



Spotlight on immigrants
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Naked ambition gets Gigi in pole position

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SHE GOES by just a single name – Gigi. And just like Madonna, Iman, and Twigg, Gigi can hold her own on any stage. She is casually dressed in blue jeans and a crisp white shirt, but she exudes more sex than any barely clad girl will.

Gigi is an old hand of the strip club industry; she knows it like the back of her own thigh. So it's no shocker that the nearly 47-year-old blonde bombshell co-owns one of the most popular clubs in Joburg.

But Gigi is not just a strip doyenne, she is a wildly successful businesswoman. And now she has found another passion – decorating her newly renovated mansion, which has been converted into a long-leased guest house.

The house in Randburg is lavish and sumptuous. The neutral walls flatter the expensive-looking, genteel furnishings. Chandeliers drape sexily from every ceiling in the house. Pictures of semi-naked and utterly nude well-known women

ogle back at you out of extravagant frames. The rooms to be leased all have themes – famous sexy sirens of Hollywood. What else?

"It's important that I am not stuck at the club the whole time. So I am at the house the entire morning overseeing all the last minute decorating and the gardens. Then I go to the club for the lunchtime crowd. But I always come home at 4pm. I just sit in the garden to relax with my babies – my cat and my bird. It's so beautiful here."

The deluxe mansion is Gigi's dream house. The clever layout and spacious design is a far cry from the structure she initially bought two years ago.

"When I first saw it, I knew it had huge potential. I just fell in love. You have to have a vision and this is exactly what I envisioned. I love it here," she says with a satisfied smile, about to burst with pride.

It's 12.50. The Lollipop Lounge is about to welcome its lunchtime clientele. The club is a stone's throw away from her home. Gigi is pleased with this expediency.

It is the middle of the day but once you step through the plastic curtains at the entrance, the bright sun becomes a distant memory almost immediately. It is dark, your eyes are forced to adjust to the sultry, sexy lighting. Gigi is greeted by her staff. Today, there are about 30 people there – all with bright smiles and warm welcomes. To her, they are not just people she employs – they are her family. She didn't have children. It is one of the sacrifices she has had to make to be a victorious career showgirl.

"That's one of the things I gave up for this industry – having a child. Now at 47, I think, if only I had a son."

"But I am waiting for the time when I can get one in the lab. I will go and see how far he is developed and just pick him up when he is ready," she giggles.



SUCCESSFUL: Gigi, the owner of The Lollipop Lounge strip club with her club logo.

PICTURES: PABALLO THEKISO



NEW VENTURE: Gigi outside her newly renovated house.



SULTRY: A stripper shows off her moves at The Lollipop lounge in Randburg.

Strip club throbs with lolly

"It's bound to happen some day." Gigi speaks fondly of her girls – the strippers who dance at The Lollipop Lounge. She shows mammoth respect for them, especially those who have kids. And, perhaps unsurprisingly, nearly all of them do.

"It is very interesting working with girls who have such a huge responsibility of parenting while working in this environment. The long hours. It's gruelling."

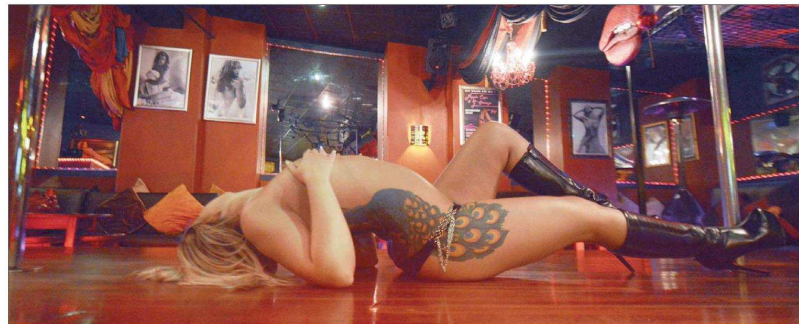
"As a woman I have to be aware and sensitive to their roles as mothers...newborns need their moms and they need a bit of freedom to be there when they need to. That's what it is all about for me."

But selecting well-groomed, well-oiled sexy dancers is still very essential.

"It's not always about a slender figure. Sexiness comes in all shapes and forms. Sometimes it's about the personality. You can see that their bodies differ in sizes," she points to some of the girls who have gathered around.

"I know that lots of men are married to bigger girls, so they must have liked a bigger woman at some point in their life," she laughs from her belly. "But I try to encourage my girls not to have too many hot chocolates and to look after themselves. We have 20-minute bath shows here where the girls play with each other in bath water. No one wants to watch an overweight girl for 20 minutes. They understand that they chose this career and they have to have the goods to do it."

Apart from being professional, and radiating sex appeal, Gigi is resolute that the girls adhere to strict house rules.



NO TOUCHING: Sexiness comes in all sizes, says Gigi, but she encourages her girls to watch their weight.

"No chewing gum on stage. Showgirls just don't do that. No heels on the couches. I can't uphold every week. It costs money and they will be fined. No talking to your friends when she walks past the stage and you are dancing. Show girls don't do that. You're supposed to be in the moment, you are a sex object."

"I know this is not a school. I mean I don't check how long their nails are like some people in the industry. But the rules must be

adhered to," she emphasises.

Behind Gigi there is a small poster with a price list. Customers must fork out R300 for a table dance. It is R600 for a touch dance and you may only touch her breasts – nowhere else.

And if you really like the girl, you can pay R450 for a private gyrating dance session in a cubicle. Still, you may not touch.

The cubicles are persistently monitored to see if the customers – or the girls – get frisky.

The buff bouncers are also there to shield the girls in case of rowdy

and unruly customers. It happens, Gigi says.

"The girls we meet are hospitable and friendly. Some don't want their real names revealed."

Alexi is 37. She has been in the industry "on and off" for 16 years. She also has a 16-year-old daughter. "I still love doing this. The Lollipop Lounge is an amazing place to work. It's like a family."

This buxom blonde is also studying to be a psychologist – a sex and relationship therapist, to be precise. "It ties in with what I do. And I am loving it. I have a daughter, and

she still comes first. My studies will help us both."

Lisa is an attractive 30-year-old beauty. She is a mother of twins. They are 14-year-old girls.

"I love it here. I used to work for an events company. But coming here I have met so many people. These are my family."

Lisa will 'fess up to her girls one day. At the moment they think she is a waitress.

"I think I will wait until they are just a little bit older. I don't think there's anything wrong with what I do."

Terry is a true African beauty from uMhlati. At just 23 she has a two- and three-year-old at home. She will keep her job a secret at all costs. Her Zulu family in KwaZulu-Natal would be shocked and disappointed to know that she took her "clothes off for money".

"Never. They must never know what I do. I will also never tell my sons. It's different with boys. I don't think they will appreciate their mother dancing naked for strangers. As much as I love my job, it's not worth them knowing what I do."

Gigi, meanwhile, admits that working with so many women is not an easy feat.

"It's not an easy thing. Women are very emotional. They fight sometimes. But they are not cars that you can just park them there. I have to be there for them when they need me."

The Lollipop Lounge has been open successfully for 10 years. "For any business to survive it says something, especially in this climate. People don't have extra money. And the whole industry has taken a knock."

It has taken buckets of blood, sweat and tears for Gigi and her 100 staff. To me it is not 100 staff – it's 100 families who are being supported. We just have to make it work. We put our heads down and just do it. Many of the people have been here for 10 years. This is their livelihood. I am in no position to let anyone down."

It is clear Gigi and her men and girls run a tight ship. It takes a special kind of person to successfully run a strip club. And this sexy blonde is undoubtedly one of a kind.