

A photograph of Robert Earl standing in front of a vintage silver car. The car's license plate reads "God is my copilot". Above the car is a sign for the Hard Rock Cafe. Robert Earl is wearing a red jacket and sunglasses, smiling at the camera. The background features ornate architectural details of the cafe's entrance.

**ROBERT EARL, OUTSIDE THE  
HARD ROCK CAFE IN ORLANDO,  
FLORIDA: "I WANT TO START  
SOMETHING INTERNATIONAL. I  
CAN'T HANG AROUND ONE  
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PHOTOGRAPHED BY BRIAN SMITH



# ★ Mr. Universe ★

**Between the Hard Rock and Now Planet Hollywood, Robert Earl Reaches for the Stars**

**R**OBERT EARL HAS JUST CUT A tough deal with Linda McCartney, whose motto is "Never eat anything with a face or a heart." When McCartney was having lunch with Earl, who owns the London Hard Rock Cafe, she kept interrupting her meal to proselytize other customers, admonishing them to "go veggie, go veggie!" A successful restaurant man like Earl knows better than to tinker with a winning formula—the Hard Rock without its signature hamburger would be unthinkable. But Earl also depends on celebrity goodwill, so when his new restaurant, Planet Hollywood, opens in New York this September, the menu will carry . . . veggie-burgers.

Earl, who's 40 and British, flew from London to New York in just three hours on

the Concorde this Sunday morning, so it's earlier now than when he left. This bit of time machinery gives him an advantage over normal businessmen, but then Earl's business can hardly be contained in 24-hour days. He owns fifteen Hard Rocks from Tokyo to Reykjavik, Iceland, which gross \$100 million a year. Ten years ago, after his negotiations with Disney to develop EPCOT fell through, Earl began developing his own group of restaurants and dinner shows, helping turn Orlando, Florida, into the world's No. 1 tourist destination.

But his latest project is Planet Hollywood on West 57th Street, with satellites around the world to follow. "I want to start something international in New York," he says. "It's a great teething ground. But I can't hang around one place. I'm on a mission." It will be to movies what the Hard Rock is

★ **By Aimee Lee Ball**



EARL WITH HIS LIFE-SIZE SCHWARZENEGGER CYBORG FROM *TERMINATOR 2*.

to rock and will certainly be the closest Manhattan gets to its own theme park. The construction and design (by Anton Furst, who did the sets for *Batman*) is budgeted at more than \$8 million. The homage to film includes everything from Tom Cruise's *Top Gun* uniform to columns in the shape of Marilyn Monroe's legs (Earl says the measurements were supplied by the Strasberg institute).

The nonsmoking, nondrinking Earl has a way of ingratiating himself with celebrity inner circles, and his days are spent—cellular phone in one hand, portable fax in the other—arranging favors and cutting deals. "I'm trying to get Diana Ross to sing for the queen of England," he confides. Small and soft-spoken, he has only one flamboyance: a collection of wild silk shirts. "Yoko begged me to get her one of these," he says of one apple-printed model. It seems only fair: Ono donated four drawings by John Lennon for silk-screening onto Hard Rock T-shirts. And Ross can always be tapped for memorabilia from *The Wiz* for the walls of Planet Hollywood.

Earl is something of a real-life Zelig, the unidentified person among the famous faces in paparazzi photographs. He's also part impresario, part hustler, part Jewish mother. ("French fries? Ice cream? Chicken soup?" he offers. "You've got to eat—I'm a restaurateur.") His partners in Planet Hollywood include film producer Keith

Barish, director John Hughes, and actors Arnold Schwarzenegger and Bruce Willis, who showed up last February to pose, shovel in hand, at the New York groundbreaking.

The partners bring movie-world connections, but Earl brings the experience of running restaurants and the skills of a first-rate celebrity wrangler. The idea is for Planet Hollywood to become Elaine's with an open-door policy: food and fame with no reservations—customers will wait in line on the street. Earl thinks he knows what people want—recalling Al Jolson, who used to bring up the lights on an audience so he could check their faces—and he's unapologetic about his strategy and clientele. "You can't make f---ing money at Le Cirque," he says. "And there's nothing wrong with feeding the masses."

**I**N 1989, KEITH BARISH MENTIONED TO his new friend Robert Earl an idea for a restaurant called Café Hollywood. He'd never invested in the restaurant business, but he liked the idea of combining food and stars. Barish, who had produced *Running Man*, brought Schwarzenegger in as a partner. Willis, who recently bought producer Robert Stigwood's Manhattan apartment, also joined up, saying, "I need a new place to hang out in New York." Earl developed the idea into Plan-

et Hollywood, passing over the old Henri Bendel's site and settling on a nineteenth-century building, down the block from Carnegie Hall, where the rent is more than \$1 million a year.

Besides the restaurant, there are plans in the works for a screening room, cutting rooms, and fourteen floors of movie-related office suites. (Earl says the mayor's office for film development is interested in relocating from West 54th Street.) An MTV programmer has been hired to put together film montages on screens throughout the restaurant—even in the rest rooms for uninterrupted viewing. This way, you can watch a retrospective, say, of Hollywood leading men while eating blackened chicken with apple coleslaw.

More than 200 customers at a time can choose from an inexpensive grazing menu: fajitas on sizzling plates, Cobb salad from the Beverly Hills Hotel, bread pudding with whiskey sauce, and apple strudel from Schwarzenegger's mother. A private room will cater to the more exclusive needs of Holly-

wood-on-Hudson: Earl is thinking along the lines of a Kirk Douglas retrospective, launched by Michael Douglas at a private cocktail reception, or a party this fall for *Knots Landing* actress Michelle Phillips, who recently appeared at a benefit organized by Earl's wife for Give Kids the World, to help terminally ill children spend their last vacation in Orlando.

**A**NTON FURST IS GOING FOR SURREALISM in his first job designing a restaurant: Customers can eat on a "veranda" against a backdrop of the Hollywood Hills or drink in the bar by a free-standing swimming pool turned on its side. (He's hoping to get Jack Nicholson's diving board.) "Hollywood is another planet, suspended between the desert and the ocean, in a microcosm of its own," says Furst. "I was asked to do for New York what I did for Gotham City. But Gotham was dark, brooding, heavy, run by criminals. This is almost a smile at Hollywood. Obviously, one way to go would be to make it absolutely fascinating with special effects. But we're trying to make it a pleasant place to be, rather than getting into awesome theme-park technology, which is the sort of place you go to once, but you don't want to hang out in it. And I

don't want it to be like a museum."

Maybe not, but the collection of movie artifacts acquired from auctions and estates for this and other Planet Hollywoods does have its own curator, and guides to the display will be handed out to customers: Valentino's frilly white shirt from *The Son of the Sheik*, Jayne Mansfield's yellow bathing suit from *The Girl Can't Help It*, and James Cagney's red-white-and-blue clown suit from *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. There is Faye Dunaway's dress from *Bonnie and Clyde*, Ann-Margret's dress from *Carnal Knowledge*, and Kim Hunter's monkey suit, complete with little simian toes, from *Planet of the Apes*. Also on view: Darth Vader's mask, Rocky's Harley-Davidson, and a collage that John Belushi's wife made out of Ed Begley's credit cards.

The knife from *Psycho* and the sledgehammer from *Misery* may be cordoned off with a warning for small children ("Like Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors," Earl says), along with Freddy's slice-o-fingers glove from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and the repulsive life-size cyborg from *Terminator 2*. No one is even mentioning *Hudson Hawk* around Willis.

In an area dubbed Hollywood Heaven, there's a portrait of James Dean with a poem he scribbled about the pressures of stardom, as well as an arcane piece of memorabilia: When *Rebel Without a Cause* was made, there were two opening scenes. One, showing the brutal beating of an old man holding a toy monkey, was cut, but the monkey survived and will be installed at Planet Hollywood. There's a lot of Marilyn Monroe material, including a pair of autographed shorts she got from a military unit in Korea and the piano she pawned as a struggling actress. (When she became a star, she hired a detective to track it down.) "I got Marilyn Monroe's bikini for the pool in the bar," says Earl. "I badly wanted that. I don't wear it."

Barish produced *Sophie's Choice*, so you'd think there would be some memento from the picture. "It's Meryl," Barish deadpans. "She's promised to be there five days a week." John Hughes has asked that a table always be held for him at the soon-to-be-built Planet Hollywood in his hometown, Chicago (Earl is currently scouting locations there).

But as with other celebrity-owned restaurants—most recently the TriBeCa Grill—it seems unlikely that stars will spend much time breaking bread with the masses. And no-show celebrities may mean disgruntled customers—at least those who believe that they're having a better time because Bruce Willis is at the next table. Earl makes no promises about who will actually show up but ad-

mits, "There's something about a celebrity in the place where you're dining. Your experience is that much greater when you're passing on the story to friends who are back in their—I won't use the word *mundane*—normal lives and routines."

**S**INCE PLANET HOLLYWOOD WILL have a shop selling the logo and lines along 57th Street, all down the block from the Hard Rock, it's hard not to think clone, and even harder to keep a straight face when Earl insists disingenuously, "Planet Hollywood was carefully designed so there would be no accusation whatsoever of duplication. You'll find zero similarity." Yet he already anticipates some of the same old problems. Riding around in a limousine driven by an ex-cop, Earl has to be almost physically restrained from leaping out and making a citizen's arrest of the street vendors selling contraband Hard Rock T-shirts.

Every day, Earl gets half a dozen offers to franchise. "The president of Coca-Cola told me that Hard Rock is the second most important trademark for 18- to 30-year-olds in America," he brags. But it's hard enough for a person, let alone a restaurant, to stay hip in an age when Kevin Kline is replaced by Kevin Bacon is replaced by Kevin Costner. "The name Hard Rock is already there," says Earl. "How do I keep it cool?" One idea is cartoon characters called the

me at all was operating food-and-drink establishments."

At the University of Surrey, Earl was friendly with a guy whose father organized a rock festival, so Earl got the catering concession. "They weren't going to contact Marriott," he explains, "and my friend said, 'Well, Robert's studying food at university. . . .'" He bused 400 fellow students to Lincoln, England, and paid them to cook hamburgers for three days. A quarter of a million people showed up, and Earl celebrated his twenty-first birthday at the festival with Rod Stewart, Joe Cocker, and the Beach Boys.

**A**FTER APPRENTICESHIPS AT THE SAVOY and Grosvenor House, Earl saw a gap in the food-service business. "There didn't seem to be any places where tourists were made welcome," he says. "A group of 100 Yanks on American Express were not well received in a restaurant when they suddenly arrived off the bus." A friend of his father's owned several banquet halls in London that had traditionally been used for weddings, and Earl turned them into themed dinner shows—a medieval banquet, a cockney evening, a tribute to Olde England. He'd fly to the U.S. to prepurchase tour groups and ended up feeding 5,000 people a night. He also bought the business and in 1987 merged the company with a British leisure group called Pleasurama, which paid \$65 million for

**PLANET  
HOLLYWOOD**

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Hard Rock Rascals, based on Janis Joplin, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, and Jimi Hendrix, who discover an old jukebox that transports them to Rockopolis and teaches them about the origins of music.

The idea of his business being turned into a rock cartoon appeals to Earl. "I found out early on that I couldn't be a performer," he says. "I probably would have liked to be." His father, Robert senior, was a British pop singer, and Earl played bass guitar in a late-seventies rock group. "Very average," he admits, "although there were some interesting people in it. One OD'd. One or two in prison. But I didn't want to go out to work, and the only course at university in the United Kingdom that interested

his 70 restaurants and expertise.

Earl occasionally dropped in at the original Hard Rock Cafe in London, founded by Americans Isaac Tigrett and Peter Morton, whose partnership dissolved in 1982. Morton got the rights to Hard Rocks in Brazil, Venezuela, Australia, Israel, and the American West. Tigrett got all of Europe, all of Asia, and the East Coast of America. Morton opened a Hard Rock in Los Angeles, along with Mortons, now one of the movie business's stalwart hangouts. Tigrett kept London and opened a New York Hard Rock, backed by Yul Brynner and Dan Aykroyd.

One of Earl's first deals for Pleasurama was to buy Tigrett's half of the hold-



# NOTHING ATTRACTS LIKE THE IMP



CORIANDER SEEDS FROM MOROCCO



ANGELICA ROOT FROM SAXONY



JUNIPER BERRIES FROM ITALY



CASSIA BARK FROM INDOCHINA

ings in the Hard Rock for \$100 million in 1988. (Morton retains the other half, and any decisions involving use of the trademark across each other's territories are made jointly.) Then Pleasurama became the object of a hostile takeover by a large British company that was called Mecca Leisure. Then Mecca was gobbled

put at the bottom of the menu, "a subsidiary of Rank." But speak to me next week. Could be Japanese."

In the late seventies, Earl had been approached by Disney to take his theme-dinner idea to the British Pavilion at EPCOT. "It was a bit plasticky, what they were doing, but I could see the numbers,"

cluding King Henry's Feast (with strolling troubadours and all the mead you can drink) and Fort Liberty Wild West Show (with shoot-outs and saloon girls). At the Hard Rock in Orlando, the exterior is in the shape of a guitar: The front entrance is a guitar neck, complete with frets and strings, and the back door opens onto Universal Studios. Earl claims it's the highest-grossing restaurant in the world. "That's a hell of a statement," he admits. "Mind you, there's a McDonald's in Moscow that has them lining up. But we do 6,000 meals a day." The spread of such commercial mass entertainment in Orlando led to a recent *Time* cover story that likened the city to "Dennis the Menace on acid"

**PLANET HOLLYWOOD**

Earl jokes about installing speaker-phones on his tennis courts and a fax in his shower.

up by the even larger Rank Organisation (remembered by movie buffs for all those classic black-and-white films that always began with the banging of a metal gong).

The climate of hostile takeovers worked for Earl: That last deal, in 1990, was for £1 billion, and Earl says his new parent company is terrific. "They're mensches, if you know the word," he says, "because they understand about leaving us alone. They don't say, 'Please

he says. "Then they told me what my stuff for them would look like, what the price of everything had to be, what I would have to do, and I walked from the deal. But you know how people will sometimes say about a city, 'You should have seen it back when . . . '? Orlando was the first time I was there before the event, early enough to get a major stake in it."

Earl moved to Orlando in 1983 and developed a group of restaurants, in-

and called it the next Los Angeles.

Admitting he can't relax for more than an hour, Earl is already at work planning a new café in Santa Monica with Schwarzenegger, who seems to have discovered the restaurant investment as cash cow. But lately, most of Earl's time is spent commuting, with his wife and two small daughters, between his dream restaurant on 57th Street and his dream house in Orlando.

"You're in the bar now," he says, side-



# PORTED TASTE OF BOMBAY GIN.

ALMONDS FROM INDOCHINA    LEMON PEEL FROM SPAIN    ORRIS (IRIS ROOT) FROM ITALY    LICORICE FROM INDOCHINA  
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stepping a pit in the floor and an Allied Sanitation bin at the Planet Hollywood construction site in New York. It still looks like the surface of the moon, but Earl points out what he sees in his mind's eye: the open kitchen, the double-height restaurant, the tiered seating of the screening room, and the beer cooler in the basement. "You must replace the steel structure when you take out a floor," he reports, and six feet of hard rock (the joke is not lost on him) had to be excavated by round-the-clock work crews. Earl stops to chat with the Irish foreman about soccer in the U.K.

**T**HE OTHER PILE OF RUBBLE in his life is the new house, dubbed Earlyworld, on a 20,000-square-foot lot in a private community behind security gates, where every home sits on either a golf course or a lake. Adam Tihany, who designed both the house and the restaurant Remi, has agreed to let Remi's chef fly down to Orlando and train Earl on the brick pizza oven in Earlyworld's new kitchen. Earl has been joking (sort of) about putting speakerphones over the tennis court in the Michael Milken tra-

dition and installing a fax machine in the shower. ("I'm quick on decisions," he says. "I'm from the school that you're okay as long as you make more right than wrong. So I'm fast on the phone and then good-bye. And all my faxes are three-liners: 'You have not done this. You swine. Signed, Robert Earl.'")

Arnold Palmer may be his neighbor in Florida, but tennis is his passion. Every year on his birthday, Earl holds a tennis tournament at his local club. This year, he turned down parties in New York and Hollywood

with all famous faces. Instead, Earl chose to continue the tennis-tournament tradition. The guest list this year included his wife's dentist, his daughters' former nanny, and several basketball players (nearly twice his size) from Orlando's NBA franchise, the Magic. The party favors were T-shirts with Earl's head superimposed on Schwarzenegger's body, and the gifts included enough tennis gear to open a pro shop.

"I've got luminous balls," he reports cheerfully. Not even Schwarzenegger can claim that.



ANTON FURST, WHO ALSO DESIGNED *BATMAN*, WILL PROVIDE A SURREAL LOOK.