

## Leopard Lounge, Fulham Broadway



In 1996 when I first saw the empty site that was to become my fourth London night club, I was immediately sold on it.

A former Irish club, the space was cavernous and hidden down a long alleyway behind Fulham Broadway Tube Station. It was derelict and unloved.

Howard Spooner, the owner of another club I had started, eMbargo, located in *The Furniture & Arts Building*, our

property on the King's Road, had the youth and energy to run a second club and the contacts to reach a young and trendy crowd of revellers. Together we formed a company which signed a lease on the premises.

Rather like *Studio 54* in New York, we made use of the alley entrance to create a dramatically lit tunnel which excited a heightened sense of expectation. The huge former clubroom would house an enormous dance floor and in the space that led to it we installed a long bar and sitting area.

Howard came-up with the name, *Leopard Lounge* - this dictated the look and feel of the club. Capacity was about 1,500.

Despite my track record founding both *The Embassy Club* - <https://jndflife.com/embassy-club/> and *Heaven* <https://jndflife.com/heaven/> - *Leopard Lounge* would cater to a predominately straight crowd who lived locally. Why compete with the huge number of gay people happily partying at *Heaven*?

Our target audience lived in Fulham and Chelsea and there was little serious competition in the area. A club here meant our patrons could walk or take a short cab ride home. I was certain even before we opened that we had a massive success on our hands and so it proved to be.

I was soon to find myself constantly fielding calls from friends with children begging entry. Some were of an age. Many weren't and for these, as licensee, I had to turn their parents down.

Our success also attracted the wrong sort of person and security became a major concern.

My good friend Max Wakefield, seemingly fearless, ex Army, charming and quite large enough to look the part, agreed to provide an essential role as head of security. It proved a tough job. On more than one occasion knives were brandished in pursuit of favour or entry. Threats included one burly fellow who elected to put Max “into the concrete under the *Millenium Dome* - now called O2, alongside another geezer who I’ve already put there.” Serious stuff.

Drugs and drug dealers, now ubiquitous in all successful night clubs, proved challenging to deter.

In 1997 I turned 50 and invited 600 friends to a party to celebrate the event. Given the name of our club we decided to style the event a Jungle Party and guests were asked to dress appropriately. The results were a stunning mixture of drag, costume and face painting – quite a scene and one hell of a party. See: <https://jndflife.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/js-50th-II.pdf>

After about two years of successful trading, our landlord, the railway company, used a clause in the club’s lease to terminate for redevelopment. We were making a substantial profit so I said to the potential developer, ‘You can either pay us £1.5 million to quit or we’ll use every ruse to delay your project for two to three years and that will cost you a great deal more.’ They cursed but agreed to my terms.

It was unfortunate to have to close.

What I did not know was that Howard had simultaneously done a private deal with this same developer to continue running the club while they got planning permission and raised their funds.

I was therefore astonished and not a little upset when the club, barely closed, immediately reopened still run by Howard.

About two years later the whole station property was finally redeveloped, into a shopping centre with flats above.

There was some sort of payback I suppose when the clientele of the *Leopard Lounge* soon found a newer club to patronise, *Public*, located in the basement of our property *The Furniture and Arts Building*.

That's another story - <https://jndflife.com/furniture-arts-building/>

## **From 'Design Week' December 1996**

Friday saw the opening of Leopard Lounge, a new nightclub at London's Fulham Broadway. The name, identity and promotional material is designed by Relay. Independent designers Jon Nussbaum and Sam Ogilvie created the interiors and furniture.

Relay senior designer Roger Barnard describes the venue as the most decadent club to hit London, "ideal for the beautiful and outrageous to slip into a new way of partying".

