

AN INTERVIEW WITH GABRIEL E. GARCIA

An Oral History Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada
Oral History Project

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the narrator. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of the *Latinx Voices of Southern Nevada*.

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PREFACE



In the mid-1980s, Gabriel E. Garcia (b 1976) was a grade schooler when his family relocated to Las Vegas from southern California. As so many others, his parents embraced the construction boom as harbinger of work opportunity. For young Gabe, it was all about going to school and making new friends. Within a couple of years, he was experiencing a Sixth Grade Center, part of Clark County School District's plan to desegregate local schools. For his situation, riding the bus resulted in fewer hours that his parents worried about his wellbeing.

He also recalls the frightening PEPCON explosion in Henderson. As you listen to him describe reactions, you sense that young Gabe absorbed everything that was going on around him.

When it comes to the sundry of Latinx identifiers, Gabe finds attachment to many and points out that for him it depends on where he is or who he is with. At the end of the day, he calls himself a Tex-Mex, son of a Texan father and Mexican mother, though he also relates to Chicano.

When it comes to his passion for his career as a graphic artist, Gabe describes his arts preferences as simple and clean. He is grateful for the nurturing encouragement as his artistic talents bloomed from the sketching of cars as a young boy to the creative collaborations of working with a creative design at MGM International and team leadership at Caesars Entertainment. More recently, his focus is on Sunday Slacker, which he owns and is “a designer, publisher, builder, and creative thinker.”

Gabe also serves as an inspiration to others through his volunteerism and mentorship. He is one of the early leaders of ALPFA (American Latino Professionals for America), a board member of the Las Vegas chapter of AIGA, (American Institute of Graphic Arts), a frequent judge at art and design events, and a collector of cars, including low-riders. And that’s just for starters.

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in Las Vegas, Nevada
Conducted by Monserrath Hernández

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Today is November 13th, 2019. I am in the Oral History Research Center. My name is Monserrath Hernández, and with me today is...

Barbara Tabach.

Elsa Lopez.

And our narrator today is Gabriel Garcia.

Gabriel, can you spell out your name for us?

G-A-B-R-I-E-L, middle initial E, last name Garcia, G-A-R-C-I-A.

I like to start by asking you, how do you identify?

This is a question I've been thinking about. It really depends on who asks the question. Me specifically, if somebody asks how I would identify, I would say as Mexican. When you look at different situations, who it's coming from, I'm American; I'm Chicano; I'm Hispanic; I'm a low-rider; I'm a builder; I'm an artist; I'm a designer. The question is always one of those I never like to pigeonhole myself into one thing. But if you're talking nationality or race, it would be, yes, I'm Mexican.

Where were you born?

Phoenix, Arizona.

How long were you in Phoenix?

I was in Phoenix until I was in kindergarten, and then from there we moved to Southern California. I was in Southern California for about five or six years, and then we moved to Vegas in 1984 or '85.

What brought your family here?

At that time, it was the boom. It was construction. We came down a weekend to visit my uncle, and we went home, and my dad didn't go with us. I was like, "Why is Dad not going with us?"

Two weeks later he shows up with a U-Haul. He had found a job way better than the job he had in a cement factory for at least ten, fifteen years. Just the work and the volume and the growth in the city, and I think the allure of Vegas, too, was one of those things that the next thing you know a U-Haul truck picks us up and we live in Vegas. We actually lived across the street from UNLV for a year at the apartment complex right here off Harmon.

Off Harmon?

Yes, right in front of the school on Harmon and Maryland Parkway.

What was that area like when you moved here?

Back then? Probably very similar to what it is today. I don't think a lot of it has changed. I think we are very much what you would picture or what you hear a lot of times as a family. It was a two-bedroom apartment, and it was my uncle, my aunt, their three kids, and then we moved in with them for at least two months or so. There were probably ten people in that apartment, maybe more, while my dad was going to work and we were trying to find a new home here because everything happened just so quickly. One day we're in California and the next day we're in Las Vegas.

What school did you go to when you arrived?

I went to Kit Carson [Elementary School]. I don't know if you guys are familiar with the bussing program. We ended up moving during that summer. We moved to Charleston and Eastern area. At that time, they were doing what they called *sixth grade centers*. Depending on what side of town you lived on, they bussed you to the opposite side of town, which was at that time North Town, like D Street and I-15, or Lake Mead and D Street. Then they bussed those kids from those neighborhoods to schools on our side. We did that for a year.

You moved into the Sixth Grade Center.

Yes.

We talk about (the Sixth Grade Centers) a lot in the African American Experience oral history project. What did you think about that when you moved here?

For me it was exciting in the sense that I didn't know anybody. Coming from California and getting the opportunity to spend—and my memory could be wrong with it—but I felt like I was the first one picked up and last one off the bus, so we had a long time to spend in the bus, which gave us some really fun experiences and built friendships. There is a friend of mine, Alan, who I'm still friends with today, and he lived on the street behind me. We went to school together and we spent a lot of time on that bus. It gave me opportunity to build friendships that I don't think I normally would have as easily if I just went to a normal school.

Then, of course, at that time is when PEPCON [1988] happened. I went to school. If you're not familiar with it, the listeners or readers will have to do their homework on that. For me, if you're familiar, you remember the movie Red Dawn; it was like the end of the world. You saw a mushroom cloud and they shut down the schools. They were taping vents because no one knew if it was a chemical attack. One of my biggest memories of being there was PEPCON and the devastation and people crying and just this whole thing that everybody thought we were under attack because nobody knew what those explosions were, what the big mushroom cloud in the sky was. Others felt it was a traumatizing time. For me it was kind of exciting and I think for me it was really fresh that I was thinking of the movie Red Dawn. I was like, it's exciting; things are going to happen. I was just being a movie kid, action hero.

What is PEPCON?

It was a rocket fuel plant in Henderson that exploded, and it caused a three-point-something on the Richter scale. If you look up the world's greatest explosions, it's always number one. Luckily

at that time there wasn't much in Henderson, but it flipped cars over. It blew up the building next door. It left only the beams from the marshmallow factory; I think it was.

Yes, marshmallows.

It was just one of those things that people remember if you've been here. I always use the gauge of...*I've been here a long time.* I'm like, "PEPCON?" And if they have no clue, I'm like, "You haven't been here a long time."

What were the sixth grade centers like? What do you remember?

I don't remember the specifics of the actual school. For me it was all the bus ride. It was just that experience of getting to intermix and see different people. But the school itself or the experience, it was probably no different than I got in California; it was school. You're just learning and looking forward to lunch, looking forward to the bus ride home, and that was pretty much school.

It was an attempt at integration?

Yes.

Was the school very diverse? What did your classrooms look like?

I don't know if it was very successful because I don't know how long the project lasted. I think moving a group of kids who are already associated with each other because they're in the neighborhood just to the other side of town for middle school—I don't know if that was a benefit. I don't know the percentage of people within that neighborhood that stayed versus those that got bussed out. Without really knowing the facts of it, for me it didn't feel any different. It didn't feel like I met anybody different. Most of the people that I met were still the same people in my neighborhood.

How long was your bus ride? Around what time would they pick you up?

I don't know the specifics, but it had to be at least an hour; you figure you've got to fill up a bus and then go all the way from this side of town to the north side. If it was shorter, it felt really long, which was good. I think it worked out great for my parents, too, because it gave them time to work, because they buffered in whether it was an hour extra in the morning and an hour extra in the evening. That's two extra hours that they got to work and not worry about their kids. A lot of times schools get out now at two-thirty, three o'clock. If I was getting home at four-thirty, closer to when they got home, I'm sure it made their life easier.

Your mom was working outside of the home, too?

I believe so for a short period. I know she worked heavily when we were in California. Then when we came here, I think financially they were doing a lot better, and I don't think she needed to go to work. But some of the specifics...It's interesting. There are a lot of little things that I guess you take for granted and don't really realize because you're so worried or just thinking about yourself. I think that happens as we're kids. You're just worried about your friendships and what you've got going on. You're not really paying attention to what your parents are doing.

EL: How many people were in your household at the time?

It was just me, my sister, my mom, and my dad. We lived with my uncle for a very short period. It was probably over the summer while we found a place. It could have been two weeks. It sure felt like two months, three months. It sure felt like a long time. Even then, we spent a lot of time thereafter. My uncle and my cousins ended up moving from Phoenix, and they moved across the street. As the city was booming, they left Phoenix and moved here. We started to see a lot of our family move to Vegas because the economy was just doing extremely well.

What year was this again? Sorry.

It was '84 or '85 when we moved here.

What was the Charleston/Eastern area like at that time?

It was beautiful. It had a lot of those homes, I guess you would define them as midcentury modern, 1940s, 1950s, the street that I lived on. From what I understand most of the people in the neighborhood were business owners or long-time residents. I believe one of the residents there owned Palm Mortuary. The houses all had manicured green grasses, beautiful lush green trees. All the homes were brick, beautiful wood ceilings. It just had that 1940s, '50s ranch. But it was extremely well maintained. After seventh grade, I went to Fremont [Middle School], so we would walk from Charleston/Eastern area all the way to Maryland Parkway and Spencer, near St. Anne's. Old Gorman High School used to be there, and we used to walk down Oakey. Those homes were beautiful. That's what you would envision as the reason why you would leave California for Vegas. It was a time that felt like everything was growing and it was quiet and peaceful and just lush and beautiful. It didn't feel like a desert, at least living there; that neighborhood. Some of the houses are still really nice there, but a lot of it, it's not as beautiful as I remember.

What was Fremont [Middle School] like? Did you bus there?

John C. Fremont? No, I rode a bike and walked. That was actually—when we talk about diversity and group, I think that was a really great experience for me because the people that I ended up walking with, they were Hispanic, white, I remember Filipino. We had a group of eight kids that used to walk, and we would catch up to each other on our route, and it was a very diverse group. For me diversity or inclusion or color, I never really saw the differences just because we were always just together. We all felt the same. We were all probably in the same financial situation, had relatively similar backgrounds. We were all the same age. I'm sure we all

had common interests. For us it was just a good way to spend time together, take the long route. It never felt in a hurry.

Going back to a little bit about your parents, what were your parents like growing up?

We were very fortunate we lived in California, I think fortunate as a whole. I actually just wrote something on my blog and website about it as I was really starting to look back and look at what were the things that we did as kids that have impacted or affected the decisions I made or the career path or things that I like? I would describe it as we were adventurous. My parents had bought us ATVs, so we would travel a lot. We would go to the Gulf of Mexico. We would go to Palm Springs. We would go to Bakersfield. It felt like every weekend we were in the car traveling, going somewhere and doing something. It was very exciting as a child knowing that we were able to experience and see a lot of things even if a lot of those things were the same things that we did dozens of times. I think it was a very smart way—I give my parents a lot of credit. I think they used it as, “Behave in school and do well and we’ll go riding this weekend.” Or, “We’ll go to Chuck E. Cheese,” if we stayed in town. Or, “We’ll go to X.” I think it really drove the decisions that I think I made as a kid knowing that if we behaved and we didn’t get in trouble that we were going to go to Palm Springs and ride our ATVs and I got to see my cousins. I think there was always this idea of ‘do well and there was a benefit at the end.’

Where are your parents from?

My dad is from Texas and my mom is from Mexico.

What part of Mexico?

She’s from Sonora near Yuma, Arizona.

Did they meet in Phoenix?

Yes, they met in Phoenix in ’73, possibly.

Were they working? Were they going to school?

Sadly, I don't know their history too much. I just see a lot of the old pictures from when they met. Then they came me. The story for me seems to start with me.

What do you remember of Phoenix?

A large family. My family has been in Phoenix; they moved to South Phoenix in 1945, '46. My grandma lived until she passed away in the same home in South Phoenix up on 16th Street and Broadway back when it was farmhouses. It's changed dramatically. I have over a hundred and fifty cousins in Phoenix alone. Our generations were deep down there. For me Phoenix was always family, my dad's family. That was always exciting and fun when we got to see cousins and groups. Because we were so large I remember there were tiers and groups of us. I remember there were tiers like six, seven, eight, and then eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and then what we pictured as, "Oh, they're old." They're nineteen, twenty, and twenty-one. The groups. That's still very similar today. I go back there and there are still those little clusters of groups of who you're affiliated with and who you grew up with.

Then on my mom's side, they're predominantly in California. We go to El Centro and Wasco, California. That's where her family is. Same thing, agriculture. Two of her brothers at that time also lived in Mexico, and we would go back a lot.

What high school did you go to here?

I went to the original Vegas High School before they shut it down. I was there the last year or the year before they shut it down. It was rough. Most people don't realize it was one of the most, my understanding, most violent, most diverse. It was a hard school to go to. I remember it got to the point—I was a junior—I had to have been a freshman. I told my mom, "I'm not going back to school. I'm going to drop out of school." It was one of those things that you had to clique up,

whether you're joining a gang or doing something, to defend yourself. I was fortunate that the year before I was able to transfer to Valley High School because I technically lived closer to Valley, but the grid lines of the zoning I would have to go to Vegas High School. When I switched over to Valley High School, I think the next year they shut Vegas down, or right around that same time just because the school was tough.

For me it was still fun because we used to be able to leave campus, so most of my memories of Vegas High School was going to lunch downtown. Same thing, I just wrote a little blog, feature thing, as I'm starting to go back and fill in the blanks to a lot of the memories and what certain things mean to me. For me Vegas High School always meant freedom because we'd always leave. Once you got past the problems within the school and the school system and just problems with the gangs, it was still very memorable in the sense of it was exciting. That's what we looked forward to.

How has downtown changed in the sense of a food scene since you were going to high school?

It's dramatically different. When I went to school there was really nothing. There was no downtown. Downtown was for tourists. We would go to Fremont Street, which you used to be able to drive back then. There was this one place specifically that I remember that used to have all-you-can-eat pasta on Thursdays. We would go there all the time. You know how five little, skinny high school kids can eat. I swear we ate them out every week. There were times that we didn't have money, and they were really cool and would spot us because I think they knew that we were just schoolkids trying to go to school, very respectful. We made sure our space was clean and we didn't make a mess and we weren't loud and obnoxious. There was a lot of other businesses that used to do the same thing. They would see us come in. They would prep our

order sooner and quicker than others because they knew we were on a time crunch. It was one of those things that you respected their place and they respected you.

EL: Did you drive in high school?

I ended up driving when I went to Valley. I got my first car, which is actually featured in the magazine. It was the first car I ever purchased, my '66 GMC truck. I had my truck. At that time, same thing; you used to be able to leave campus. Everyone was like, "You have the car." They'd jump in the back of the truck and we'd go to lunch or meet friends from other schools halfway. For me high school was always social, fun. People used to ditch and I never ditched because school is more fun than your ditch party. That's where the people were out socially, and then having a car was that freedom, and people knew 'make friends with him because we can go places.'

What was Valley like when you were attending?

Valley for me was like an eighties' movie. Going from Vegas High School, which was also like an eighties' movie, but you see graffiti, violence, your typical high school gang movie; that's kind of what Vegas felt like. Then all the sudden to go to Valley, it was the first time I saw the preppies, the hipsters, the jocks, the cheerleaders. I was like, wow, there's all these diverse groups, the nerds, the this. Prior to that they were there, but they were hidden or overwhelmed by what you saw as more the gangs. For me it was exciting. It was like, this is a great opportunity, when you talk about diversity and getting to meet people. I knew everybody from every clique because to me that was exciting to see that. I was very fortunate to go to that school at that time.

After high school what did you do?

My junior year I was in drafting class. They had an event, kind of tying it back again to UNLV, at UNLV. It was a bridge building competition where we got to design it, build it, fabricate it,

and they used weights and different things to see structurally how sound it was. I had won at my high school for the UNLV level. I beat out a bunch of people. I received two scholarships my junior year. One was for mechanical engineering and the second was for graphic design. I got that as a junior, so come senior year I had the opportunity to define, well, where do I really want to go? Do I want to go more on the strategic side where you're thinking about mechanical and everything is factual and numbers based, or more of the creative ideology where there is that freedom to do whatever you want?

But when you look at right around that same time, talking in the mid-nineties, you're talking the riots and the violence, and all that was still very relevant. The mechanical engineering school was in California. My parents were really reluctant to send me knowing that we didn't really know anybody down there and then not having the understanding of the current situation. The scholarship that I got for the arts school was in Phoenix. I think my parents felt much more comfortable and I felt much more comfortable knowing, well, if anything ever happens I've got family there. I ended up taking the creative direction. I think a lot of it had to do with where it was at versus so much of what it was I was going to school for.

What school did you end up going to?

I ended up going to a private art school called NEC. I got a scholarship for advertising design.

From there, how did you pick up photography?

I'm not really a photographer. It's part of being a graphic designer. It's just one of the elements that you either have to know or things that you work with and you have to have an understanding. It's one segment of the bigger picture of everything that I do as a designer.

What was your first professional gig?

My first gig is I moved back to Las Vegas and I worked for a small independent T-shirt shop. I worked there for three months. I didn't really care for it. One of the things that I heard early on in my career was, "Don't go to a little print shop or a small place because that's where careers die." The percentage of people who graduate, if you don't find work with a large company doing good work, within two years you change career choices. I knew that I didn't want my career to die. I went to this little company. I was like, there is no growth; there is nothing for me here. I started with this small independent mom-and-pop design firm, but they had major clients. I was working with HBO, TaylorMade, Cingular Wireless. I was just a production designer at that time. But having those brand names in my portfolio really helped launched my career because if they're looking at you as a fresh student or young designer and they're looking through your book and they see that you're affiliated with these companies or these companies trust them and, in turn, they trust you with their work, it means a lot. That really helped me understand the importance of affiliation, networking, who you hang out with; all those little things had impact.

BT: *Who was that firm?*

It was Victa Graphics. I haven't seen him maybe fifteen or twenty years. I don't even know if he's in Vegas anymore. But he was very influential in my career where when I outgrew them he helped point me in the right direction of getting my own business license, hustling my own work, and really taught me to position myself for success, so I thought really well of him.

He was a good mentor.

Very much so, yes.

How did you launch your own business?

We were actually just talking about this not too long ago. I look at my career where it stands today in three phases. The first phase of my career, I would say the defining point for me really

started when I started with MGM Resorts or MGM International. I spent five years there as a senior designer. Up to that point and then the five years that I was with MGM were defining for me in the sense of finding myself as a designer. I was really trying to figure out where I fit in this world of graphic design. I had moved up relatively quickly while I was there. I was getting requests to work on certain projects.

One time someone—and I used this same story, too, with a lot of designers and people that I work with because for me it was a defining moment—one time someone had described my work as pretty. At that time I took so much offense to it because you're talking the only Hispanic male. I had a low-rider. I used to wear Dickies. I looked nothing like the person that you thought of the work that was being designed, and working with MGM Resorts, I was working a lot of spas and restaurants and things that I had never even been to. I think one of the benefits is because I wasn't exposed to it, I tried harder. I did more. I did my research because I didn't understand it. I think that gave me the leverage over everybody else. They would default to what they thought was pretty or beautiful for a spa or restaurant. I'm like, I don't know what these experiences are like, so I was putting in the work. When they had told me that I took it to heart and I started to switch up my style. I could see it just wasn't right. I was like, well, if I don't want them or the clients to stop requesting me, I need to figure out, why is it that they like my work?

One day I grabbed all the work that I had and I laid it on the floor and then I stood on a table and looked down at it. What I had found is, yes, it was pretty, but I think the person that said that didn't know another way to describe the work. To them it was pretty. For me it was minimalistic; it was simple, a lot of white space, a lot of sanserif typeface, very precise, a lot of lighter pastels. It wasn't bright or vibrant or color everywhere. The way they described it as pretty was to me minimalistic and refined. Once I realized that I realized my place within the

organization is, this is what I'm good at and this is why people like my work. If I'm going to learn a new skill set, I can't lose that because that is giving me the competitive advantage. I use that as an example as a lot of times take a step back and look at the big picture.

That first portion of my career was finding myself. Once I found that then I had a new drive to move forward. I left MGM Resorts and I went to a boutique startup, which was Wicked Creative Window Media, which now they're known as one of the owners of Life is Beautiful and they've since grown. At that time I was doing a lot of freelance and a lot of design work. I really consider those eight years my entrepreneurial, really trying to find myself. When you're working with a startup, you're hustling. You're having to do a lot more with less. You're really being innovative in the sense of, how do you compete with the MGMs and the Caesars when you're this boutique little startup?

That time really gave me the opportunity in working with clients and pitching work. As a freelance designer you're out there hustling work. It forces you to wear many hats and become expert at many different things. I would define that period as almost my hustle years because that's really what you're doing. Fake it till you make it. All those little taglines and sayings that people say are real, and for me that's what it was. I had the opportunity to work with some major clients, people who went off to have really great careers who gave me an opportunity as a young designer.

I did that for a good six, seven years, and then I got tired of that hustle and that chase. It's exhausting, really tiring. I started to see a lot of my friends at that time buying homes and really starting to mature. We're starting to hit that level of—I would almost define myself at that point as, I'm an adult now.

That's when I left and went to Caesars Entertainment. They were starting their in-house design agency. I was one of the first people that they hired. I would define that eight years as really my leadership. That's where I really became a leader, really started to leverage my networks, people that I knew, leverage my experience as a designer, leverage my experience as a hustler and an entrepreneur and as a presenter. Those years were really defined as my opportunity to share and grow and develop others.

Can you talk about being a board member of Caesars Entertainment Hispanic Business Resource Group?

VIA? One of the things I had noticed about Caesars is they were very big on—which is now called BIG, funny, the Business Impact Group—really big on their diversity programs. As I was continuing, I've always been at that mindset of, I need to learn; I need to push; I need to surround myself around people that are smarter than me, that know more, that can teach me something different. I've always been that way throughout my career. One of the things I had noticed is because they had really pushed those initiatives, I was like, well, let me see if I could have any impact.

Prior to that I was on the board of AIGA [American Institute of Graphic Arts], which is one of the largest organizations for graphic designers. They've been around a hundred years. I was on the board for that. I ended up having to leave just because I was working so much and I wasn't able to have impact as much as I wanted to in that group.

One of the things with Caesars is when you join one of their groups, they're almost forced a little bit to work around your schedule. A lot of the meetings are either after work or during work hours, but it made it easier for me to have impact and it felt like it wasn't impacting my work because Caesars is really pushing people to get involved. Almost selfishly I joined, I

think, really looking at the network opportunities or the benefits of me without realizing how much more I was getting out of it. I think after my first year I really changed my positioning on it as I felt like I'm getting more out of it or I have more impact than just doing it because it's something you can put on your resume or feel like you're a part of something, which I think a lot of people in this industry that's one of the reasons you get involved in things and then realize that you really have an impact. I became a lot more passionate about it.

When I left Caesars I ended up still wanting to be involved in the culture and the business and work that impacts, so I joined ALPFA. We partner a lot with VIA. We're still networking with a lot of groups and we partner with a range of diversity groups. It's not just about the Hispanic community. It's about all the communities. We're leveraging what we're closest to, which in a lot of the cases the board, because they're Hispanic, they're leveraging their community, but we're also cross-promoting with other groups.

BT: *What does the acronym stand for?*

For ALPFA? American Latino Professionals for America. It's the largest and oldest professional Latino group. There's hundreds of chapters. The Las Vegas chapter is less than two years old.

You're currently—

I'm vice president of community.

What is your role within the organization?

Currently my role is twofold. I might even be switching. I do majority of—I'm leveraging my background, so a lot the marketing and advertising, I create a lot of stuff for the group. But initially is my role is engagement with the community, so building—when we're looking at having different events or partnering with different groups or creating benefits, and when we look at the resources whether it's a toy drive or this drive, what are those groups and how are we

getting involved? I'm usually leveraging my connections. Well, I think everybody in the group does that, but officially that's my title.

Where does Sunday Slacker Studios come in?

Sunday Slacker Studios, if we go back ten years, my wife and I started Sunday Slacker Magazine. You'll start to see a common thread with a lot of stuff that I do. It's all about inclusion or getting involved. My wife and I are really big in the automotive industry. We have a collection of cars. I've always been involved in multiple groups. I had my '66 GMC, which is traditionally known as a low-rider, and then I bought my 1948 all-original Buick, which is more of your custom, your *bombita*, your classic, almost your traditional car, depending on which show. That really gave me the opportunity to go to a lot more. At that time I had a monster truck, big old thirty-five-inch tires. The thing was so big my dad couldn't even get in it. I had ATVs and I had my truck and I had my Audi, so I had a little bit of everything, everything but the motorcycle.

I was always frustrated that there was really no one place or the segregation of the groups. If you were a low-rider, you went to this. If you were that you went to this. It really bothered me. When we created Sunday Slacker, it was really about the culture and bringing everybody together. It was a resource for if you like automotive culture and all the things that go with it, so pin-ups, tattoos, pin striping, rockabilly music, oldies, it was all those things coming together. We built it to really bring the community together, to start to erase what people's ideology of one group was, and that's how and why we started Sunday Slacker. It originally started as a way to get people together on a Sunday to cruise, to barbeque, to hang out, to go to the show together.

Is that still going on today?

Yes, we still have it on today. We're currently not printing the publication, but this year is our ten-year anniversary, so we're looking at relaunching. We're probably going to biannual or at least once a year. Our goal at this point is to at least get one ten-year anniversary issue out this year hopefully during spring or summer.

Do people still gather on Sundays?

The original idea behind Sunday Slacker was that you work on your car Sunday through Saturday. You're always grinding, you're always working, and you're always building. Sunday was the day that you got together and slacked. That's the day you went to the car shows. That's the day you went to the barbeque. That's the day you went to cruise.

When I was young and when I was in Tiempo Car Club, I remember we would go hang out at Freedom Park back in the day when you used to be able to drive through. They'd barbeque and hang out. For me it was always about a social group, networking, families. When we were thinking about names, Sunday Slacker was that's the day some would define as you hear like church. There's the praise the lowered, L-O-W-E-R-E-D, like the slammed car. It's that idea that that was, in essence, their church, their being around like-minded individuals. That was one of the things that helped define the name.

BT: Walk me through on a Sunday. What time? How does this all come together?

It's very different and it changes every year as the culture and people change. But when I was young it was originally about a car club or multiple car clubs coming together on a Sunday at a park. You would barbeque and hang out and music and grill. It was really about the social aspect. There was a time where a lot of that had changed in the culture and a lot of people weren't getting together anymore as low-riding went away and more the hotrod and rockabilly scene came in. Then things switched. I think today, though, you still see the groups that get together in

the morning for coffee. They hang out. Usually it's like eight in the morning, seven in the morning until ten o'clock, and that would usually lead to a car show or a cruise. It's really different depending on which group you're hanging around. But there is still that core idea of the community and just hanging out and spending quality time together. Sometimes that's the only day that as a group you can get together and help your buddy build this car. It could be very much in just a garage. It's a day that you hang out and maybe you get one thing accomplished because the rest of the time you're eating and drinking and hanging out telling stories. It changes. But that idea of just being around like-minded individuals I think is what really draws everybody together.

Where would a cruise go, when you use that word? Did you map it out?

They still do things today. One of the cruises that's happening currently in Las Vegas, it's every Tuesday. It's a taco cruise, so they meet up somewhere and they go to a different taco shop. That one is predominantly low-riders, customs, rockabilly, and classics. You're starting to see this mix within the community where you're having—for me on my '48, how we define it is it just changes shoes. One side of the hubcaps, it has a fifties vintage look. If I remove the hubcaps, it has a fifties rockabilly look. If I put the wire wheels, now I'm a low-rider. You're starting to see this mix of low-rider paint jobs, but maybe with airbags or slammed and fifties hubcaps, so now they're low-rider rockabilly or custom hotrod because they may have the big blown motor, but they have the cruiser tires on it. You're starting to see this blend between cultures and groups right now, which I think is a fantastic time to be around the scene because you're not really grouped into one thing anymore. I think the sense of international really helped that where it's really big in Japan and Germany and Australia. They're really embracing the culture and they're embracing the culture from different angles whether it's the West Coast vibe of cruising, but the

East Coast vibe of speed or style or down South in Texas. Each region has its own. A lot of these people from different countries are embracing all of it, and I think that's really helped us, I see it, and I could be wrong on this, but I see it as one of the reasons we're starting to embrace and mix and blend a little bit more. Of course, social media has a big impact on that because you're seeing what others are doing. You're not really just looking at what's in your own community anymore. Now you're looking at what others are doing, so you're starting to see this infusion of styles, which is fantastic.

Are there any competitions or award shows for these groups, or is it just a get-together?

There's tons of shows. One of the big things for me, going back to my '66, I spent my first year taking second places. I was like, this sucks. What do I need to do? I rebuilt it and was very fortunate that the group of people who helped me when I was sixteen, seventeen years old rebuild it, rebuilt my truck again twenty-plus years later. But I went undefeated for three years. I was like, well, the day I take a second is the day I stop showing, because it is a lot of work and it is exhausting. You're traveling and doing a lot. At some point it almost stops becoming fun because it becomes about the competition. That's right around the same time the rockabilly scene was really starting to blow up in Las Vegas and you had a Viva Las Vegas at that time at the Gold Coast and it was this group of people that it wasn't about trophies. It was a show, but it wasn't a show for points. Whereas the other shows are points driven and you're being judged on paint and chrome and your display, which is still fun and it still happens a lot, but for me it really changed where it started to take away the fun of it. People wouldn't go to the show because they were like, ah, my paint is a little chipped, or, oh, I didn't have time to clean it, so now they're not going. What I found is as shows are starting to pivot towards the rockabilly scene and no trophies, or if there was a trophy, it was more of a group trophy, like this car was driven the

furthest or it's pretty cool, but it's not really on points. It's more of maybe group's opinion. They make five trophies and they're going to give five out. That really changed for me just because I really loved the social aspect of it and it was just about fun. It didn't matter if your car had chips. It was still cool. In fact, it was almost the opposite where unlike shows, a lot of the show cars are driven on trailers and, yes, they're beautiful, but they're not used as cars; they're not driven. Where on the other scene, we're driving it. We're building them. We're breaking them. That's part of having a car. They break down. Things happen. That's what the fun part is. The teaching of somebody taught you how to fix it or building it yourself; you know how to fix it when it's on the side of the road or something happens, or you have people that you can depend on and call instead of just calling a tow truck. The first thing you're doing is you're calling your buddy. "Hey, bring me that tool; bring me that part; bring me a jack." You got a tire, whatever you need. For me that's always been way more fun just because it's social.

How many cars might be present?

They vary. Viva Las Vegas, you could have up to eight hundred.

In one place?

Yes. Most little parking lot shows nowadays, you maybe get thirty, forty people. They vary. If you go to a show in California or Arizona, you're getting a thousand cars or more. It just really varies on which show, what group, and where you're going.

Does somebody rent a space for that?

Yes. It's big money. They have the Low-Rider Super Show here, I think it's in September, and they ran out of space within the convention center. It's not cheap. It's just a different group. That one is very specific to one group, one culture, very trophy driven versus Viva Las Vegas where the car show is one portion of it. It's really a music festival. People come from around the world

for the music and the culture and there happens to be a car show. It's just one part of the big picture. For me cars was always one part of the big picture. That's why my new website I built was cars, art and music because everything leading up to that has been affiliated with one portion of cars, art and music. To me they're all the same. They're all intertwined. I don't like to look at things and be like, well, you're Hispanic, or you're white, you're black, or you're young or old. I don't like that and I don't like that with the car scene and I don't like that with the music. I listen to the oldies, the rockabilly, the country. I'm all over the map. For me that's the fun part. Same thing with art. Whether it's art or design or architecture, it's all creative. To me it's all one thing.

How many cars do you have?

Currently I think we have seven.

Which one is your favorite and why?

Oh, it's hard. They're all very different. My '66 for me probably because that's what I'm known for and that was my first car. Unfortunately we took it apart and I haven't found dependable people to help put it back together. It's been down for a little bit. But that one is probably my favorite just because of the history with it. But my '48 Buick is real important. I got that when I met my girlfriend at the time and then she became my wife. My dad helped me build it and some friends who helped me pull the motor. I have a lot of memories with all of them, and that's really what it is. Cars are memories. The times you cruise. The times you broke down. Different places you went. Each one has a different story.

The only thing you didn't mention are women. Are women driving these cars and fixing these cars? Has there been a gender change in that?

Yes. Probably not as much as we would like, but, yes, they're very much a part of the scene. My wife has been a huge supporter in everything that I've done, and she has two cars. She has a

Regal and a 1946 Fleetline that we're building, so she's big in the scene. What a lot of people don't realize is the strong women behind a lot of these whether they're helping, whether they're supporting, whether they're just riding shotgun, whether they're building. They're very much a part of the scene as well.

That was one of the big things that when I found a car club early on that was important to me, it was the family aspect. There were kids. There were wives. There were girlfriends. It wasn't just a group of guys hanging out. That was one of the things that when I was looking at joining a club or getting involved, one, it didn't make sense for me to join a group of nothing but young people like me. I was like, I'm not going to learn anything. And if it was just a bunch of guys. I ended up joining a club that I was the youngest member. They were family driven. They were doing things. They taught me different values and different things that I wouldn't have gotten from just hanging around like-minded people like me at that time.

EL: Is this the first club you joined?

Yes. I've only joined one and I've only been in one. When I got out I laid my plaque down and I would never—for me it always felt like once you join one, while there's nothing wrong with people who club hop, for me it was...how do you say it in a very PC way? For me it was a sign of respect of I've paid my dues, I flew my plaque, and when I was going to leave that I wouldn't disrespect my old club and friends by flying another plaque.

What's the name of your own club?

I don't have a club. We just have a group. We consider Sunday Slacker is a group or slacker social club. We're just a group. We don't have an official plaque per se and we don't have official meetings and groups. We're just a group of people. Majority of us are people who have been in various clubs. As much as I love clubs, like any organization, you get the politics. One of

the big deciding factors for me to leave the club is it became a group of people telling me what to do, and I was like, I don't need somebody to tell me that I need paint or I need to clean my car. They don't know what's important in my life, or my priorities are not the club's priorities or their priorities. At that time I left because I didn't want to be making decisions when others didn't understand what you're going through. I know people that you could define as riders who don't have a car and maybe haven't had a car in twenty years, and I think they're stronger individuals as a rider than that person that has the best car on the streets because they don't have an understanding what it means. They're looking at the fame or the reputation, but they don't know anything about loyalty, or they don't know anything about family or culture or why they're doing it. For me that was one of the reasons to get out. Now that's one of the reasons why we're just affiliated and I do everything that is just a mix of cars and music, a little bit of everything. Cars are one aspect of thirty other things that I'm into these days.

EL: How did you become a part of this part of—

Just as art or design or business or cars? Which?

Cars.

Well, when I go back and look at things—I actually asked my dad this question, is what got me into art? At that time I was drawing and doing different things, and I was starting to draw cars a lot. That was one of the big things that really got me into the art field and then the cars. You're talking probably late eighties, early nineties, your typical hotrod era where everything was painted bright and colorful and there was just this different sense of the automotive culture. Then at that time being in California, you had the California vibe and very colorful. I think those two things, the art aspect and then drawing cars, and then my parents had an old Buick Riviera, '66 or maybe '65, so I remember the music. I remember the oldies and the music and then the sound

of the motor and the car and then drawing. For me there were always those three, and that's why I named my site Cars, Art and Music, because for me they were always intertwined and it just came natural. When it came time to get a car, well, I wanted an old car. That's why I still have it today.

Going back to your graphic design, walk me through your brainstorming process.

For me now—and this is what I always tell young designers in design—at least in the part of design that we're in, commercial design, it's a business. The design that we do has to solve problems. There is art for the sense of creating beautiful art and you're making a political statement or visual statement. What I do as a graphic designer or commercial designer, we're advertising; we're marketing. There has to be—very purpose driven. The way a lot of our projects start is you're defining, what are we trying to accomplish? You have to have a clear definition of, what is the goal? As they would define it, the ROI; what's the return on investment? What are we trying to accomplish?

Once you get everybody established on that same page, then the brainstorm process is really you're throwing out words, you're doing affiliation. If we're designing a restaurant, what are all the things at the restaurant? What type of food? We start to do this verbal and visual brainstorm without really thinking about the project that you're doing because we're not trying to answer the question immediately. We're forcing people to think outside the box, and we're trying to think big picture.

Then with that there might be a segment where you're doing research. Who is our competitors in market, out of market? Who is our target? Who is our demo? Who are we trying to communicate to? That very much changes language, tone, visuals. Do you want something very approachable, open to everybody, or do we want something elevated and premier? If we're

designing a very high-end restaurant, well, what's the segmentation? What car do they drive? What stores do they shop at? There's a certain look in things that that customer expects versus something that's all things to all people or family friendly, so your tone, your voice, and it's very important to understand that. But we'll explore all different options without really leaving anything off the table. All ideas are good ideas unless strategically you can say, this idea won't work, or it is too elevated for what we're trying to accomplish.

Our brainstorms are really about big picture. Then as you're going down and as you're defining, you're using data, you're using analytics, you're using the brief to help define your design.

What are some of the clients you've worked for?

I've been very fortunate to work with—one of the biggest things for me is the celebrity chefs when I was at Caesars Entertainment. I've opened and worked with every Gordon Ramsay restaurant in Las Vegas or within the Caesars enterprise, Giada, Guy Fieri, Michel Richard, which he passed away a few years ago. He was one of the first chefs that I met that really got me into cooking. The best way to describe him, every time I picture his face, he looked like Santa Claus, so he had the big round red face, white beard, but he had a French accent like Ratatouille. When he talked about food, I had never met anybody who talked about food with so much passion. He was talking about sugar and how much he loved sugar. The only thing he loved more than sugar was his family. We're doing this interview with him, and he's talking so passionate. Right after that interview I went and made a reservation at his restaurant, and this was Central at Caesars.

If you've ever looked at Robert Rodriguez, the director, I think it's Once Upon a Time in Mexico, if you look behind the scenes, he's really well known for cooking. I watched that video

and he was, “Learn to make three things, learn to make three things well.” Between Robert Rodriguez and Michel Richard, they were the ones that really helped define my appreciation for food.

When I got to work with Gordon Ramsay and Giada, it gave me much better appreciation and a respect that yes, they could have great food and they could have a great venue, but it’s just as important that they had great creativity. All these things worked together to make something successful. I realized where I fit in that big piece, not to say that they’re success is my success or vice versa. There’s truth to a little bit of that. But I was honored to be a part of that and to have such success that I was able to work with Nobu and Bobby Flay. I’ve worked with...there are just so many. Steve Martorano, which he doesn’t get a lot of credit. He would always tell you, “I’m a cook, not a chef.” He understands where he fits in the Caesars empire and he realized that his looks hold him back. But when you look at his story, you’re like, wow that’s very motivating, very self-driven. He got things done knowing all the obstacles that were presented in front of him because of the way he looks. But he’s been able to leverage his background being from Philly and what makes him unique, and I’ve always appreciated people like that that realize their place and then realize how to maneuver; that don’t use that as an excuse to hold you back.

BT: It sounds like part of our process is to interview the chef or the owner? How does that transpire?

We don’t get to interview. Usually once the creative is done, we’ll do the photo shoot, so before the project of brand launches, and in that time we get to meet them. Usually it’s after the fact, but at that time we’ve already done our homework and/or, in many cases, we’ve worked with them in the past, so it makes it a little bit easier. But, yes, we’re always taking little tidbits or watching interviews or really starting to figure out, what makes this person the success that they are? What

is it that when we're looking at creating tone and voice and brand, does it sound like them? Does it look like them? Does it resonate with their terminology?

Steve Martorano, one of his big things was, "It's not sauce; it's gravy." That's a big Philly thing that we really didn't understand. To us it's like spaghetti and meatballs. It's like, no, it's not sauce; it's gravy. We're like, okay, so can we leverage that in the language and the tone and in the brand?

Of course, you've got Gordon Ramsay, which he is known from his television. Then when you meet him he's nothing like that and you're trying to figure out, how do I leverage his brand? Because there's an expectation that people have, but there's also an expectation of what he has. What his shows are versus what his branding of his restaurants may not be directly the same. We would take that into consideration or maybe present an option using that, but we realize that's probably not the right choice.

When we looked at Guy Fieri's re-brand, he's really looking at his food size and portions and how possibly people perceive that his food is not of quality because of the size. As he was looking at scaling things down and introducing healthier options, it was like, well, we can't lose who Guy is because he's classic Americana; he had a reputation. But he is conscious of the culture and people changing. I read this article in Vice and it was very clear on there that he knew he can't change overnight. He compared it to an album or music to where there is an expectation that the first album you can't dramatically change. Knowing that we used that and I used that quote in our presentation that goes, "You are not going to see dramatic changes," because he even used it himself. It's baby steps. I leverage that in the presentation to our clients that here's how we're going to position the creative and how we're going to slightly move the needle, or push it a little bit, but we're going to be very careful in the language we use because

he's aware of it, so we should be aware of it. That's just part of doing the homework and that's just part of really looking at, kind of going back to design, we're there to solve a problem, which is, what is the problem? They want revenue. They need more money. They need more customers. That could easily be the problem. In many cases, it's awareness, just trying to get people to know about the place. We'll build copy or language or visuals to support that narrative.

Have you ever been star-struck with any of your clients?

I try not to be because usually on all these you're the design director on set, so I'm the person they're working with and you have to be extremely professional. You don't ask for selfies. You don't ask for pictures. You do not ask for autographs. I'm fortunate that we'll get a lot of what we define was a wrap photo, so you get everybody involved and you do a big group photo. I've got pictures with Bobby Flay, right next to him, because I'm used as a stand-in. Bobby puts his arm around me and we're taking pictures. But it wasn't a selfie; in essence, it was for the shoot. But, yes, deep down, of course, star-struck, but you have to be professional. They want to be treated just like anybody else, respected for what they do, so you treat them as such. It makes it much easier to do your job.

One of the big things where I give Gordon credit, it was his first restaurant. We're working at Paris. In between shoots, while they were setting up to do the kitchen shoot we had done a couple of PR photos for him, he was leaning against these couches that we had pushed against the wall to move them out of the way. He had kicked his shoes off and he had these very colorful, unique socks. We're like, "Tell the photographer to take pictures." *Boom, boom*. He snapped a few photos. We're like, "Oh my God, these are fantastic." You can see them on my site. I would define Gordon as very curious, mischievous. He says things that are just so funny and inappropriate, but a lot of times he'll say it, I think, to see if you're listening, especially his

team and PR. He has a little riff with Bobby Flay. He would do an interview and say Bobby Flay's name or call his own restaurant, just things to just be like, come on, you know we can't use that. He's funny.

When we do this photo and we're looking at behind the screen and we're clicking, I'm telling the photographer, "Save this one. It's really cool." All the sudden Gordon comes up behind me and he's like, "Hey, what do think?" I was very surprised that he took the time to ask me my opinion. He obviously saw I was the one making decisions there, but for him to ask, I was like, wow, that was very thoughtful and very nice. We were able to have a good conversation about why I think this one works. He was like, "Yes, that's great. Let's have some fun with it." From there we went to the kitchen. It was a nice, natural progression. I think when people realize you're just trying to do your job, then they show you that same respect. I was like, wow. It's those little things that for me are big takeaways when you meet anybody regardless whether they're famous or not. It's how they act and what they say and what are those things that they do. For me Gordon is always that memory of him being super cool.

What are the nuances of photographing food?

One thing I learned with food is it's like the movie magic. There are so many things you have to do to make food look appealing. You literally should build it in front of the camera because a lot of things melt under the light in the time that it takes. We've never been a fan of using glycerin or all the things that make it shiny. Every time we actually shoot something, it's usually as authentic and real. We rely very little on Photoshop to take things out. Sometimes what you have to do is undercook things a little bit or dry things off and pat things down, layering. Sometimes if it's soup you might put a little bowl or something underneath to hold the leaf up or capture it. It's a little bit of movie Magic. One of the fortunate things I've noticed is everything is real, as real

as you can get. It's just timing. You really have to move quickly because you want to capture the food as best you can. Working with Giada or Gordon in Hell's Kitchen and working with a lot of these chefs, when I worked with Guy Savoy at Caesars, when you look at his food and the plating and just the way they do it so beautiful, you want to capture that and you want to capture it in a way that's authentic to what they're doing, so we're very cautious and careful of staging and how we present it. What's the champagne or wine or glass of beer? What's the table? What's the background? What's the lighting? That's just as important as the food element because we're looking at everything holistically, as a whole, and it forces you to move really quick on your feet. Sometimes you're like, this table linen is not working with this plate, and you've got a team of people behind you. You're like, "Can we switch the plate?" We don't want to be unauthentic to the customer experience. This plate is close enough. Sometimes you'll get a photographer and they'll switch things out, and you're like, wait, wait, you're changing the narrative of this customer's experience. Now you went from a really small plate to a big plate, and now the customer is like, this is not what I saw. We have to be very careful. It's something you have to teach photographers because they're really just trying to—it's unfortunate that a lot of photographers are thinking about themselves and their piece in the book, their portfolio, versus thinking about, am I giving them the best product that's going to have longevity and tell the customer's story? We spend a lot of time really working with photographers, going, "Hey, here's how you shoot it. Here's why you need to capture as much of the background. Here's why I don't want you to tilt the camera. Yes, it make look stylistically great on your website, but it doesn't look great when I have five food products and they all look like they're falling off the table." They usually get very mad when I'm like, "Put it on a tripod, straight and direct, boring, right above." But it's consistent. It's visual. If somebody has to come back and add food or shoot

photos a year from now, they have something they can easily follow. We're trying to sell plates. I'm not trying to win a food photography award, and I think a lot of photographers that's what they're thinking. It's a lot of education and just really teaching people that we're trying to solve a problem here and educate. It makes it much more fun.

What project are you most proud of, personal or in your career that you've done?

Recently I would have to—and I think I get people the most interested—it's the Gordon Ramsay stuff. I was very fortunate working on his very first restaurant, Steak, to his most recent, Hell's Kitchen. Hell's Kitchen is in Dubai. They're opening in Tahoe. Being able to see that brand grow. I worked on Burger twice from the initial and then the re-brand and his Fish and Chips and Gordon Ramsay Pub, so the diversity within his portfolio. One thing you've got to think about is Gordon is somebody that I love. I respect his work. Then at the same time from a customer standpoint, he's got five restaurants in Vegas. How do you create all these different restaurants? He has a signature pose, so how do you make them all distinct and different when we know his limitations and what he likes? You're forced to design around a set of parameters and it really forces you to be creative. It really forces you to find the right answer. It really forces you to think about the customer whether it's fast food or grab and go, like Fish and Chips, and what's the language, versus Hell's Kitchen we really struggled with how do you tell the story so a customer doesn't think it's the Hell's Kitchen television experience? We had to be very careful, so we're thinking about language and tone and photography and style and what are we leveraging? We're leveraging the fire, the flame, the brand Hell's Kitchen, the pitchforks. I think I'm most proud of that just because each one has been so different. They've really believed in us because they easily could have taken that to an agency. They could have easily done that themselves and presented it to Caesars. Having that designed in house when I was at Caesars was great, and then

the experience that we all got across the board, the whole team, because I worked with dozens of people on each of those projects over the eight years, that's probably my most memorable, my favorite work.

Who are some of the mentors that have helped you throughout your career?

There's so many people. One of the biggest one—and kind of going back to my blog, is I'm starting to revisit a lot of this stuff. If you've been here a long time, you may know the teacher Ms. Cartwright. They actually named a school after her. [Roberta C. Cartwright Elementary School.] I was fortunate at Valley High School in my senior year, she was my teacher. She had said something to me, and I've often questioned this. She said, "Get published. Live forever." I don't know if she saw my drawing, my doodling, my writing, poetry, literature, and just seeing where I was going, if she saw something and put it, or if it was just something that she just happened to say and I grabbed on to. For me it took many years to understand what that quote meant.

Now I wonder if half the things I have done have been because of that quote that's been implanted or roads just crossing. Since then my work has been published in many books. I've had poetry published. I've been featured on six albums. I've written and produced music. I've been on television and TV shows. There's always this underlying "get published lift forever" mentality. For me that was always one of the biggest thing that at least today I look back at a lot, knowing that she had impact on my life.

Then there's just dozens of people, way too many people than I could ever really imagine or think about or thank that almost feel like a pinball machine. One person ping-pongs you to the next to the next to the next. Where I think I've been fortunate is not to forget all those people along the way, or never burn any bridges. One of the things I've noticed is it's a small city. It's a

small town whether it's automotive culture, whether it's design, whether it's the city, whether it's music. We all seem to know each other somehow. I just continue to leverage. It's usually that one little thing that somebody says that I'll find a way to hold on to that.

You also helped curate the AmercianX exhibition here.

Yes.

Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

We were talking earlier, one of your former staff members, Checko (Salgado), through conversation, through various groups, he had called me and was telling me about the exhibition and some of the voids they were trying to fill. As I started to think about, who can I bring? How can I get involved? What can I do different? Once again, how can I think a little bit different?

One of the people that was featured in that show was actually a friend of mine and he is actually a UNLV graduate. His daughter actually goes to school here, and he actually has a UNLV tattoo. For me, everything has to have purpose. If I'm going to bring somebody or get people involved, what are they going to bring that's going to be, one, interesting and exciting? In fact, I think they actually ended up actually doing a photo shoot and a story of him because of that interview. It's how we all kind of get tied together. I was excited to be able to get involved and then really take, for me, a different approach. How do I make it interesting so I can get invited back again? What are the opportunities that I can bring to others? In this case, having my friend Cisco come through and being able to share his story, for me that's always the interesting part. I was very happy and excited and looked forward to them doing something again possibly next year.

What did the exhibition consist of?

It was all Latinx, Latino culture, so they had various artists. I wasn't involved in a lot of the artists and paintings and different displays. I was specifically helping to fill the void of the

automotive culture and how do we extend the art outside the building to want to make it visually interesting to leverage and get people inside the building? What I brought was I leveraged my connections to the automotive scene and culture and added my little portion and twist to that little show.

You mentioned earlier that you frequently judge different art competitions?

Yes. I work with UNLV, one of the teachers here. I help with portfolio reviews. I work with CSN. I've worked with the Art Institute. I've worked with Valley High School. I do a lot with probably CSN more than any other school. I was fortunate to speak to about a hundred and fifty, two hundred kids, showing the work. My role usually at this point on the portfolio review is really helping them as they're looking at starting their careers. We'll look at their portfolio, give them guidance on what they could, what they could change. One of the things that I tell a lot of designers is, yes, these are your friends, people you go to school with, and you guys are working on each other's portfolios, but once you leave here that's your competitor. You guys are all maybe fighting for the same job. You have to figure out what is the one thing that you can distinguish yourself and leverage against others. If you're going into a new market, it can be extremely competitive and very different. We'll look at their portfolio and then figure out either the voids that they need to fill, or really look at, what can they leverage? As young designers are looking to get into the field, a lot of times you're not really getting hired for your work, especially if it's student work. Student work doesn't get you the job. What's getting you the job is, are you a creative thinker? Can you take feedback? How do you sell in your work? Is there thought behind your designs? That's what really is going to put you in a position. It helps if you have great work, obviously, and it helps if you're out there hustling and doing freelance work and going up and above. I used to tell student all the time that I would hire a lot of people and I'd

get, let's say, three people. The three people might have come one from CSN, one from art school, and one from UNLV. All portfolios are relatively the same. They're all talented. They're all equal. But maybe one of them is out there doing freelance and he's out there doing work, so he knows what it's like to present and sell and chase that check and get that job. Now he's got one notch up because he's showing that he's doing up and above more while the other two are maybe playing video games and hanging out with their friends. There's nothing wrong with that, but the other guy is doing more, or lady, guy or girl, whoever it is. They're putting in the work and that's usually what we're looking for. I'll help guide them in their career going, what are you doing? What can we leverage? How can we position you in a way that makes you much more interesting to whoever is hiring you? A lot of times reminding them to do their homework. They're interviewing with people sometimes and they have no clue, no background, no history of what that company is.

BT: Do you find that because you're a Latino that that comes into play with working with the students? Do they look to you as a role model partly because of your success, but then also because you're a person that's...?

Yes and no. When I was at UNLV or an art institute, I would look at it that most of the time their parents are paying for it or scholarship. It's very different. What they're looking at, their background, their diversity may be very different. They want the facts. I might have to show them the pretty work. Or I would align with the teacher, going, what are we trying to teach them? How can I leverage that?

One of the things I found at CSN is most of them are either in a situation where they didn't get the scholarship, they're paying for their background themselves, they're really looking into their career, and, yes, majority of those students happen to be minorities. At that point I

wouldn't leverage being minority. I would leverage, what is it in your background that makes you interesting and what can you leverage?

For me, one of my presentations I would show my schooling or my cars, and what I was really trying to drive there is that I'm leveraging the automotive culture because it taught me how to win and how to lose with respect. It taught me that you are a part of something bigger. You can't act a fool because you're representing something bigger. Then it taught you patience and it taught you collaboration. One of the things I tell them is regardless of what you're doing, I'm leveraging my connection to automotive culture and the scene. I'm going to leverage the ideology of what it means to be in a car club; I'm going to leverage that in business. I help them because a lot of times they're like, "I don't have nothing," or, "I don't do nothing," or, "I'm not involved." I'm like, "What is it about your life? Tell me about your life. What can I pull out of that to help you see that you can leverage?" I'll adjust the presentations and switch things around depending on the student or the class. That was one of the things particularly in that presentation where I leveraged my background because it was appropriate for the room; it was appropriate for that class, which doesn't happen too often. Most of the time they want to see the pretty work, Gordon Ramsay, Giada, and all the fun stuff. They don't really want to see the story or how do you get there.

Earlier you mentioned when you worked at Caesars Entertainment that they very much valued diversity. What do you think diversity means to companies as big as Caesars?

That's one of those subjects that I have a different opinion on that and it probably will continue to change. I was just reading—what was that diversity program, this might be ten, fifteen years ago, where they were enforcing a certain amount of diversity? I think it predominantly came out of California. Caesars and a lot of companies have this initiative; it's like the fifty-fifty initiative,

and really foreseeing whether it's women, diversity, and a lot of other groups, which I'm all for. I think it's extremely important that we diversify. The danger sometimes is you could be missing out on somebody who is great because you're trying to fill the void of 'I need a minority; I need a female; I need whatever,' and you could be passing up on somebody great because they don't fit your check box. That's the danger. I understand it, but I think it can also be unfair to somebody whether you're male, whether you're white, or whether you're older and they need younger. Diversity is fantastic, but I think we have to be very cautious and very careful in how we do that.

I think when we talk about diversity, I think it's important to have a mixed group when possible because you want perspective. From the advertising and marketing side, it's extremely important because we're talking everybody, so it's important that you have the millennial and it's important that you have somebody more senior and you have diverse backgrounds, not only nationalities, but from East Coast, West Coast, from Canada to South America. In that field specifically it's extremely important because you can leverage somebody's background and experience. Maybe in another field it's not as important. Maybe it's not as important to food and beverage or to valet. I don't know. I don't work in those fields. But from the marketing and advertising standpoint, it's extremely important because those are our customers.

You mention your wife a lot in your interview. How did you guys meet?

We met through our connection in the car culture. She had just moved to Las Vegas from South Dakota. She came down with two of her other friends. That was one of the things, her appreciation...She's also an artist and designs, and we connected on a lot of things. Music related. We had a lot of similarities. While our backgrounds are very different, her passion for automotive and the arts is really what brought us together. We're both self-driven and

entrepreneurial and always trying new things and doing new things. I think it helps because the majority of things you're going to try are going to fail; statistically and factually that's just the way things are. I think having somebody that understands that we're going to take risks, we're going to lose money, we're going to lose time, and that's part of life, it makes it much easier to be a designer, artist, musician, builder, creator when you're with somebody that understands that. I think that's why a lot of times you'll see artists, musicians, designers, they're usually in the same culture and the same people who are together because it makes it a lot easier. She pushes a lot, or she'll be a critic and go through and tell you exactly what she thinks. I'm like, eh, I like your opinion, but I'm still going to do it my way. Or, wow, I didn't see it that. She has a way bigger heart, very sensitive, and I'm the opposite. With work I'm very sensitive and I know those parameters, but I guess you can define it as I'm a little more selfish. I think big picture and I'm thinking about me. She helps balance that out to 'there's a bigger picture here; think about others.' She's my nice balance. Then I'm helping on the other end. Sometimes your heart is too big and you're not thinking about yourself. We're trying to constantly balance each other.

And it seems to be working. Right now are you still on the east side? Do you live on the east side?

No. I left the east side when I bought my first home pre-9/11. It was 2001. I pretty much grew up on the east side and I was looking for a home and really looking at trying to find a place I could call home. At that time I just kept looking and I didn't find anything that I felt like dishing out and spending all this money on. Then I kept losing out as you're bidding on homes. My realtor finally was like, "Let's go look at these houses in Southern Highlands." I was like, "Southern Highlands? What's this? Too far away. It's not my style." I was very happy I did, being surrounded by a very different group and being involved in this other community that at this time

was growing and then going back and forth to my parents' and sister's. My dad and my mom, they all still live on the east side and a lot of my friends still do, so I still go back quite often. But, no, I moved a long time ago.

You're living in Southern Highlands?

I live in Southern Highlands.

How has Southern Highlands changed since you moved there? Almost twenty years now, right?

Yes. It's grown and then it stopped growing after 2008 and everything really slowed down. I'm the president of my association, which trips people out sometimes.

Oh my God, really? Why?

I got elected in and every year they just...

It takes a young person.

I always tell people associations are not bad. The laws have changed dramatically. They record everything. You can't get away with...I always tell people it's like politics. I'm like, "If you don't go to your meeting and you complain, I don't want to hear your complaint because you have a voice, you have an opportunity." We have a small community; it's like two hundred and fifty homes. But we encourage getting together and we sponsor an annual picnic and all our board meetings, we pay for everybody who shows up for their dinner. We're really trying to do what we can to build a community within our community. I always tell people, "You have to go to those meetings. You have to have a voice. You have to show them that you care because if you don't go, it's just like politics; you're complaining, but you don't vote. What's the point?" I was very, very fortunate. I think I'm going on six years and I keep getting voted every year.

I tease you when I say that. But I do believe in HOAs. I think it's really important.

There's times I hate it and I get the same letters and the same complaints everybody else does. I have to educate them. It's their party. They don't know where I live. If I get the complaint for weeds, you get it, we all get it. It's part of maintaining the neighborhood. That's where I've noticed where I get involved a lot is helping build that education or breaking down that barrier or that stereotype of any group. I think that's why I'm involved in so many different things is I'm starting to see as I start to connect the dots. I'm like, why am I interested in that? It's that barrier and that breakdown. How do I knock that wall down? That's where I'm starting to see where I tend to have the most passion or get involved is because I don't see the color lines or the age or the financial background or what group you belong in. To me it's all the same.

Are you bilingual?

Yes. Not that great in Spanish as I wish I was. I always tell people that I speak construction Spanish.

Why construction Spanish?

It's enough to get by. I was working construction when I was putting myself through school. When you think of construction Spanish, it's either Spanglish—in construction it's not Mexicans, you have people from South America, so you have the mix, the breakdown of Spanish that's very broken and very incorrect, and a lot of it is a blend of a bunch of different Spanish, but you all have the same goal and task. You're trying to get something done at the end of the day. That's why I always view it as construction Spanish because you're not just talking to Mexicans, you're talking to huge range of diversity and groups and ages within construction whether it's someone super young or someone who's been in the business who is sixty-five years old and still out there swinging a hammer or picking up a wheelbarrow. That's always how I view it as construction Spanish.

Do your parents perpetuate the Latinx culture for you at holidays, or how do you celebrate that?

No. For me it's never—my dad being from Texas, we're Tex-Mex. My mom being from Mexico and then coming down, I think growing up for us was very much California and more—as I was thinking about the term, especially as I was young, I would always define myself as Chicano.

The reason being, especially when you're in Phoenix, and it's unfortunate in Arizona even within its own race, there is a lot of tension. If you're from Mexico or South America, you're considered, right, or Chicano. It's like, we've been here; we're born here, versus those that have crossed. Even within that culture you have turmoil. In Arizona you might not say you're Mexican because if you say you're Mexican, then you're perceived as not from here. When I was in Arizona, you really know I'm Chicano, which then penned you as an American Hispanic, and that's probably the same thing as in California. Growing up when I was young, I always considered myself a Chicano, and then you're really trying to find your place. Whether you look at a lot of older movies or Chicano power, Chicano pride, (Aslan), you're looking at the farmworkers and you're trying to resonate with the culture and embrace, I'm like, well, I'm not from Mexico. I understand the culture and the food, but I don't understand what it's like on the other side. As a youth I would always embrace the term *Chicano*.

Now, like we were talking about early, it's like, who is asking? If it's a policeman, I'm American. If I'm in Vegas, yes, I'm Mexican. If I'm in Arizona and California, I'm Chicano. If you're asking me professionally, I'm a designer. I'm a leader.

The term as we look at *Latinx*, I embrace it just because I work with a lot of students and I work with a lot of the schools. But if I didn't, would I embrace that term? I don't know. To me it's not a term that I understand. I don't know if my friends understand it or my family or other

people. I think it's too specific to a generation and predominantly possibly West Coast. I think that's where I'm reading a lot more and then being on ALPFA as we look at, how do we communicate to people and who are we communicating to? Are we Chicano, Hispanic, Latin, Latinx? It's a term that's starting, but is it going to have longevity? I don't know. Is it going to be embraced? I don't know.

As a marketer with your background, talking about this term and the evolution, I have to refer to this chart up here when we created the term Hispanic and then it changed to Latina/Latino and now we're at Latinx—it may be a rhetorical question—do we need that kind of label?

I understand why they're doing it. I think we have a tendency as a culture these days to move rather quickly, and change for the sake of change without really considering... For me, if you look at that term and if it is the definition who it's supposed to represent, and you look at the population as a whole of Latinos or Hispanics, if that segment is five percent of the overall segment, then is it valid that that term represents a group? Does it represent your grandma? Does it represent your uncles and you *tía*? But if that term is to represent the future generations moving forward, and it's predominantly, let's say, pre-twenty-five and it's starting with the West Coast and it's going to go out, okay, then that makes sense. But how do you make sure that that's done in Brazil and South America and Mexico? How does that term go?

I was reading an interesting article where they were talking about, how does the X work in various languages and various cultures? Where it was easier for the term *Latina* and *Latino* for them to embrace. But, at the same time, we're also in a culture, especially when you're dealing with these older Latinos or older generations, they don't like change. Maybe they would embrace it, but they don't like the idea of change. It's a very tough subject. For me as a marketer and a

designer, we're going to do whatever we need to, to talk to people, but I often worry that we just change for change.

It's really hard with Latin America using that term because they use their nationality over being from Latin America.

Yes.

It's a very U.S.-centric term.

Very much so.

It gets very complex when you're talking about—

And it's a very West Coast term, too, versus U.S. term. There was an article I just posted, and I can share it with you guys, that I had read, and they broke it down to numbers and statistics. For me I've always been fascinated—for me everything is logic, logic, logic. When you can put things in terms of numbers, you're like, okay, then is that correct? Is that the right term?

Please share that article.

It was an interesting aspect where they took a different approach that I possibly didn't think of at first and then now I'm like, yes, you're right. If I asked my mom, would she understand that? If I asked my cousins...But if I asked everyone in my family, the only ones I think would get it are the two or three who just got out of college or school.

And college is a significant part of that. It is an academic—that's the only place I had ever heard this term used.

Yes. I'm sure it has its place. I think there needs to be a little bit more homework and a little more strategic approach either through education, or if you're going to embrace it, make sure that you embrace it for much longer than three to five years and then really figure out what's your plan of attack and who is it supposed to represent? I think to group everybody as a whole

and throw your grandma in that, I don't know if that's correct. But if we're talking everybody that's pre-twenty-five growing up who is under this culture or social media culture and new model of education and really trying to embrace our heritage, then, yes that may be pretty much the right term.

That's really good. Good interview.

You mentioned the 2009 crash and how it kind of affected things. Can you talk a little bit more of how it affected you or at least the industry that you worked on?

For me there are two big points: 9/11 really hurt and then 2008 or nine, the crash. Nine-eleven was hard because I had just started with MGM. I wasn't in there three months and—I could have my number wrong—but let's say 50 percent or 60 percent of the staff was let go just because of everything that happened. For me that was a pivotal point. I had just bought my house. I'm like, I don't know if I'm going to lose my job. I was fortunate to keep my job and keep my home. But when I moved in, my block was empty because people lost their homes.

When I look at 2008 or nine; that crash, I had a lot of my money invested in 401s and you put your money away and you're trying to be an adult. I had spent a lot of money on my home and now my home was worth a quarter of what I paid for it. It's been a little over ten years and I'm finally no longer upside down. It's really, really hard. Most of my investments are slowly creeping up. The only thing that ever held its value is my classic car. My '48 Buick is still the only thing worth...My cars are worth more than I paid for them. It's the best investment I've ever done. Everything else comes and goes and it's scary. I couldn't imagine being at the point where I'm ready to retire and then something like that happens because at that point I was in my thirties and I was scared. It just makes you really start to appreciate.

Now we're in the process of downsizing. I'm like, I don't want to ever go through this again. Can I go back to cash? Can I go back to what you're starting to see in the culture, this minimalistic, this minimalizing, quality over quantity? I don't need all this junk. Give me one or two pairs of good shoes, a few good pairs of pants, good quality food. I don't need plethora and this overload of stuff. I don't buy, which is hard for my advertising and marketing, I very little buy Amazon. I don't buy online. I don't go to big-box stuff. I'd rather pay more and go support the business down the street. I go to small coffee shops. Starbucks is great and they've done a lot for the community and they employ a lot of people, but I'd rather go to these little boutique mom-and-pop shops. Their roasting and they're doing stuff. I'll go buy my clothes from, same thing, the smaller things because to me it's always been important... When I printed our magazine, it's printed here in Las Vegas. It's printed locally. I could get it cheaper elsewhere, but I always tell people when you or your friends lose your job, don't complain because you're not supporting your own community; you're not spending your own dollar in your home. You're spending your money and buying things online and things are coming in. When your store closes that you work at, don't complain because you're part of the problem. If you're not supporting your own community and your own business, I don't know what to say. I do everything I can to support as much as I can because it's important.

What's your favorite coffee shop in town?

Right now it has to be—I guess it depends on where you want to go. From an experience, I love Gābi if you're going to go in and have a good time. It's in Korea Town, a great coffee shop. Quality-wise right now, I'm a huge fan of Mothership. I really like what they're doing downtown with the Ferguson. They just opened up. I think them as a brand are really high-quality stuff. That was is my favorite right now.

Do you have any children?

No. It's just me, my wife, and the dog.

And the dog?

Phoebe, a little red-nose pit. She's like a kid, she's so spoiled.

What's next for you? From here where do you want to take your career, or any activity that you're currently involved in?

I think the big thing right now, as we talk about downsizing and minimalizing, I want to be able to get to a point where I can make decisions based on a real passion of what I want to do and not driven by 'I need that job' or 'I need more money' because I think that's one of the dangers where we're making decisions or we settle for what we currently have because we're afraid to leave. Right now I'm in that point. I'm like, do we move back to Arizona? Do we go to California? Do I buy a vacation home? Do I downsize? Right now I'm exploring a lot of different options and I'm not trying to overthink it. I'm just going to...I got a poem that I wrote a long time ago. Let me see if I can get it right. It goes: "As the wind blows, my heart flows with the breeze, as I will never go unnoticed." I'm kind of like that; like the breeze. We'll see where I end up.

That's nice.

Tell me a little bit more about what you write about or your poetry. Where do you get your inspiration from?

Surprisingly—I think you'll see this with musicians, artists—most of the things that had the most meaning were always from my darkest days. Pain, sadness, struggle, loss of loved ones; those really, I think, challenge you to question and push and pull. I think the majority of the things that have been successful or the way I view as impactful always have those underlying stories.

Usually when I'm happy and things are going good, I don't write because I can't; I'm not a happy writer. For me it's when things are a little bit dark or I need to vent or I need to get something off my chest, I'll usually write.

Now I'm trying to take the approach—I'm a big fan of Seth Godin—write something and write something every day. It doesn't matter what it is, just write. I started to write more blog and I'm trying to tell the story. I know it's imperfect. I'll have an editor now look at it and for style make this right, clean it up. I stopped looking and stopped judging of what I'm writing. I'm just trying to tell my story now. But most of my stuff usually has a hidden meaning that I usually won't tell people, kind of like poetry.

Do you hang with any of the local poets at all?

No. It was always just self. I really got into it and then that lead to music. It was more that I would really love to write things that if you listen, not hear, because there's a difference—people hear music all the time, but they're not listening—a lot of my stuff has meaning that you won't get. I have this one poem that I wrote and it's two paragraphs and all the words are exactly the same, forwards or transverse, reversed, and they take on totally different meanings. It's the same thing. It ties back into my systematic thinking and really strategic. I wanted to see if I could write something and then I started thinking about—I probably should have read it before I came, but a lot of it was perspective—how you meet one person or one change could dramatically change your life. That's basically, in essence, what the poem is. You see one life this way, and if two things change, the next two things, your life changes dramatically. That's really what it's about. A lot of my poetry and words will have a hidden meaning. One of the other ones, I go, “If you take a step, I take two, always ahead of you. Nothing you ain't thought, I ain't thought through.” It's more of this, maybe I think I'm too smart, so that's what's got me in trouble because you

always think you're smarter than you are. A lot of it would be lyrics like that; subconsciously, the hidden meaning to money or the hidden meaning to this. There is always little jabs, but I'll let usually the viewer, the reader or the listener get it, and if they don't get it, it's okay.

What kind of music are you involved in?

Back then I used to do hip-hop, rock, kind of rap, ska, a little punk. We did a little bit of everything.

Did you have a band?

Yes, I used to be part of a group, and then we recorded with Columbine, 187, and we went on a little, small tour for a while. I used to write and produce. At that time music was very different. It was very stereotyped music, low-rider, girls, cars, your typical. Then as I started to do my own independent album and went solo, I started to record a lot of deep, meaningful things. I've got tons of music I haven't released that I just did to do. I used to have a recording studio in my home, so I would just write. In fact, my wife keeps bugging me and keeps pushing me to write. She was like, "You were way more sensitive when you wrote." I'm trying to get back to writing because it forces you to soften up and really think. I told her, "I'm going to bring the recording studio back." Even if nobody ever hears it, it's the process of writing and opening up that she is constantly reminding me that I need back in my life.

Balance.

Balance, yes.

What kind of businesses did your mom own?

My mom currently owns a cleaning business, but it's in the sense of—how would you describe it?—like remodels, so she comes in and cleans it before the people move in or apartments and

complexes when people move out. She goes in and paints and cleans and maintenance and gets everything prepped and ready for the next person.

How long has she been doing this?

She's been doing it about four years, maybe.

And then your dad's retired?

Yes, he's retired. He used to build swimming pools for the longest time. He still works every now and then. He's seventy-three, will be seventy-four, but he can still outwork these young kids because they just don't have the heart like they used to working in construction. He just retired this year, but now he's itching. He's like, "We've got to go back to work." It keeps him youthful. He's been predominantly cement ever since we were in Arizona. He used to work for cement fabrication in cementing pools, so construction. He was the one when I was young, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, he would be like, "While there's nothing wrong with it, you don't want to work like me, outside where you make a lot of money." I would go and I was like, "Yes." I would just try to be a little smarter and use my brain and figure out other ways to work. It was very beneficial.

Is your blog published?

Yes. My website is Sunday Slacker, automotive culture, SundaySlacker.com. Sunday Slacker Studios is all my creative work, and then I recently launched Cars, Art and Music, which is tidbits of everything, so it's my own work, things that I like, that I'm a fan of, trying to educate others whether it's through whisky, wine, food. I'm trying to curate content that I think will help bridge people because I'm constantly trying to show them, buy this instead of that, or quality is better than quantity. I started to put this together to, one, tell my story, and then share things that I find interesting.

I have one curiosity question. I don't know if you have an answer for this one. You mentioned way back when we were talking about the chefs that one of the chefs told you to find three foods or recipes. Did you find three for yourself?

Yes. It was director Robert Rodriguez. I might be getting his quote wrong. But he said, "Learn to make three things; learn to make three things well." At that time, yes. I still have one recipe. I don't have a name for it. It's kind of a twist on a Cuban sandwich, like a pork sandwich roast. It's the one thing that I make that every time I make it, it's always gone. I've made it for parties and events. The rest of the stuff I'm really kind of learning and working, but that's the one thing I can make and it never fails.

What's the sandwich like?

It's basically a Mexican *pan*, bread, slow roasted pork in the crockpot with coke and a bunch of spices and chicken broth. Let it roast for eight hours. I use pork shoulder or pork butt without the bone. It's key for me without the bone because you get more of an even temperature without the bone. Then you slow roast on a *comal* tomatoes and cilantro, and then you use jalapeños. I usually make two, one that's spicy and one without. I use jalapeños and jalapeño juice. That's what I found is the hardest part because the tomatoes have to be sliced at a perfect thickness, even, and it's like three minutes roasted, and then you throw in the cilantro and the juice and take it out. It's that topping with the Mexican bread, *pan*, and a little bit of butter and mayonnaise prepared with the meat to make it perfect.

One thing I learned from chefs: It's all in the timing; when you add ingredients, the right amount, and the preparation because if you don't take the time to remove the stems from the cilantro and make sure you've got the right chilies that are not too hot and the blend and just the

right amount of juice, it just doesn't taste right, or your bread is a day too old, or you sat on it too long. It's all those little things coming together.

Then, like anything, you pair it with the right drink, wine or beer. One thing I learned with chefs is pairing it properly. You'll go through and help guide people. It's like, "If you're going to eat that sandwich, I wouldn't drink that. Try this instead." You just try to help guide them through the experience and that's one of the things that I love.

After having the relationships with the chefs and working at Caesars and being stressed out all day, I found comfort in the kitchen. My wife leaves me alone. I go downstairs and turn the music on and I'll just cook. I found that as my downtime because you can't rush it. It forces you to not cut corners. You can't rush it. Yes, you can experiment and play with the recipe, but there is usually a little bit more formula that you have to follow, and I like that because I'm in the field where sometimes we're making things up and you're learning as you're going and you're moving a hundred miles an hour and you're making decisions based on feedback, where in the kitchen you just get a chance to slow things down. Right now I'm really loving the kitchen.

What's your favorite cuisine that you like to cook?

I don't have anything favorite. It really depends. If I'm making, let's say, a bison burger and it's Friday, then I'm probably going to play some blues or rockabilly. I'm going to probably open a good brewed beer or an ale. For me cooking is the music that's with it, it's the drink that I'm making. If it's a Saturday and it's a little unwinding, I'm making pasta and I open wine and I've got a nice old wine, red zin, and I might be playing music that's a little more laidback and chill, a little more ambiance. For me it's the experience as a whole that I think really defines the experience. If I'm just cooking to cook and cook fast, then it doesn't matter. I'll have NPR on

and just have a glass of water and you're just cooking, quick. For me it's the experience and I think that's why I like it. I take my time, slow it down, and enjoy the experience.

Any last thoughts? Stories you want to share?

No, I think I've said a whole lot. If anything that I would share for anybody is what I always tell people, just leverage your background and just learn as much as you can from anybody. Don't dismiss anyone because it's usually that person that you may dismiss that may change and impact your life in the future. Be mindful and be respectful.

Any thoughts on the project and what we're doing?

I'm honored that you guys have asked me and I'm excited to see the other hundred and fourteen people and see their story and how when we talk about get published, live forever. It's an honor to be part of it because that's an underlying goal of mine is to have impact. It's going to be really interesting to see our commonalities and where we're different with everybody, so I'm really excited in that.

Do you prefer Gabe or Gabriel?

I go by Gabe for the most part.

Why is that?

I think Gabriel feels very formal. Usually when I meet people it's Gabriel in the professional level. I'm real quick to make friends with everybody and Gabe always just seems much more personable and a little more authentic where you could put your guard down and not be so formal.

Thank you so much for this interview. This is great.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]

