

CHELSEA space

Steve Thomas: Big Biba and other stories

Donald Smith
Director of Exhibitions

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Private View: Tuesday 16th September 2008 6 – 8.30pm

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the CHELSEA programme

'Steve, I really dig your artwork, man' – Mick Jagger, 1969

Male model, artist, designer, rock & roll manager, King's Road roué and teller of tall tales... Steve Thomas is one of the few survivors of the 1960s who can still remember it all. He's the man who designed the legendary *Big Biba* shop, who went on to work for years as Paul McCartney's personal designer, who created the livery for Formula 1 teams (and for London buses to celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee) and whose style helped define the restaurant and club environment of the 1980s.

In the '60s, having left Chelsea School of Art, he inhabited the fringes of the record industry, hyping hit singles for Peter Frampton's first band, The Herd (who he had discovered) and designing record sleeves for acts including PJ Proby and the Rolling Stones. Then in 1971 came his big break when Barbara Hulanicki invited him and his design partner, Tim Whitmore, to design the new Biba store: a seven-storey department store filled with own-brand products. The *Sunday Times* called the result 'the most beautiful store in the world.'

Subsequent work included building a studio for the recording of 'Mull of Kintyre' and adventures in Mexico City, New York and Toronto (designing the revolving restaurant 1300 feet up the CN Tower). In the 1980s, as speed and dope gave way to cocaine hedonism, Steve became the architect for the hippest of showbiz hang-outs, among them the Restaurant in Dolphin Square, the Pheasantry and John Conteh's bar JC's, as well as the Roof Gardens Club in Miami.

And in an era of conspicuous affluence, Steve stumbled into designing some of the most legendary advertising and branding campaigns of recent decades, including Lucky Strikes, Levi's, Esso and Pepsi Cola.

Still working, his 2007 shop-design for Parisian punks *April 77* has been called a 'Biba for the 21st century'.

This is the first time a retrospective of Steve's work has been staged in London.

**Maker's
Mark**

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