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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:
Jeff Swaney and Jeffrey
Yarbrough today; hanging out at
Club Clearview; and Swaney and
Yarbrough in 1985

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Club Clearview Rocks Deep Ellum

BY JEFFREY YARBROUGH

The old Clearview window warehouse in Deep Ellum was the site of some of the first outlaw parties in the neighborhood, powered by generators, music, and nonsanctioned beer sales. So it was ironic that the club that went on to carry its name became one of the legitimizing forces that helped spark Deep Ellum's heydays in the late 1980s and 1990s. With four distinct rooms (and even more distinct clientele), Club Clearview served as a melting pot and microcosm of Dallas, pulling every corner of the city into a world where hippies, yuppies, and everyone in between was welcome.

I HAVE ALWAYS FELT THAT PARTYING IS AN ART unto itself, and downtown's Deep Ellum abandoned warehouse district is a place where I knew I wanted to make my mark.

My goal was to have a place that openly served a crowd with mixed backgrounds, mixed opinions, and mixed practices, encouraging diversity in a close-minded time. We envisioned a place where guests knew that—regardless of their standards of living and outward appearances—they could come in and have a good time.

The genesis of Club Clearview was raw youthful energy and inspiration: meshing art, music, and people from every direction. This 10,000-square-foot, seven-room multienvironment club drew a diverse and colorful patronage. Here, rock stars and real estate salesmen, punks and hippies, and persons of every pigment, priority, and sexual preference mixed and matched in one big, laid-back, post-Impressionistic party. This was a true first for Dallas.

"It was about real people," says my partner Jeff Swaney. "This was not some disco on steroids. It was fun because of the people."

The progression that led to the opening of Club Clearview in 1985 is a tale worth the telling. Swaney, along with our yuppie buddies Steve Clohessy, Mark Cuban, and others,

got bored with their corporate jobs and Dallas nightlife and started throwing outlaw warehouse parties. I was working for *Women's Wear Daily* at the time and would produce fashion shows with them. We'd find empty warehouses in the Deep Ellum area, set up electric generators, hire a DJ and dancers, and sell beer. At the end of the night, the police

would raid the parties and we'd leave, high on the successes of each great and memorable event. Having an absolute blast and making a decent profit, we decided to go legit.

Because Swaney threw one of his first parties in the old Clearview warehouse, it seemed a natural

place to start the club.

At Clearview we could have any type of event we wanted. I liked that customers knew to expect the unexpected. Doing an after-party for Pink Floyd or Oliver Stone was a normal thing for us. Musicians, producers, and designers all knew Clearview was a place they could do whatever they wanted and not be judged—or turned away. It opened the door for a creative community to emerge and thrive. How inspirational it was for me to see a British chef on a Triumph sharing a beer and discussing politics with a star from L.A., like chef Mark Schmidt and actor Thomas Haden Church.



Early on, Club Clearview catered to local artists by providing them a place to showcase their talents. It also helped birth local acts like Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians, the Dixie Chicks, and Vanilla Ice. National acts like the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Ministry, and Chris Isaak also frequented the stage.

My goal was to have a place known throughout America for being different. That challenge led a slew of other entrepreneurs to Deep Ellum to do their own thing. Clearview helped the city get stimulated for change.

Club Clearview was the spot for weddings, wakes, and wild charity events such as the bachelor-bachelorette Multiple Sclerosis Pre-Party night with national recording artist Sara Hickman and 20 other high-profile singles, like myself. Signs of success were eminent, such as a personal ad in the alternative newspaper in which a woman described herself as, "Corporate by day, Clearview by night."

And though the nights always came to a close, not everyone returned home the person they were before. Lonely singles became longtime couples and crazy one-time antics became lasting reputations. I would know. Commonly referred to as "the nightclub guy," I met my own sweetheart of 17 years after seeing the beautiful blonde the night I was auctioned off for the Multiple Sclerosis event at Clearview—a night I started as a fun-loving bachelor.

Jeffrey Yarbrough is a former owner of Club Clearview. He is the CEO of Big Ink, a public relations and marketing firm.