of Japanese-Jewish history.

"I was profoundly moved by what I had read in this book, not only because of what the refugees experienced, but also harsh, wintery conditions Mr. Osako, his colleagues and the refugees experienced on the journey through Russia into the Sea of Japan," Kitade said. "With the album, Mr. Osako added impact to his words through these interesting, powerful images of life on the boat and of the people he helped rescue."

Kitade, who is writing a book about Osako and other like-minded Japanese citizens who aided Jewish refugees during World War II, is hoping to identify the people in the seven snapshots and speak with them or their descendants.

Kitade's search took him across the United States in 2010, which included speaking with Jewish refugees who had traveled to Japan during the war and a visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. He plans to return for a trip that would include the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles and the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia.

So far, he has yet to find any of the Jewish refugees in the photos.

In the meantime, he pores over articles, interviews and old manifests that document the Japan Tourist Bureau's rescue operations, and speaks throughout Japan about the righteous actions of his former boss.

"It is my responsibility to educate others about people like Mr. Osako, who worked behind the scenes and did it without searching for fame or recognition," Kitade said.

In July 1940, Chiune Sugihara, Japanese consul in Kovno, Lithuania, defied his government and issued Japanese transit visas to Jewish refugees. Despite the Soviet closure of consuls and embassies in Lithuania, Sugihara remained in Kovno and continued to issue visas, the last of which were handed out from the window of his train to refugees as he departed for Berlin on Sept. 4. Known as Japan's Oskar Schindler, Sugihara is estimated to have saved approximately 6,000 Jews.

After the refugees traveled thousands of miles along the Trans-Siberian Railway to

Vladivostok in Manchuria, the Japan Tourist Bureau, with funding from American Jewish organizations and the support of various Japanese government agencies, arranged to transport the refugees to Japan.

From September 1940 until March 1941, Osako, a tourist bureau employee, served as an escort and clerk aboard the Amakusa Maru, a ship that ferried more than 2,000 Jews carrying visas issued by Sugihara — and obvious forgeries — between Vladivostok and Japanese ports every two weeks.

A few of the refugees helped by Osako

role in transporting Jews out of Russia. Kitade, who had worked under Osako for more than 20 years, said his former boss' name jumped off the page. But with Kitade stationed in Seoul and Osako retired, it would be another 10 years before the two reconnected. When they did, Osako presented Kitade with a memoir detailing his observations aboard the Amakusa Maru.

According to the memoir, life on board the ship was often stormier than the sea itself, with food shortages, the stench of illness and Spartan shared living conditions. In his ob-



Akira Kitade holds up a page of a diary owned by Japan Tourist Bureau employee Tatsuo Osako, during an interview in Tokyo. The page holds seven photos given to Osako by people whom Osako helped escape from Europe in the early days of World War II. Photo by Shizuo Kambayashi/AP

gave him their photograph with inscriptions of gratitude.

"My best regards to my friend Tatsuo Osako," is written in French on the back of one snapshot, which is signed I. Segaloff and dated March 4, 1941.

On the back of another snapshot, a woman has written in Polish, "A souvenir to a very nice Japanese man."

Once in cities like Kobe or Yokohama, Tadeusz Romer, the Polish ambassador in Tokyo, arranged for Jews to immigrate to the United States, Canada, Australia and Israel, among other countries. (Those who remained in Japan were eventually deported to Japanese-controlled Shanghai, China.)

Kitade first learned of Osako's role in the rescue in 1988. While reading a book about the Japan Tourist Bureau's history, he stumbled upon a short section detailing the bureau's

observations, Osako was struck by the refugees' shared optimism and the respect the crew had for their charges. Kitade said the feeling is best captured in one passage in Osako's memoir, when he describes coming out on deck and seeing the first rays of sunshine in weeks, recognizing a better day was dawning for refugees escaping the darkness of war.

Given that Japan was allied with Germany, Kitade says it's natural for people — particularly Jews — to believe all of Japan was pro-German and that the culture may still be anti-Semitic. He hopes his efforts will shed new light on the efforts of Japanese citizens who continued Sugihara's heroic deed.

"A greater understanding of Osako's motivations, actions and relationships with these refugees will wash away that impression and reveal there were several brave

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Japan

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Japanese people besides Sugihara who thought otherwise,” Kitade said.

Although he has yet to find the seven survivors aided by Osaka, who died in 2003, Kitade says he is thankful for the moral support he receives from people he has met in the United States.

“They give me continued encouragement, saying things like, ‘Kitade-san, I’m looking forward to reading your book. *Ganbatte!* (Do your best!),’” he said.

For information on contacting Akira Kitade, visit this story at jewishjournal.com. ●

April 13-19, 2012

DOWNTOWN J

UP OUR ALLEY

by ELYSE GLICKMAN and KARMEL MELAMED, Contributing Writers

From a retail fashion standpoint, many Los Angeles-area streets are paved with gold, from Rodeo Drive's designer outposts to Robertson Boulevard's trendy boutiques. But there's no place quite like Santee Alley in downtown L.A.

The "Alley" stretches from Olympic Boulevard to 12th Street between Santee Street and Maple Avenue. It is part bazaar and part carnival—an enormous swath of tents, storefronts, balloons and neon-colored signs stretching over several city blocks. As shop owners and their staffers announce their wares, shoppers of all descriptions crowd the sprawling grid of narrow streets. The merchandise runs the gamut from overruns of familiar department store brands to designer knockoffs of clothing, shoes and accessories.

It is many things to many people—everything from a bargain lover's paradise to a multicultural melting pot. It is also a cultural and historical touchstone for many Jewish garment-industry entrepreneurs who set up shop for their families' future here while stitching together a neighborhood.

Although Santee Alley, with its more than 150 stores, plays like something that's been around forever, its identity as a retail destination started taking shape in the late 1970s and '80s, and then came to fruition in the 1990s. There is some debate as to who made the Alley what it is today, but one cannot deny that its character was shaped both by American-born Jews who originally came to the area as property owners and in jobs, and Iranian-Jewish immigrants who opened up shops after fleeing Iran in the wake of the 1979 revolution.

At the dawn of the 1950s, Paul Mohilef's father, Will Mohilef, and a business partner came to the area and bought two lots, at 1117 and 1121 Maple Ave. The younger Mohilef recalls that the once-quiet swath of land was a mix of industrial properties and small houses, some dating back to the late 1800s. Mohilef later followed his father into the garment business as a jobber—buying job lots of clothing from manufacturers and reselling them to small shops, while department stores and larger retailers bought direct from the factory.

"Historically, Jews have always been in the garment industry, either in retail or in manufacturing, so the evolution of Santee Alley in some ways was a continuation of something that had been happening in Europe and New York," said Mohilef, 70. "My grandfather came in 1920 and started manufacturing, my father opened his manufacturing business in 1944, I started mine in 1967. Other Jewish families opened retail stores, some were jobbers, and some were manufacturers."

In the late 1960s and '70s, with its thriving garment factories, warehouses and jobber establishments operated mostly by a small handful of American-Jewish families, the area was strictly business-to-business. Mohilef's neighbors, Len and Selma Fisch, 80, were

wholesale merchants and, later, property owners.

During that period, the Alley was simply an alley, with trucks and cars coming and going through it to make deliveries and pick up shipments.

Selma Fisch believes that a Jewish work ethic shared by the Ashkenazi American-Jewish community was key during the beginnings of Santee Alley.

"Our group [consisted of] hard-working people who earned everything they had in life



rather than inherit it," she said. "We built these family fashion businesses from scratch [and evolved into] very smart businesspeople."

Fisch explained that she and her peers realized they could continue building their fortunes by purchasing buildings and renting space out to other small garment businesses.

Later, they constructed buildings on former parking lot space.

From Fisch's perspective, however, the biggest change happened around 1981, when fellow jobber Rafi Oved (originally from Isra-



Above: Shoppers examine clothing, shoes and accessories along Santee Alley.

Left: Inside a clothing store at Santee Alley. Photos by Gretchen Helene

el) put a rack out in front of his store. Although she asked him to put the rack away, she said she quickly changed her mind when she saw customers buying garments off his rack at warp speed. She and her husband, along with the other jobbers, decided to put out their own racks, and the alley

was on its way to becoming "The Alley."

The Iranian presence in the Alley has been transformative as well. Leading up to, during and after the 1979 revolution in Iran, as Los Angeles became a safe haven for 40,000 Jews fleeing the new Islamist regime, Iranian Jews came to the area to build their businesses and

of the area in 1980 and then sublet the property to other Iranian-Jewish business owners.

"I can tell you for a fact that the Alley and the current garment district in downtown L.A. as you see it today would have never existed if there had never been an Iranian revolution in 1979," Neman said. "Thousands of Iranian Jews were coming to L.A. every day, and many had no work, so I would help them set up clothing businesses in the spaces I subleased to them within the alley ... and over the years it grew little by little until what you see today."

Neman, who is now a real estate developer in the downtown L.A. area, said he was only 19 when he helped transform the alley into an Iranian-style bazaar with a plan to subdivide

larger lots.

"Even though the larger properties were first owned by American Jews, we Iranian Jews transformed the alley into what you see today,"

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"Our group [consisted of] hard-working people who earned everything they had in life rather than inherit it. We built these family fashion businesses from scratch [and evolved into] very smart businesspeople." — Selma Fisch

rebuild their future.

One of these successful immigrants is Behrooz Neman, who had a store in the Alley selling women's closeout clothing. He said he later obtained the first master lease for a portion

he said. "This way, we could get maximum use of the properties on both Santee Street and the alley. Iranian Jews being business-minded made this area prosper only because of their hard work over the years."

Neman said he and his late business partner, Ebrahim Babajooni, were among the first Iranian Jews to set up shop in late 1979 in the alley area. He said Iranian-Jewish businesses there in the early years struggled to make ends meet. As a result, his partner and others began opening up their stores on weekends, when most businesses in downtown were closed.

"Back then, Iranian Jews [were] stuck at

home and were bored on the weekends — they really had no Persian-language entertainment, and their families were young — so my partner Mr. Babajooni was among the first to open the store on Sundays, and then he encouraged other Iranian Jews to do the same since we began to sell more goods on the weekends," Neman said.

Today, not only do Iranian Jews own businesses in Santee Alley and downtown's Fashion District but nearly a dozen Iranian Jews also own many other properties in the area.

Another Iranian-Jewish immigrant, Bobby Nehorai, came to Santee Alley in 1989 as an employee and now has his own shop. He said he enjoys interacting with customers from all walks of life and all corners of the world, but added that he and many of his fellow business

owners hope their children go on to college and careers that will enable them to enjoy a future that the 1979 revolution denied Iranian Jews of his generation.

"Many of us held degrees in medicine, law and [engineering] and other professions, but we could not practice [them] in the States, and we had to find jobs in [fields] where we did not need a license," Nehorai said.

"We started downtown, as the garment industry was easy to get into. From there, our involvement in Santee Alley's development took on a life of its own. The first Iranian Jews to arrive were really smart people. While we are grateful for what we have, and Santee was a refuge, we see what we've done as a stepping stone for our families. To some extent, I think some of the Ashkenaz families of the Alley had

the same experience, encouraging their children and grandchildren to move from Alley businesses into other professions."

The '80s was a period of growth and transition. While Mohlief recalls that the customer base between 1981 and 1983 was primarily wholesale and trade — retail shoppers were only allowed to shop the Alley on Saturdays — this began to change. Families not only purchased and built more structures in the area, they also divided their space into smaller compartments, renting them to modest businesses and shopkeepers from many backgrounds. The result was a new shopping experience in Los Angeles, and people were coming in droves by 1989. At this juncture, the Fisches and their fellow property owners decided to form the Santee Maple Alley Association.

"The Alley concept came together officially because we wanted to [attain] security and maintenance of the buildings and streets," Fisch said. "We knocked on doors and made calls to other owners, and asked them to contribute money for the cause."

Fisch also credits U.S. Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, then a California State Assembly member, for helping them fully transform the alley into a pedestrian shopping zone that was safe and user-friendly.

"Lucille Roybal-Allard advised us to make out a wish list," Fisch said. "This was a good thing for us because it helped us define our needs as a group of business people working together. I learned quite a bit about what we needed to do to operate as an entity in the process of committing our needs to paper."

Roybal-Allard, a Democrat representing the 40th Congressional District, said the association has been an "important asset" to the city.

"Recognizing the important role the downtown merchants play in our city's economy, when Selma and other merchants asked for my help, I was more than happy to give them suggestions on how to organize and be more effective at City Hall when advocating for their needs," she said.

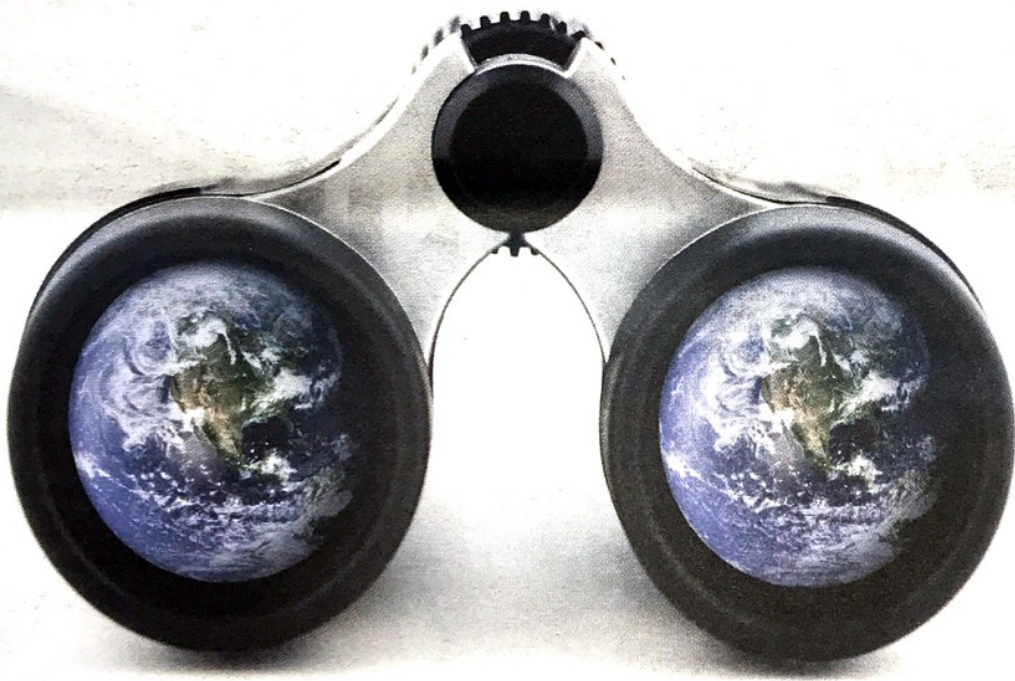
During the 1990s, former City Councilwoman Jan Perry helped the Fisches and their colleagues ensure Santee Alley met with the various codes and ordinances established by the city when she was Councilwoman Rita Walters' chief of staff. Later, during her 12-year tenure on City Council, she assisted the group with issues such as water drainage, street resurfacing, maintenance, lighting and other safety issues.

"Many of the owners are into their second and third generation of [property] ownership in Santee Alley, reflecting deep family investments, commitments and a desire to be relevant and grow and expand," Perry said.

"It's been interesting to have worked with the parents over the last 17 years, and then continue to work with their children and, in some cases, grandchildren," she said. "Santee Alley is a truly one-of-a-kind experience that makes downtown Los Angeles unique. It is also a reflection of a thriving entrepreneurial spirit, resulting in commerce that is extremely responsive to the ebb and flow of our economy."

Karmel Melamed writes the blog *Iranian American Jews*. Find it at jewishjournal.com/iranianamericanjews. ■

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Mechanic Mom

Carchick Rebekah Fleischaker brings female knack to a male-dominated field

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

Rebekah Fleischaker knows a thing or two about working as a woman in a male-dominated field. A mechanic for more than 20 years and owner of Sherman Oaks-based California Automotive and Mobile Mechanics, she goes by the moniker "Carchick."

When Fleischaker speaks at women's conferences, she encourages female attendees to not make their physical assets a focus when they enter a male-dominated career. She refers to it as drawing the "girl card."

"Once you draw that card, you cannot put it away, and you instantly limit yourself," she said. "You need to avoid limiting yourself through other people's preconceptions."

Whether Fleischaker is dealing with an ambitious entrepreneur or a customer, her message is to try something new and to not be afraid to ask somebody else you admire and respect to teach you how to do it right. In her case, that person was her first boss in auto repair.

Raised in a traditional Jewish home in Florida, Fleischaker joined the Navy out of high school to earn money for college. When her tour ended, she returned to find her truck totaled by a friend. It turned out to be a happy accident.

"While I was waiting for the [repair shop] owner to survey the damage, his phone rang and I answered," she recalled. "Soon after that, he hired me as his secretary."

Fleischaker spent her downtime reading auto repair manuals and catalogs. When she asked what a word meant, the owner said, "You don't need to know."

"And I responded, 'If you could teach me a little bit about this, I feel that the garage would make more money because we would be better able to communicate with customers,'" she said.

The relationship ended up being a dynamic one.

"I never thought I would ever develop a passion for working on cars," she recalled. "However, he nurtured my curiosity and interest so much because he loved what he did."

Shortly after moving to Los Angeles in 1989, Fleischaker happened across her first customer — a woman who needed a master cylinder installed for her clutch. After that, word of mouth spread so quickly that she quit her retail job to start an auto repair business that will pick up your car and deliver it when done, do the work where you are, or in their shop.

Fleischaker, mother to 9-year-old son Zane, notes that being a woman in a trust-based business like auto repair is actually an

asset, especially at times when you have to break bad news to a customer.

"Most of my clients know that I will not lie to them, and that I am a good listener," she said. "With each customer, however, I have to prove it to them through the quality of the work my shop does in rebuilding an engine or fixing the brakes. The other part of my gift is being able to tell my customers something, and from there be able to find a good response to their concerns. I listen closely to what they have to say back to me — or what they *don't* say to me or ask me. I often look at their facial expressions to figure out how to solve a problem."

Though the temptation to expand her business is there, Fleischaker says she would rather keep it the same size to ensure she and



Rebekah Fleischaker Photo by Joshua Ploke

her team will never lose sight of the complex, quality work that has kept clients loyal.

"This is not a Jiffy Lube, in-and-out kind of place, but somewhere a customer would go to get specialized work done on his or her car," she said. "With that attention to detail and commitment to getting the job right, there are only so many customers you can see in a day, and, as a Jewish mama, I want to give them and my staff the care and attention they deserve. After all these years, I still make the coffee at my garage. However, it is because I want my employees to have my coffee, because I love making it and I know it is better than the coffee they are able to make."

California Automotive and Mobile Mechanics, 14254 Oxnard St., Sherman Oaks. (818) 780-4369. carchick.com. ●

WEDDINGS

The Bachelor Party Grows Up

by ELYSE GLICKMAN, Contributing Writer

There are many things that come to mind when the words "bachelor" and "party" are said in the same breath, and often the sum of this equation is not pretty. Despite Hollywood's depiction of this rite of passage as a final gasp of protracted adolescence (from the Tom Hanks camp classic "Bachelor Party" to the "Hangover" movies), there are men who are not interested in acting silly (or worse) for its own sake.

A variety of event planners are targeting grooms who want the time-honored tradition of transition into another stage of manhood to be, well, more mature. And men are increasingly opting for theme parties and weekend retreats, with activities that can be enriching rather than embarrassing.

Companies offer weekends built around fishing, formula auto-racing, dude ranches and culinary education where wine, beer and spirits are put to more sophisticated, refined use. In England, event company StagWeb even offers a getaway built around a James Bond theme.

As bachelor weekends and weeks are picking up steam, services like CruiseWise have sprung up that allow for maximum bonding with minimum planning.



Holding the party aboard a cruise ship allows for easily customized itineraries, even squeezing in a quick game of bocce ball.

Steve Davis, co-founder of CruiseWise, says that while his clients don't see marriage as the end of fun or a loss of freedom, that doesn't mean they want to skip a celebration with their friends.

They have witnessed a "trend away from 'traditional' bachelor parties for some time now," he said. "While there will always be 20-somethings who want to do the traditional

movie-style bachelor party, there are many more who would call that a nightmare, not a celebration."

Obvious benefits of all-inclusive cruising include no need for a cab or designated driver, mix-and-match activity menus and easily customized itineraries to accommodate the different personalities that make up the groom's entourage.



Art of Shaving in Beverly Hills offers a sophisticated alternative to the raucous bachelor party.

Thanks to the newly opened Beverly Hills flagship of Art of Shaving, grooms without the luxury of time can still put together a pre-wedding day celebration that is all about luxury, pampering and putting one's best face forward.

Amber Loose, the store's general manager, notes the location and the concept are particularly popular for older grooms as well as

businessmen whose lifestyle may not allow getaways aside from the honeymoon. However, thanks to the distinctive ambience (mansion library/den-meets-men's spa), the Art of Shaving alternative promises something more grown-up than a night in Vegas and more memorable than a steakhouse dinner.

"We don't call it a bachelor party," Loose said. "We see it as more of a sophisticated, pre-

wedding gathering that's particularly appealing to anybody who has outgrown strip clubs and pub crawls."

When a gathering is booked with Art of Shaving, Loose says, she closes off the store to the public so guests have undisturbed access to eight barber chairs for shaves and haircuts, plus two manicure/pedicure stations.

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Bachelor Party

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“Brides, meanwhile, have the luxury of knowing their men are literally in good hands and will look fantastic on the big day,” Loose said.

Art of Shaving’s party planning service include customized wine and beverage services, hors d’oeuvres, music of choice and a photographer to capture the transformational magic. If bosses and co-workers are going to be a part of the wedding party, this kind of gathering will be sure to make a lasting positive impression.

Although popular variations on the sports weekends include baseball fantasy camps, golf resorts and camping, a fitness retreat week can both enlighten and entertain, according to Omari Bernard, one of the lead coaches at Playa del Rey’s Live-In Fitness Enterprise (LIFE).

“When you think about it, getting drunk, behaving badly and feeling awful the next day is not how you want to start the next major chapter of your life,” he said. “However, this experience goes beyond just shaping up so you look great in your tux.”

LIFE emphasizes the team aspect of fitness and coaching. All activities, which integrate a variety of favorite sports (such as hikes, boxing, martial arts and basketball), involve team-building exercises that will help the groom and those closest to him with interpersonal relationships and challenges.

The groom, family and friends also learn good eating and exercise habits that can keep married life, and life in general, exciting and



A Live-In Fitness Enterprise coach trains one-on-one with a client.

active, Bernard says.

“Everything we do is quantitative, and when the party leaves after a week, they don’t just take away a better body and some workouts to do at home. The groom brings practical information on staying healthy and fit into his marriage,” Bernard said.

What’s the best way to sum up the new wave of groomsman’s gatherings? Party on, but do it with intelligence and self-respect.

For more information, visit this article at jewishjournal.com. ●