

Feature Story Interview

Edwardo Tokarek

by Lisa Louise Santonato

"Coffee or martinis?" The decision was simple. At eleven o'clock on a sunny autumn morning, good strong coffee suits even the purest of Lounge purists. And so, with a cup of Java for each of us, Edwardo and I met in the Blue Lizard office high above the streets of Vancouver. One of the three founding members of the Blue Lizard Cocktail Club, Edwardo Tokarek is a well-known individual in the world of restoration and conservation. Restoring antique artworks has been his specialty for many years and continues to remain so as he devotes his conceptual energies into the Blue Lizard productions.

I was duly impressed when Edwardo showed me a stack of the original menus from the Waldorf Hotel's Polynesian Room. Among these and other relics he discovered in storage were some postcards, also produced in the 1950's, bearing photographs of the Hotel's Tahitian Twilight Room, the Polynesian Room and the Menehune Mambo Hut lounges in all their Tiki splendor. As you can see, as much as Lounge has changed since, the lounges of the Waldorf Hotel have not, thus providing the perfect setting for a tasteful blend of old and new.

Edwardo: "Look at this postcard I found amongst all the other stuff in storage. That's the original owner, wearing the suit. And see the waiters wore these sashes and these Hawaiian shirts - I found those original sashes and Hawaiian shirts too, and just think, this is like fifty years ago, it's like a time capsule, you could do something with that, sort of like a little museum of Tiki history. There are some good stories about Hopkinson, the local artist who created the wall-sized painting in the Polynesian room. he had a drinking habit and instead of paying him for his paintings, they'd let him run up a bar tab and just paint and then when they'd owe him money for the paintings, he'd run up a bar tab again, and then he'd go paint some more and drink some more."

TAXI: "It was probably his drinking habit that kept him working."

Edwardo: "Yeah, and it took him a long time to get it finished."

TAXI: "Is that owner still operating the place now?"

Edwardo: "No. The original owners were Bob and Pat Mills, who are now deceased and at the time they owned it there were other partners and one of the partners was Frank Puharich, the chef. The Puharich family owns it now, and Frank is still working in the kitchen."

TAXI: "He's the owner and he still cooks!?"

Edwardo: "Yeah, yeah, and it's incredible, he's in his eighties." **TAXI:** "He must love his work. Do you have any plans to take over the place someday?"

Edwardo: "Dreams, yeah, I'd love to."

TAXI: "Does Frank have anybody in mind for the inheritance?"

Edwardo: "No, you see, he's a family man. There's a brother and a sister that I know of and they probably have large sums being passed on to them."

TAXI: "Well I hope they appreciate the value of the place."

Edwardo: "No, they're very jaded, about everything! It's the hotel business, it's like they just don't wanna know about anything that will complicate their life. They're just too busy doing all those little things, although Marko knows that he has something there but he can't enjoy it anymore, see, he's spent his whole life in that place."

TAXI: "How long did it take to produce the Smooth and Wild compilation CD?"

Edwardo: "Oh gosh, about two months - the recordings were probably done at the end of '95 and with the printing and everything, production went a couple of months into '96. It's a custom jewel case, too."

TAXI: "Very slick. it has the same effect as Maxine's blue dress under the blue lights, it shimmers!"

Edwardo: "That's good, that's very good."



TAXI: "Hey, what a great idea, including a coaster with the CD, it's all part of the Blue Lizard's atmosphere!"

Edwardo: "Yeah, and it's the very thing that you don't expect to fall out onto your lap - look at the disk okay, you have to study the martini glass, there's a word written in there, do you grab it?"

TAXI: "Oooh, very clever. And subtle!"

Edwardo: "Now you know why you wanted that copy!"

TAXI: "Yeah, and that's why I got that chill down my spine!"

TAXI: "How did you get the inspiration for the Blue Lizard? Was it something you'd wanted to do for a long time?"

Edwardo: "Inspiration?! Well, basically, it was just from living abroad, and coming back to Vancouver and saying, hey, you know, what's going on? There's nothing going on, just going to discos and such and if you weren't into that, then what sort of social activity did you have?"

TAXI: "Where had you lived before?"

Edwardo: "London. There was one club, I think it was called the House of Games. It was a bar stacked with board games, anything...like Scrabble, Monopoly, Checkers, and they had easy listening music in this place. You just go and relax and the atmosphere just totally changes when you have people doing something silly but still intimately interacting socially, which is very good. Another great place was Fred's on 5th Street and Soho, it's in a Georgian house, four levels, it's a private club. Went there a couple of times, and they would have a jester coming around, dressed up in costume, a Shakespearean court jester speaking in Olde English rhymes and he would say something like, 'Kind sir, for a doff of the hands, and some silver for my hat, I will tell you a story of...' whatever, something clever. So you would throw a coin, and he would go on to tell you some amazing story. The whole place was lit with candles and there were fireplaces too. And they had various little things! going on in different rooms, someone reading poetry, someone playing piano and there were big couches and beds, everything was amazing. So there's nothing like that here, and you'd think there should be something interesting happening that's not like all the other places. So it was probably about May of last year that we started putting ideas together. The first event was in June, upstairs in the Waldorf."

Afterword:

I was initiated into the Blue Lizard Cocktail Club when the streets were fragrant with the scent of Dogwood flowers blooming in the spring. Coming from that big city on the East coast, I was sure I'd seen it all. Not so, I realized as soon as I'd walked through the doors of the Waldorf's Polynesian room to discover the sweet sounds of the crooner on stage and the beautiful people around me. My first night was a true Tiki treat complete with all the fixtures: the Blue Lizard martini (and another Blue Lizard martini, and another); being tickled by passing feather boas; swinging to the sophisticated grooves of vinyl mixologists Dick Scorpio and don stronzo; slipping some coin for a Havanita to Sass the Cigarette Girl; and at the end of the evening, doing the midnight limbo contest (hosted by Cha Cha la Flambeau) and managing to stay on my toes. Twice. And I wanted to do it again and again, like I wanted yet another of those blue martinis, I wanted to lounge. And so I returned, and I return again and again in my most delicious cocktail attire. I am, needless to say, a regular at the Polynesian lounges and should you chance to be wooed by the cocktail sensation too, you might find me there, watching you, beautiful.