

THE BEST OF IRVINE'S CRAFT COCKTAILS · EXPLORATION OF IRVINE'S MUSEUM OF WOMAN · A SLICE OF NATURE AT IRVINE'S WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

IRVINE

WEEKLY

DECEMBER 12, 2018 · No. 5

**ART OF THE
TEESE**

**DITA VON TEESE REVEALS WHAT SHAPED HER INTO
THE BURLESQUE SUPERSTAR SHE IS TODAY.**



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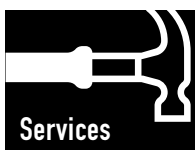
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For all inquiries: publisher@irvineweekly.com



IRVINE'S SAN JOAQUIN MARSH AND WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

A SLICE OF NATURE IN THE HEART OF A BUSTLING METROPOLIS

BY: SUSAN HORNIK

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: IRVINE RANCH WATER DISTRICT

With everything that is happening in the world, we need down time, preferably in a place that helps take away the stress of the day and quiets the mind. Irvine Ranch Water District's San Joaquin Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary is just that place.

The area offers a quiet respite in the heart of Orange County's bustling urban environment. Nearly two-thirds the size of New York's beautiful Central Park, the Marsh is actually one of Southern California's most significant freshwater coastal wetland habitats, with more than 300 acres of lovely views, framed by willow, alder and cottonwoods. Not to mention impromptu visits by more than 200 species of birds! Wendy Haase, senior director, Desti-

nation Irvine, describes the sanctuary as a little "oasis" in the middle of the city. "As a runner, I've incorporated the two-mile route into my workouts as a way to escape traffic. It's such a tranquil surrounding."

Ian Swift, Irvine Ranch Water District's natural resources manager, talked to Irvine Weekly about the array of fun activities one can do at the sanctuary as well as its history:

"Visitors can walk along 12 miles of trails, relax on benches overlooking scenic marshland, do some birdwatching, take a peek at the butterfly garden and take advantage of the many educational opportunities offered there."

Swift manages the Natural Treatment System, which is made up of a network of small marshes located throughout our watershed.

islands to provide a secure place for birds to build nests and lay eggs, safe from predators. The nesting islands are surrounded by "predator rings," which are moat-like structures that remain filled with water even when the level of the main pond is lowered.

Restoration and enhancement of the San Joaquin wetlands was initiated in 1995, partly in response to the effects of fertilizer in local runoff, which had created huge algae blooms in the Newport Back Bay. The marsh restoration was completed in 1998, and the San Joaquin Marsh Campus opened in

"MANY PEOPLE CALL THIS THE 'HIDDEN GEM' OF ORANGE COUNTY."

-IAN SWIFT

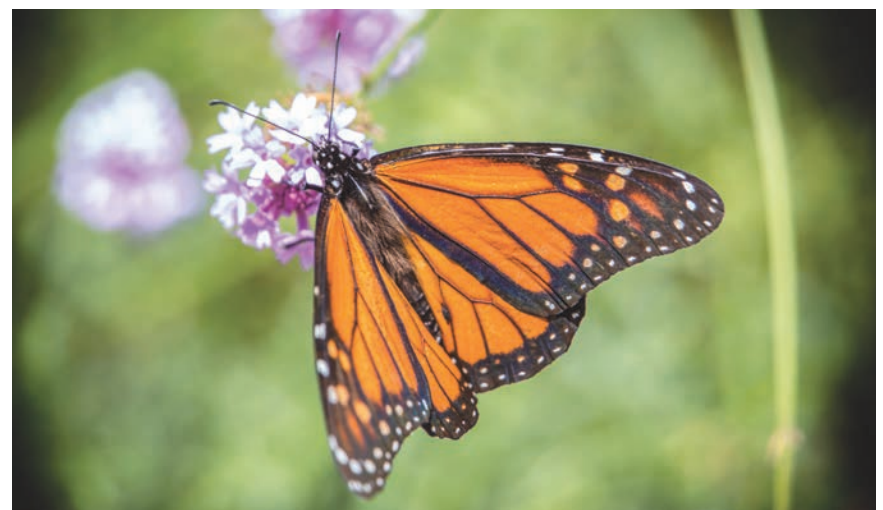
January, 2009. Nowadays, in addition to providing native habitat and cleaning local runoff before it makes its way to the ocean, the Marsh Campus serves as a historic and educational center.

The Irvine Ranch Water District restored three historic farm homes, one of which was built in 1904 by the Cook family. This was the first house in Orange County to have running water.

"You would think that with so much beauty, Irvine residents would be flocking to the sanctuary. But one of the biggest challenges is getting people to know that it's there," acknowledged Swift, who has worked for the sanctuary for seven years.

"Many people call this the 'hidden gem'

The marsh's Natural Treatment System process occurs in a series of ponds, many of which are configured with





of Orange County," he said. "We'd like to see more people taking advantage of it and all that it offers to the community." The marsh is home to hundreds of insects, reptiles and mammals, including white pelicans, great blue herons, cormorants, ducks and egret. Visitors may also spot a western fence lizard, harlequin bug, raccoon, cottontail or bobcat!

Special attention is placed on the 140 nesting boxes situated throughout the marsh. Sea & Sage Audubon Society volunteers look for nesting activity and count the eggs and monitor the hatchlings. Throughout the nesting season – late spring through early fall – there could be two or three broods of eggs laid and hatched in a single occupied nesting box.

One of Swift's favorite memories was the recent discovery of breeding Wilson's warblers in the riparian woodlands. "This species has not been recorded in coastal Orange County since the early 1990s," he told us.

Also, most of the plants at the marsh were selected based upon botanical records of the native plants which were historically present in Central Orange County 150 years ago, including penstemon, sage, San Diego coyote mint and buckwheat.

"A pollinator's garden was established in 2016 to attract native bees, bumble bees, sweat bees, butterflies, moths, beetles and other indigenous insects that help plants produce seeds by transferring pollen grains from flower to flower," he added.

The sanctuary is a unique place for families to come for a day, to learn more about the environment and animals residing in the area. Swift described

the marsh as a "living laboratory" for students, teachers and the public.

"Irvine Ranch Water District, in cooperation with DiscoveryCube and Sea & Sage Audubon, offers a variety of water- and wildlife-themed educational programs and tours, including an active school field trip program that serves thousands of students a year," said Swift.

In addition, Sea & Sage Audubon operates a visitor's center at the Marsh and assists with self-guided and guided tours and educational programs for the public. Some of their scheduled programming includes birding classes, bat walks, summer camps and junior naturalist programs.

Apart from the educational and recreational opportunities available at the San Joaquin Marsh, the wetlands are a critical component of IRWD's Natural Treatment System, which captures and cleans water runoff flowing from the San Diego Creek into the ocean, noted Swift.

"This system of ponds and native plants naturally clean urban runoff from the San Diego Creek and helps to protect the environmentally sensitive Upper Newport Bay," he explained. "This runoff is captured in the marsh, where it interacts with the bulrush and other plants for seven to 10 days."

During that time, up to 70 percent of the nitrogen is removed to help keep the ecosystem in balance. "The cleaner water is returned to the creek to continue its journey to Upper Newport Bay and the ocean," Swift added.

And would you believe, a whopping 50,000 tons of sediment and 10,000 pounds of phosphorus are removed each year from San Diego Creek desilting basins that were built in the



late 1990s?

The marsh is open every day from dawn until dusk, and is free to the public. Visitors should enter the marsh from Campus Drive and Riparian View in Irvine. There is a free monthly Wildlife Walk at the sanctuary on the first Saturday of the month at 9 a.m.

Volunteer naturalists share their love of

nature with others to help promote an understanding and appreciation of the wetlands to both wildlife and people.

For more information, visit irwd.com/san-joaquin-marsh or seaandsageaudubon.org/SJWS/sjws.htm

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Watching Dita Von Teese perform is a magical, sensual experience. Like a flickering

candle, you are drawn into her graceful movements, mesmerized. It's no wonder why her performances attract sold-out crowds.

The queen of burlesque lives a full life, traveling on a whirlwind Europe tour with her burlesque revue and designing her latest lingerie collection, which is on sale in Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom.

"I've created a show called 'The Art of the Teese,' which we have toured with successfully all over the United States, Canada and Australia," Von Teese told the Irvine Weekly. "While performing in Europe, I have been working with some of my cast members on their new acts for the New Year's Eve Gala."

You can catch Von Teese on the small screen too, as she recently appeared as a ghost named Vivienne on Netflix's goth baking series, "The Curious Creations of Christine McConnell."

Lucky for Irvine Weekly readers, Von Teese is back in Southern California to host her annual New Year's Eve gala, held in downtown Los Angeles at The Orpheum Theatre.

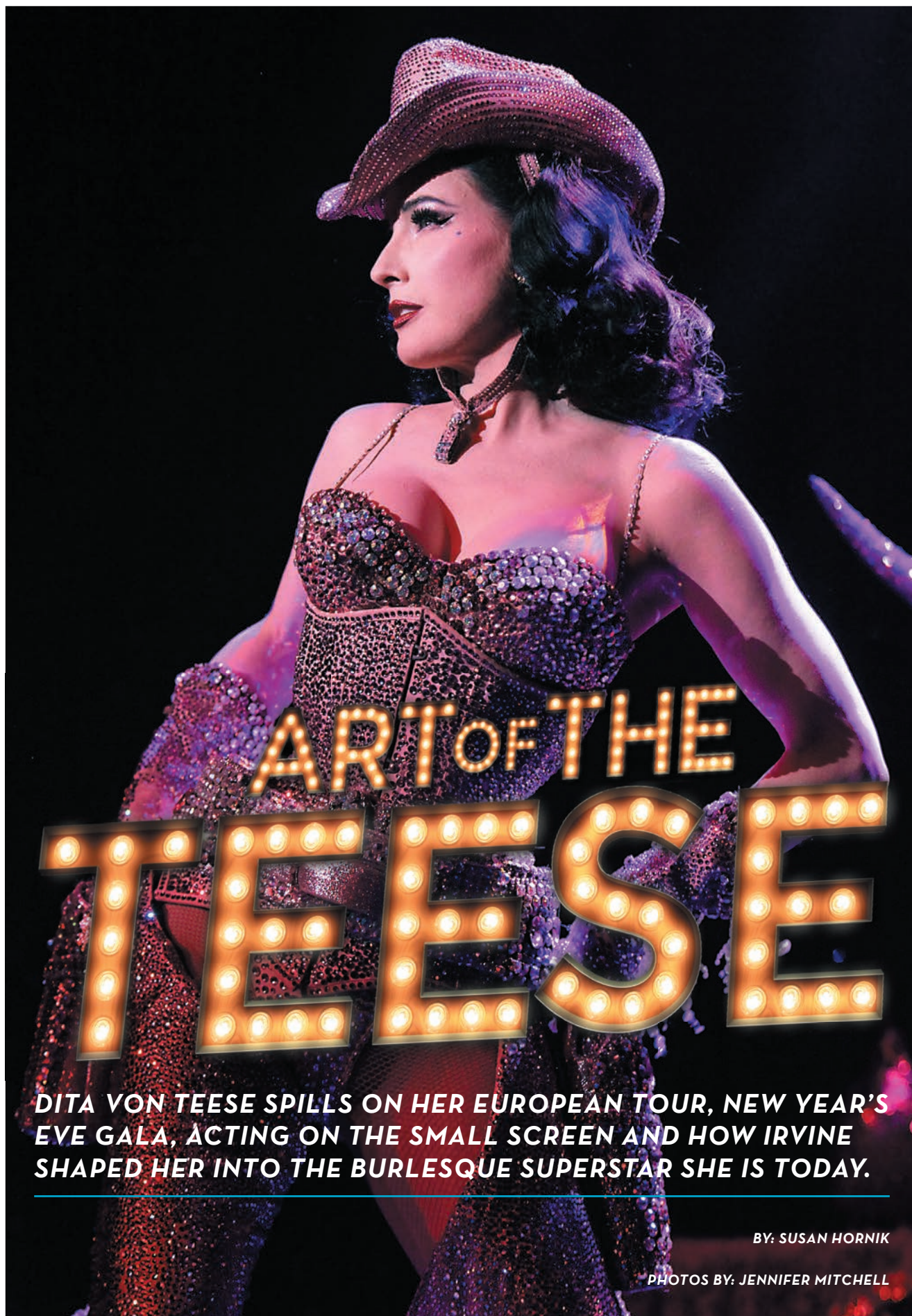
The burlesque icon works on every aspect of her epic performances, everything from the sets and costumes, to the overall production, music and lighting. Describing her vision for this year's gala, Von Teese admitted she's always fantasized about a mythical New Year's Eve that evokes the Golden Age of Hollywood.

"Last year's event created a stunning atmosphere of opulence, with the sold-out audience dressed to the nines, creating that New Year's scene I always dreamt of!" she said excitedly.

"This year, I decided to up the ante, so I chose one of the most glamorous theaters in the entire country for the 2019 gala. The Orpheum has a rich showbiz past, a stage made for vaudeville and burlesque shows, so it's especially exciting to invite the audience into this historic space. It'll be a night you'll tell your grandkids about!"

With her delightful visual stimulation, Von Teese takes great pleasure in planning her glamorous shows.

"It's a lot of fun to build a new show for New Year's Eve. I usually create a couple of brand-new acts," she said. "And sometimes, I really like to pick something from my older repertoire that



DITA VON TEESE SPILLS ON HER EUROPEAN TOUR, NEW YEAR'S EVE GALA, ACTING ON THE SMALL SCREEN AND HOW IRVINE SHAPED HER INTO THE BURLESQUE SUPERSTAR SHE IS TODAY.

BY: SUSAN HORNIK

PHOTOS BY: JENNIFER MITCHELL

I don't perform that much anymore. I like to think of ways to make the performances bigger and better."

People that have been asking when she would do a burlesque performance again are excited to see it onstage, Von Teese enthused. "Also, people that didn't go to my shows five to 10 years ago, get to watch something they've only seen in photos or video."

When she's not on tour, Von Teese spends time looking for new talent to put in the show.

"I enjoy doing the auditions and seeing what other types of variety acts we can add to the lineup. I often like to visit the Magic Castle and their secret little off-site members-only theatre, which puts on shows that are for performers only," she said.

Her most recent audition announcement on Instagram back in August attracted over 80,000 likes.

"We are seeing dancers of all abilities, from professional dancers, burlesquers, to strippers and variety acts," Von Teese wrote in the post. "One of the things that I find compelling when I am watching a performer is not necessarily fancy footwork; I honestly love performers that convey sensuality and elegance, and a certain kind of ease."

She continued: "Not being able to follow choreography doesn't discount anyone for me. In fact, some of my favorite performers are not technical dancers. Truth be told, even at the height of my ballet dancing, I was just a flower or a snowflake in the back, just trying to keep up! But where there's a will there's a way, and here I am, burlesque dancer."

The Savvy Marketeer

Von Teese is one smart cookie, extending her brand outside the theatre space. In addition to her renowned, live burlesque shows, Von Teese is a self-styled fashion legend, always on best-dressed lists all over the world. Featured on Vanity Fair's International Best Dressed List 2013, she has expanded into her own distinctive brands. Her lingerie collection debuted exclusively with Bloomingdale's in the U.S. in March 2014, and has expanded to other iconic retailers such as Nordstrom, bare necessities.com, the designer lingerie company, Journelle, glamuse.com and the Australian fashion retailer, Myer.

She has a luxury gloves collection, a signature hosiery line and launched the world's first-ever striptease candle as well as her latest fragrance, "Scan-

dalwood." Recently, DITA Eyewear announced they were collaborating with Von Teese on an classically styled eyewear line.

"The cat-eye is a well-worn style, a silhouette that rarely transcends the era in which it was created," she explained. "My goal was to keep within the spirit of the 1950s, but to craft our version in a slick, new way as a secret weapon for the modern Femme Totale," she said.

Von Teese has worn some exquisite costumes during her decades of performing. An array of Von Teese's own haute couture, Swarovski-embellished costumes from designers like Catherine D'Lish, Jenny Packham and Elie Saab, will be showcased at the theatre.



"I've been putting some of my most extravagant costumes on display in the lobby, so people can have a look at them up close. Some of them weigh more than 65 pounds, and have hundreds of thousands of Swarovski crystals on them, so they're quite something to see up close!"

While performing at a sold-out show recently, Von Teese had one of those unforgettable, career-defining moments. On Instagram she posted: "Last night in London was one for the books! This is what I worked my whole life for! I met someone last night that saw me feather fan dance at a strip club in North Dakota more than 20 years ago. Every single show, big and small, is what led me to this moment; so grateful for this ride, all of it!"

For \$20 a month, super-fans can sign up for the Dita Von Teese Archives,

which has over 30,000 studio and performance pictures, personal scrapbook pictures, videos and interviews from her decades-long career.

Writing and Music

Von Teese is also a prolific writer. Her New York Times bestselling book, "Your Beauty Mark: The Ultimate Guide to Eccentric Glamour" (Dey Street Books/Harper Collins) is 400 pages long and has been printed in numerous languages. It's a delicious read for any fan.

"I think that writing my books has helped me to have a voice. It means a lot to me to be able to inspire others to embrace their sensuality and beauty,"

are outside of my comfort zone, so in the past, I've collaborated with artists I admire that have invited me, such as Monarchy and Die Antwoord.

But nothing compares to this project with Tellier, she acknowledged. "Having been a fan of his music for a long time, I would go to see him play live in California. And when I performed for the first time at the Crazy Horse in Paris, I invited him because I was such a fan, not daring to imagine that someday he would compose an entire album for me." When the duo began recording, he offered to let Von Teese write some lyrics. "But I preferred the feeling of letting go, of making a Sébastien Tellier record... To describe the album is difficult; perhaps it's me with less make-up. At times, there's a certain vulnerability which stands in contrast to my stage image of a confident and glamorous woman. I would never dare say such things in real life."

Tellier has long imagined creating music for a woman. "I was looking for someone both beautiful and unique. When I saw Dita dance to a piece of music I had written for her, I had a feeling that her physical presence and her personality were a perfect fit with my music and I started to compose only for her."

Tellier said that Von Teese reminded him of Snow White, because she has the "freshness" of a cartoon character.

"But when I saw her arrive at the studio in her black Mercedes, I understood that she was a ghost. Observing her, always smiling, available, I thought of mermaids, shells, mother of pearl objects and of marble. My wife, Amandine de la Richardière, wrote some sexy pop lyrics to balance the melodrama of my tragic vision that love always ends - in my songs - in bitterness and regret."

After having worked with her, Tellier describes Von Teese as a fantasy factory, "In the sense that when you think that you've finally pierced her mystery, she turns out to be more than ever, a creature of dreams, totally out of reach."

Orange County Memories

Born Heather Sweet in West Branch, Michigan, Von Teese grew up enamored by the Golden Age of Cinema, pin-up imagery and vintage lingerie. This naturally blond, mid-western gal redesigned herself into a glamour girl, similar to those women she adored. Performing striptease since 1992, Von Teese is the biggest name in burlesque in the world since Gypsy Rose Lee and

mused Von Teese.

"I enjoyed writing about the things that first sparked my love of glamour, the reasons why I became a pinup girl and burlesque star. Finding my confidence is something I always wanted to share, in hopes that it could inspire others."

She is currently working on her next book, to be published in 2019.

Von Teese's alluring vibe attracted the attention of a French musician. Earlier this year, Von Teese's self-titled debut album was released via the Parisian label, Record Makers. A collaboration with singer/composer Sébastien Tellier, the album conjures up a modern-day Brigitte Bardot and Serge Gainsbourg feel.

"I'm not a professional singer. In fact, I'm quite uneasy about recording my voice," she noted in the album bio. "But I do enjoy the thrill of doing things that

is greatly admired for bringing this vintage artistry back into the spotlight, with a new sense of style and inventiveness.

Dita Von Teese's lifelong dream has been to be the next Bettie Page, a well known, 1950s burlesque model.

"When I saw the pinup pictures of Page with her jet-black hair, pale skin and classic '50s style, I was enamored," she told *InStyle*. "Even when she was filming something really risqué, she always had an air of playfulness and fun about her." Teese owns a pair of Page's fetish heels. Bet you didn't that know that Teese once lived in Orange County!

"When I first moved from Michigan at age 12 with my family, we lived in a little apartment in (Irvine's) Woodbridge. My mother began working as a manicurist at a beauty salon in a shopping center. I would spend a lot of time in that mini mall, and became enamored with a lingerie store there."

Eventually at age 15, Teese began working there. "That was where my knowledge of lingerie came from," she said proudly.

Von Teese went to Lakeside Middle School, and then later, to University High School in Irvine, where her older sister went.

"WHEN I SAW THE PINUP PICTURES OF PAGE WITH HER JET-BLACK HAIR, PALE SKIN AND CLASSIC '50S STYLE, I WAS ENAMORED."

"It was all a shock for me," Von Teese acknowledged. "Arriving in California for the first time ever, and straight to Irvine! I remember a lot about living there. It wasn't easy for me at first.

California girls my age were so much more advanced compared to me, a dishwater blonde from a farming town in Michigan."

For several years, Von Teese just kept to herself, took ballet classes and had a high school sweetheart for four years. After living in Irvine for almost seven years, she was ready to move.

"When I was 18 years old, I moved to

various areas of Orange County, from Buena Park to Huntington Beach, and then to Costa Mesa, which is where I lived for several years before heading to Los Angeles in 2001," she said.

Most of the places Von Teese really enjoyed going to in the area – like the legendary Sid's Steakhouse in Newport Beach – are all gone now.

"I have very fond memories of the swing dance scene in the '90s, and weekends at Disneyland. Back in those wonderful days when the lines for rides were never long, you could just simply park in the Goofy section," she reminisced.

Of course, Von Teese owned a vintage car: a 1939 Chrysler New Yorker.

"I used to drive that beautiful classic car all over Newport Beach and Costa Mesa. It was my very first vintage car, and I would dress up in my vintage clothes and take it out to the swing dance clubs. Swing dancing and posing for pinups was my entire life back then; I'd dress in head to toe 1930s and '40s clothing, and go to all the big dances from the Brown Derby, to the beautiful deco era ballroom on Catalina Island." She added: "It was a really wonderful time. I was getting a lot of recognition

as well, appearing in music videos for bands like Green Day, and becoming noticed for my burlesque shows that I was performing at strip clubs and fetish parties."

Von Teese still keeps a couple of her vintage cars in Orange County, but her family has left the area. "Only my immediate family lived there, and everyone relocated to different states."

#metoo

With the #metoo movement, one might wonder if this vintage theatrical entertainment has been impacted by recent events.

"I certainly can't speak for everyone, but it's hard to think of the ways that it has affected burlesque from my point of view. Unlike burlesque of the 1930s and '40s, the neo-burlesque world isn't it really driven by men, so I think the industry of burlesque isn't really subjected to the same kind of issues as, say, the movie industry," she noted.

"Men aren't the most powerful icons in burlesque anymore; that's just one reason why the revival is much different than it was in the old days. Women are in charge in modern burlesque!

That's not to say that they might not be in #metoo situations stemming from women in power."

Von Teese is a fearless feminist; she once spoke at the Oxford Student Union in England, where other elected speakers have included the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Tony Blair and Anna Wintour.

An advocate in the fight against HIV and AIDS, Von Teese was MAC Viva Glam Spokesperson from 2006-2008 and in 2009, and participated in the H&M/Fashion Against AIDS t-shirt campaign. She has also performed and appeared at several events for AmfAR and was honored with their Award of Courage in 2008.

"I am still with AmfAR and the MAC AIDS Fund occasionally," said Von Teese. "Being a spokesperson, it was amazing to see what a difference their work has done in the fight against AIDS. So whenever they ask me to be present for something, it's a pleasure to be involved."

What's next for Von Teese? "I'd like to take more vacations. Right now, at the top of my list is a nice tropical holiday, on the beach, under a big hat, with a coconut drink in my hand!" she quipped.





YNK - PHOTO COURTESY YNK

THE BEST OF IRVINE'S CRAFT COCKTAILS

OUR PICKS FOR THE TOP 5 PLACES TO SAVOR AND MARVEL AT THE FINE ART OF MAKING THE PERFECT DRINK

BY: EVAN SENN

In the craft cocktail world, the biggest dilemma is the fact that it is trendy to drink craft cocktails. That means that as a craft cocktail-serving establishment, your primary customer-base is much larger right now, but most of the average drinkers that will order craft cocktails choose their poison based on the way the drinks look and by the cool names they have. So, you have to create craft cocktails that are palatable for people who are not used to drinking spirit-forward

subtle and nuanced cocktails that take a long time make. This is a big issue for craft cocktail connoisseurs because it means that when we drink our cocktails they are watered down, overly sweet and are often made in batches for the unexperienced cocktail-chugging masses.

The art of a craft cocktail is in the nuanced and careful balance in each concoction. A craft cocktail takes time, is infused with herbs and vapors, and has artistic and thoughtful details in its

design and its presentation. There are hundreds of places in Irvine to get a drink that is labeled a "craft cocktail" but only a few that can prove that their cocktails are crafted with care and thoughtfulness, earning that title.

We spent weeks grilling local bartenders and craft cocktail connoisseurs to find out the top performers in Irvine's craft cocktail scene, and then we tried them for ourselves. These are the winners – the bars that create art through a delicate mixture and design of obscure

liquors, poisons, bitters, vapors, fresh juices and herbs. These are the bars you've searching for – just be warned, they're not for the masses, they are for the select few who truly desire (and deserve) a craft cocktail experience worth remembering.

Paul Martin's

Paul Martin's American Grill, 534 Spectrum Center Dr., Irvine, 92618

Paul Martin's is a high-end classic American restaurant and bar with international inspiration in its cuisine. It has a decadent atmosphere and luxurious interior design. The Paul Martin's bar, however, is even better than its \$48, 12-ounce, center-cut Filet Mignon – which is saying something. With classic pre-prohibition era craft cocktails and a flare for presentation and customer service, this is our high-end favorite. Paul Martin's bartenders are friendly and talented and will make you a custom craft cocktail of your choosing without hesitation, or will allow you to choose from one of the many classic drinks on their menu, with a brief cocktail history lesson on the side. With your choice of drinking on sofas, private high-tops, at the bar, or at one of the many communal tables, this is a bar for every kind of drinker, but with a special gift for classic craft cocktails. We recommend the Chilton, the Vesper Martini or the Manhattan.

YNK

YNK, 18000 Von Karman Ave., Irvine, 92612

YNK, aka You Never Know, is an eclectic micro-bar inside the lobby of the Irvine Marriott. It's become a tourist favorite because of its quirky and clashing aesthetics of bright contemporary club-like furniture and its insider, pop-up style attitude. But, alongside its charming and quirky design, this speakeasy-inspired bar also serves delicious craft cocktails for every kind of taste. Not all their drinks are winners, but their bartenders are experienced and passionate mixologists that are not afraid to wow customers. With rotating seasonal craft cocktails and a "pick your poison" option where you get to choose every detail that goes into your cocktail – including the garnish – YNK is an intimate and enchanting little gem that will satiate your craft cocktail cravings without any fuss – as long as you know where to find it (it's behind the bar in the lobby).

Andrei's Conscious Cuisine and Cocktails

Andrei's Conscious Cuisine and Cocktails, 2607 Main St., Irvine, 92614

Andrei's Conscious Cuisine and Cocktails is an enjoyable high-end experience in a very a strange space.

mouth. The environment is relaxed and elegant with an open floor plan and central bar. The Elsa's Revenge and Sage Advice are some of the best craft cocktails we've had in a long time. You can tell every drink has been designed by an expert – even if the bartenders

ket. This casual café and bar is always busy, covered in televisions and has become a favorite daytime spot, but if you go toward the end of the night, you'll be pleasantly surprised at the friendly service and interesting concoctions available at The IRV. Their craft cocktails are balanced, subtle and often made with organic spirits. The Carrot Top, Honey Fennel Smash and Beet Gimlet will

big city atmosphere but are currently situated in Irvine, Tokyo Table is a great spot for you. This large Japanese restaurant and bar is constantly full of loud and happy people chowing down on delicious Japanese cuisine and sipping away on unique craft cocktails. Celebrating their 10th anniversary this year, Tokyo Table offers a huge menu of cocktails including many easy-drink-



PAUL MARTIN'S MAKERS MARK MANHATTAN • PHOTO COURTESY PAUL MARTIN'S

A spacious second floor restaurant and bar, Andrei's cuisine is health-conscious high-end omnivorous food, but their bar program is classically inspired by international craft cocktails and spirit-forward American tastes. Each drink is crafted with care and designed with nuanced details that light up in your

are not those experts they take great care to create these drinkable artworks.

The IRV

The IRV, 8525 Irvine Center Dr., Irvine, 92618

A surprising find in the craft cocktail search is The IRV at Whole Foods Mar-



ANDREI'S ELSA'S REVENGE • PHOTO COURTESY ANDREI'S CONSCIOUS CUISINE AND COCKTAILS

clean your internal organs while treating your taste buds and fulfilling that deep desire for a nuanced craft cocktail. Although the parking lot can be trying, the cocktails will make you want to come back again and again.

Tokyo Table

Tokyo Table, 2710 Alton Pkwy., Irvine, 92606

If you love the hustle and bustle of the

ing Tokyo-style Mojitos, Japanese Margaritas, Geisha Sacketinis, and a number of different Japanese-infused Mules. But, they also offer a handful of new classic Japanese craft cocktails that are balanced and thoughtful. Their Tokyo Old Fashioned is a perfect, spirit-forward classic cocktail with a contemporary twist, and they can also make you a custom craft cocktail with meticulous care.



DIVINE EXPLORATION OF THE GODDESS AT IRVINE'S MUSEUM OF WOMAN

THE LARGELY UNKNOWN ART SPACE SERVES AS AN INTERACTIVE SANCTUARY AND EDUCATIONAL CENTER FOR HISTORICAL WOMANHOOD

BY: EVAN SENN

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: MUSEUM OF WOMAN

The Museum of Woman is a wonderful and unique educational space that is a largely unknown hidden gem in the city of Irvine. This organization is less of a traditional museum and more of an interactive sanctuary and educational center for goddess spirituality and historical womanhood, telling the stories of goddesses, queens and wisewomen from the paleolithic to the present. Although the Museum of Woman (MOW) does offer visitors rotating and permanent exhibitions, these exhibitions are very small and presented in a more approachable and casual style than traditional museums. The MOW is a multi-room space near the John Wayne Airport that offers guests the opportunity to learn about



leading women in history, female archetypes from a wide range of cultures and eras, the traditions of goddesses in history and the role of femininity throughout history. This American Alliance of Museums certified organization is the only museum of its kind in the country and has been calling Irvine home for over 16 years, thanks to its

founder, curator and director, Reverend Ava Park.

Touted as a museum to educate the public in the hidden history of goddess veneration and matriarchies in history as well as the history and differences between matriarchies and patriarchies in society, MOW offers free admission, refreshments and reflection or meditation spaces to anybody interested. Fridays and Saturdays are days where anyone is welcome to come in and explore and enjoy the exhibitions and spaces at the MOW, while Sundays are reserved for women-only services for the MOW's sister organization, the Goddess Temple of Orange County.

This feminist museum is first and foremost a space for women – whether you want a space to sit quietly and reflect,

a space to channel the four corners, a place to connect with goddesses from history, a place to connect to your inner self, or simply if you want to connect with other people who identify as women, MOW is the space for you. The Museum of Woman is open to women, men and children, with the intention of teaching all to value woman and her gifts to humanity. All events sponsored by the MOW are open to everyone, women and men alike.

The Reception Room is a dedicated area for the Celtic goddess Bridgit, with a permanent exhibit of information and artifacts of ancient Celtic goddess spirituality. There are also a few small rooms in the front that are themed around different goddesses from history with sitting areas, comfortable medi-

tation spaces, and information and artwork about the goddesses and cultures. This front area also houses a rotating exhibition case that is dedicated to an innovative leading female from more contemporary times, sometimes a musician, an actress, an artist, a politician, a social leader, etc.

Although the MOW offers historic and spiritual lessons about women and goddesses, this non-traditional space is a private museum that is largely based in Goddess Spirituality. Both new and permanent MOW exhibits are meant to educate the public about the actual history of woman and goddess veneration in our human history, which has been largely hidden from the public. The history and mythologies of the goddess is not often taught to young people in schools, or even in adult religion courses. Judeo-Christian culture is less than 4,000 years old, far younger than goddess worship, which began worldwide over 250,000 years ago.



Goddess Spirituality is currently one of the fastest-growing religions, and with its appealing lack of dogma, it is intended to be a highly individualized set of beliefs and practices. With roots in contemporary feminism, Goddess Spirituality is closely linked to Neo-Pagan and Wiccan practices, but Goddess worshippers can be Christian or Buddhist or from any other tradition. Like the religion of Voodoo, Goddess Spirituality can exist within traditional religious frameworks and can also exist without any framework at all. In the end, it comes down to your personal relationship with Goddess or divinity and a female-centric approach to society and life.

The basic theology (not a misspelling) can be remembered by the acronym "ROSE" – R for "reverence for life," O for "oneness" (all is one); S for "sacred" (all is sacred) and E for "eternal" (nothing ever dies, it simply changes form). Toward the central area of the space, there are other gathering places and

rooms relating to goddesses and a permanent exhibition case dedicated to The Black Madonnas. This case holds the largest collection of Black Madonna figurines in North America. In this central space, there is also a large communal area completely draped in luscious red fabric they call the Red Tent area or Oshun's Lounge, where people are invited to sit down and relax, gather with other women, or reflect on what it means to be a woman. This space also offers guests refreshments and some small exhibition cases with information and artwork relating to different cultural deities and historic goddesses relating to womanhood.

The largest space of the MOW is in the far back – the Main Gallery, or Sanctuary. As you enter this 1,600 square foot main room, you must cross a bridge with water features surrounding it, as if you're crossing over into another realm, a sacred space. This space is often used for events, classes and ceremonies with exhibits/altars in all four corners, relating to the four quarters and four elements, taking root in Pagan traditions.

rooms relating to goddesses and a permanent exhibition case dedicated to The Black

The four corners also serve as altars for the four female archetypes in Goddess Spirituality: the Maiden, Mother, Queen and Wisewoman Crone. This Sanctuary also has a huge exhibit/altar for Sekhmet, an ancient Egyptian goddess on her step pyramid, with individual prayer candles below, for people to light in prayer.

The MOW hosts a number of events that are open to the public and some exclusive events for members or the Goddess Temple of Orange County members. The MOW is the home of the Orange County Chapter of NOW, the National Organization for Women, and the Joseph Campbell Foundation Mythological Roundtable and hosts public lectures and discussions where guest speakers come from all over the world to educate and inspire us in the areas of history, mythology and human potential. The MOW also offers Spirit Faires twice a year, where tarot card readers, healers and vendors come together for the day, offering services and connections to those who are interested – this is open to the public. They also offer a weekly gathering event and Happy Hour every Friday, where adults are welcome to come by for wine, music and fun, while MOW has readers – women and men – set up to offer readings to the public in a beautiful, peaceful, supportive environ-

ment. The MOW also hosts a number of public peace walks and Peace Suppers throughout the year.

The Goddess Temple of Orange County uses this Sanctuary space to hold their weekly services beginning



at 11 a.m., where female members of the Goddess Temple gather in their spiritual pursuit of empowerment and worship – there are no men allowed at these events. The Sanctuary can be rented for private celebrations, birthdays, parties, weddings, funerals, etc, and have competitive rates and packages available.



IN PRAISE OF THE FIRM SOUNDATION'S GOSPEL BRUNCH

CHARISMATIC CHOIR AND 11-PIECE BAND IGNITE AUDIENCE AT HOUSE OF BLUES

BY: ZOË ELAINE

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: HOUSE OF BLUES ENTERTAINMENT

As you learn in the introductory video at Gospel Brunch at the House of Blues Anaheim, the Biblical music genre has unique roots. Dan Aykroyd, co-star of Blues Brothers and co-founder of the House of Blues chain, narrates the short film to a background of scraping forks and humming mouths. He describes the history of Gospel as a cousin to the Blues – begun by African-Americans who used it to cope with the reality of living in a country that once enslaved them. A history of shared trauma united them and Gospel music lifted them up. Music moves us because it is art and because it makes us reckon with our senses. When it is coupled with exuber-

ant hymns, it can ignite a live audience. Congregational worship is a community effort, especially among majority-Black parishes across the South. This is a stark contrast to the Mass services that are associated with majority-white, European-based sects of Christianity, where speaking out of turn is considered shameful.

When I visited the show at the House of Blues, it was a more mixed affair, where tourists dressed to hit Disneyland later in the day mingled with other attendees in their Sunday best. Everyone picked at the buffet that surrounded the seating arrangements. The entire setup was a rather intimate affair, where the upper level and most seats in the back were

cordoned off. Only a few dining-hall-style tables were set up directly in front of the stage, where a few dozen people were seated.

Sharing a meal is not insignificant. As we have learned from wise men like Jonathan Gold, “food is a way to look at the world.” When we come together for brunch, we have a connection, no matter how brief or untenable. We sing the same songs and breathe the same air. We share the same problems, like when biscuits run out before sopping up all of the gravy. We rearrange our seating to ensure that everyone can sit together. We care.

The venue allowed everyone ample time to get situated with their food, and some even had time to go for seconds before the show started. A projector screen retracted into the ceiling after Aykroyd’s spiel, and the velvet curtains unfurled to reveal a lively 11-piece band that had already begun playing. When not onstage at the House of Blues, the band is known as Ray Sidney and the Firm Soundation, led by a charismatic bandleader.

They are an international phenomenon. The Firm Soundation has connections to Japan and Korea, where evangelical Christian movements have taken hold since the advent of – and this is true – the 1991 film “Sister Act 2,” starring Whoopi Goldberg. They call their congregation “Here To Praise Ministry,” and they are part of the Hallelujah Gospel Family choir network of Japan. The Firm Soundation will be spending most of Advent touring overseas in eastern Asia with relatively new believers.

As Sidney introduced Gospel Brunch, he promised many diverse styles of music, not limited to what we know as Gospel. Their choir of seven people would





bring their a cappella prowess to just about every number. And except for a few traditional spirituals, few songs were explicitly about worship. The symbols along the walls – of a crescent moon and star, the Hamsa Hand, Star of David, yin and yang – demonstrated the band's dedication to unity in diversity. Though the crowd was sleepy at the start of the show, everyone played along with the clapping, towel snapping and

the most familiar classics that feature messages of faith. "Amazing Grace" is considered the most recognizable song in the world, so the choir took a moment without instrumentation to sing the first verse. After Sidney proclaimed us all one family at the House of Blues that morning, a rousing rendition of the Sister Sledge smash hit lifted people from their chairs. A guitar lick from "Don't Stop Believin'" led us to the full chorus of

Vice has said that the best compliment she ever got was from a non-believer at one of her performances at a rock club: "You almost made me believe in Jesus." Hope and beauty work together to drive home messages that some listeners are not prepared for, and that some may need to reckon with later.

Gospel's history is continuing to be written. There are many directions that the genre has been taken, from hybrid bluegrass to urban-contemporary. Singers do not pursue the genre because they will be world-famous, but because they know it has power. Even those without faith can see that.



group singing. The band pulled onto stage anyone celebrating a birthday or anniversary, making for a surprisingly lively dance party. In our house, everyone celebrates like it is their final day. Popular music and Gospel do not traditionally have much overlap. But the band smartly borrowed some of

Journey's best-known single. Today, a contemporary form of Gospel has been finding its way to other music charts. Artists like Portland-raised Liz Vice have been courted by niche radio and propelled into the independent music scene due to the composition of their work – notably, not the message.

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