



The Grapes of Rock

Chris Hammond melds wine and rock 'n' roll in themed parties at his Las Vegas home.

By Lisa Brown

There's a delicious note of irony in the fact that Chris Hammond, founder and president of Rock 'n Roll Wine, found his home in Las Vegas's aptly named subdivision the Vineyards. And the punch line: Built and purchased in 2001, the single-family residence sits on Chambolle Court, named after a winemaking region in Burgundy, France, famous for its pinot noir.

The home was originally constructed with a two-car garage and single-car garage on opposing sides of the home, but Hammond has since converted the smaller of the two into a combination office and wine room, which has a capacity of 1,200 bottles. "That's kind of like my baby, where I love to have people over to the house and deplete it," he says with a smirk.

That jocular disposition lends itself well to Hammond's current line of work: hosting high-energy wine-tasting events with decibels to match. But his career path was anything but expected. Originally from Lexington, Kentucky, Hammond graduated from being a student athlete at Duke University to a position with the Montreal Expos (now the Washington Nationals), running their spring training camp and serving as general manager of the Class A Minor League team.

Five years later, a shift into the software industry brought Hammond to Las Vegas, where he hooked up with his current business partner, Sonny Barton. As Hammond studied for his sommelier exam, the two hosted private tastings around his dining room table. Music selected to complement each wine blared in the background to complete the environment.

"It's popular because of the lack of pretension," says Hammond, who went on to introduce theme nights: Bob Dylan, Janis Joplin and Crosby, Stills and Nash paired with flowery, high-acid or earthy wines for Hippy Night; or Mötley Crüe and Poison pitted against leathery, in-your-face wines from Southern Rome for '80s Hair Band Night. He even incorporated live music from such bands as Everclear and Sugar Ray in lieu of the iPod.

Hammond's love of entertaining is equally apparent in his home. Speakers are strategically placed to flow music throughout all living spaces, both inside and out. The backyard centers on a barbecue grill, pool and spacious open area for guests to kick back and enjoy a cocktail. On days when the weather is less than hospitable, the fun can continue indoors with a luxurious bar as the centerpiece.

Maintaining engaging areas for entertainment was the primary influence behind the home's design. Hammond's goal was to ensure there was enough room for people to gather and have some fun. "I usually like to place myself either behind the bar or grill, holding court, pouring wines or beer — not that I'm opposed to other types of alcohol."

Hammond asserts that there are two types of parties. The first is when the host has the meal nearly or entirely prepared upon the guests' arrival — but that's not his style. "I like to sit there, have people marinate and have them starve a little bit before I put the food on," he says with a slight undercurrent of devilish glee. "Get the music playing, get the drinks flowing — then put on the food."

But there's a softer side to Hammond's

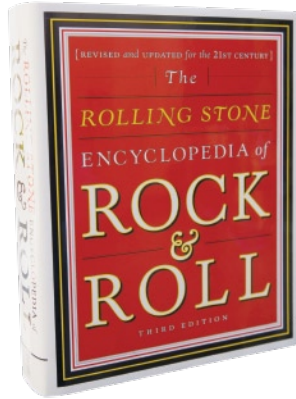
rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle: his children. “Right now, my daughter’s into jumping on her bed, which is not good for us,” he laughs. “We’ve got a playroom set up where she likes to spend most of her time, and we’ve actually got a little princess castle — she’s really into princesses right now.”

At a tender six months of age, however, Hammond’s son is more than likely too young to have settled upon a favorite room in the house. “He’s really into eating, smiling and laughing right now,” Hammond says. “He’s really laid back and cool.” And in all probability, that cool factor could be genetic.

Rather than pick a bold or flashy color scheme, Hammond’s home favors a more subdued décor, relying on a palette of dark and light tans — with the exception of his daughter’s room, which has some pinks and turquoises. Yet despite the home’s less-than-showy appearance, the vibrant life lived within its walls says it all.

“My liver hurts a little bit,” Hammond jokes. “But I’ve tasted a lot of great wine with a lot of great people. In Vegas or in L.A., they’re always some of the best people you’ll meet — not any of these people who are trying to be someone they’re not.”

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