



Hollywood's Mocombo

The Mocombo was a nightclub in West Hollywood, California, at 8588 Sunset Boulevard on the Sunset Strip

The Mocombo opened on January 3, 1941, and became an immediate success. The club's Latin American-themed decor designed by Tony Duquette cost \$100,000 (equivalent to \$1,663,801 in 2017). Along the walls were glass cages holding live cockatoos, macaws, seagulls, pigeons, and parrots. With big band music, the club became one of the most popular dance-till-dawn spots in town. On any given night, one might find the room filled with the leading men and women of the motion picture industry.

In 1943, when Frank Sinatra became a solo act, he made his Los Angeles debut at the Mocombo. On March 15, 1955 Ella Fitzgerald opened at the Mocombo, after Marilyn Monroe lobbied the owner for the booking. The booking was instrumental in Fitzgerald's career. The incident was turned into a play by Bonnie Greer in 2005. It has been widely reported that Fitzgerald was the first Black performer to play the Mocombo, following Monroe's intervention, but this is not true. African-American singers Herb Jeffries, Eartha Kitt, and Joyce Bryant all played the Mocombo in 1953, according to stories published at the time in Jet magazine.

Among the many celebrities who frequented the Mocombo were Clark Gable and Carole Lombard, Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, Errol Flynn, Charlie Chaplin, Elizabeth Taylor, Judy Garland, Henry Fonda, Lana Turner, Ava Gardner, Bob Hope, James Cagney, Sophia Loren, Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis, Natalie Wood and Robert Wagner, Grace Kelly, Debbie Reynolds and Eddie Fisher, Howard Hughes, Kay Francis, Marlene Dietrich, Theda Bara, Tyrone Power, Jayne Mansfield, John Wayne, Ben Blue, Ann Sothern, and Louis B. Mayer. Myrna Loy and Arthur Hornblow, Jr. celebrated their divorce there.

The club's main stage was replicated on the TV series *I Love Lucy* as the "Tropicana" Club. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz were frequent guests at the Mocombo and were close friends of Charlie Morrison. The Mocombo was also parodied mercilessly in the 1947 Bugs Bunny cartoon, "Slick Hare". According to a commentary track on the DVD with this cartoon, the animators managed to get into the kitchen and drew the kitchen exactly as they saw it, complete with dripping grease on the refrigerator and vegetables lying around the ground.

Early in 1957, club operator and co-owner Charlie Morrison died at his Beverly Hills, California, home. The Mocombo remained in business for one final year, before closing its doors on June 30, 1958. The building was then sold, reopened as a supper club called The Cloister, and eventually demolished. [<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mocombo>]

