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EXCLUSIVE

COLIN COWIE

ALWAYS FINDS LIGHT IN THE DARK!

**MANAGING YOUR EMOTIONS
HOW TO NAVIGATE A CRISIS
AND COME OUT STRONGER**

MAKE A COMMITMENT TO MORE FAMILY MEALS

*Market Your Business
for Long-Term Success*

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF COLIN COWIE LIFESTYLE.



COLIN COWIE

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*W*ith clients like Oprah Winfrey, Jerry Seinfeld, Ryan Seacrest, heads of state, and foreign dignitaries, the Zambia born and South Africa raised Colin Cowie provides luxury experiences for the most celebrated people. He has designed and produced every conceivable type of celebration — from cocktail receptions to product launches to royal weddings. Spanning the globe multiple times, Cowie has traveled over 15 million miles in search of the finest and most authentic experiences for his clients and has become an expert in guest experience along the way.

In May of this year, Cowie launched a groundbreaking guest experience brand – Thrive Hospitality – as an extension of Colin Cowie Lifestyle.

With his extensive chronicle delivering unforgettable guest experiences for clients, Cowie has become known as the Master of Hospitality. While the event industry has slowed due to the coronavirus pandemic, Cowie has redirected some of his efforts for the benefit of all businesses emerging from COVID-19 and those looking to reimagine their own guest experience.

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PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF **COLIN COWIE LIFESTYLE.**

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Through Thrive Hospitality, Cowie has glamorized the tedious protocols and uneventful norms of today's world by helping brands raise their standards and elevate their guest experience. Hospitality businesses finally can treat their guests to a Colin Cowie Experience.

We had the honor to sit down with Colin as we prepared our July / August edition, and he shared with us those fascinating details which answer, "Who is Colin Cowie?" We were thrilled to learn about Thrive Hospitality and how it would benefit businesses emerging from COVID-19. We're thrilled to bring our riveting conversation to you.

William Jackson: Who is Colin Cowie?

Colin Cowie: Colin Cowie is a fiercely passionate experiential designer with a very curious mind that has taken him 15.5M miles around the world in search of the most unique and authentic experiences.

William: What traditions were important to your family? Family meals? Recreating together?

Colin: Family meals together were a must. It was unthinkable not to dine together as a family. This instilled important values in me and I realized the importance of sitting together as a family and sharing what happened in our day. This led me to believe some of our most memorable times are those spent together around the dining table with family and friends.

William: We've learned you served in the military and were highly effective. Tell us about your experiences.

Colin: I was drafted into the armored car division. Go figure! I was either a gunner, a driver, or a mechanic - clearly three things not meant or designed for me. I faked a major seizure and got to work in medics where I thrived and enjoyed what I learned during my military training.

William: During what ages were you contributing to the military?

Colin: I was 17 years old when I was drafted and was in an active war at the age of 19.



William: *Are there particular skills gained which you apply currently in various aspects of your personal and professional lives?*

Colin: Many. I discovered I was good at cutting hair. I must have cut 500 heads over two years. As the senior medic during our active duty, I assisted in many procedures including the delivery of many local babies (I have not done that since!). I certainly learned how to defend myself and developed a strong set of survival skills.

William: *Upon leaving the military, where did your life's course take you?*

Colin: Having grown up in South Africa during the height of apartheid, we were pretty much cut off from the rest of the world because of the sanctions against the country. Thirsty for style and exposure, I traveled quite extensively in Europe.

William: *What impact, if any, did these experiences have?*

Colin: I was like a sponge and could not get enough. I went from museum to museum, from fashion stores to restaurants, and saturated myself in this newly discovered culture with a big dose of European style.

William: *Tell us about events surrounding your transition to the United States.*

Colin: I returned to South Africa and realized there was no future for me in the country under apartheid. I didn't want to invest my hardest working years in a country whose government I had no faith in. I set my sights on California - same language, weather, and lifestyle. I arrived in September 1985 and it was a defining moment in my life.

William: *What were your emotions upon disembarking from the airplane?*

Colin: After realizing the endless possibilities of working in Los Angeles / Hollywood, I felt like an artist from South Africa who had been working in black and white then discovered a world of technicolor and opportunity.

William: *As it was probably important to become settled and immersed into your new life as quickly as possible, what were your immediate steps?*

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Colin: I needed to make cash, so I worked for a catering company for two months. While I was there, I saw exactly what they did, who they hired, and how they operated. A month later I was in business catering small chic dinners.

William: At this point early in your burgeoning career, what would you say was the most noteworthy experience?

Colin: While I was in the catering business, I was also teaching cooking classes. One of my students was the wife of the president of *Playboy*. She asked me to consult on the menu for Hugh Hefner's wedding in 1989. I took a meeting with Hugh Hefner and his team and walked out as the designer / producer of the entire wedding.

William: What did you learn about yourself from this experience?

Colin: I was so excited! I drove my car to the pay phone on the corner of Sunset Blvd and Benedict Canyon to call my family [collect] and tell them I was about to 'make it' in Los Angeles. That wedding got me labeled as 'Mr. Wedding', and my career took off.

William: How important to you is it to appeal to the senses?

Colin: Very important. If you really want to connect with something or someone, it or they, need to move you. Surrounding a good decision with an emotional bond makes any experience far more memorable and impactful. I'm first and foremost a storyteller and I use the senses to tell my story. That said, I always start with the source DNA as this keeps the vision on track and allows the senses to support one idea. I use this approach throughout the day, morning, noon, and night to enhance and seduce the senses. We consider all aspects that influence a 'feeling', adjusting to accommodate seasonal changes. Each time, we find new opportunities to play to the senses to tell our story.

William: Colin, take us through the design process you engage with your clients.

Colin: I've been told I'm an exceptionally good listener which allows me to absorb as much as I can from

my surroundings. I then create a vision anchored by the brand DNA. This guides me through the process of using the senses to tell the unique story. I'm continually looking for opportunities to make things more appealing-better, smarter, chicer, and sexier. From arrival to departure, I assess what we can do to engage people in a meaningful way and evoke an emotional connection with the guests. I find this to be incredibly important in today's world as it buys brand loyalty and that is what you want most out of every transaction. I've come to learn the emotionally connected consumer is more attentive, spends more freely, and spreads the word about their experience with our brand.

William: Customarily, how engaged are your clients? Does your team consider clients as event co-producers?

Colin: Every case is different. In most instances, a client has a good idea of what they want, but I work very closely with them to manage the aspects that will get them where they want to be. We see what others don't and that always captures their attention. It's our responsibility to work with their assets and people to develop standards and protocols to bring their story alive. Layer on top of that a culture that supports proactive service delivery and 35 years of lifestyle experience across all continents, and we end up with a very compelling story.

William: Tell us about, with as much details as you can share, your most memorable event you've produced.

Colin: It would have to be my recent wedding in South Africa on February 2, 2020. We took 176 guests to South Africa for a 10-day wedding. We took all our guests on safari which culminated in a party titled Glamoflage. Guests were encouraged to come dressed as their favorite animal. We then flew all our guests to Cape Town and hosted a "Welcome to Cape Town" cocktail party and a Mykonos-styled beach party at the Grande. We transported all our guests to the Stellenbosch winelands where we hosted an intimate rehearsal dinner. That Saturday we had an epic wedding that started at 6:00 PM and continued to 6:00 AM! We had a 22-piece orchestra for the ceremony and exchanged gold bracelets custom made by Jacob & Co. We also had a Dom Perignon Rose' cocktail reception and a dinner banquet that featured Marcella Roggeri, the #1 concert pianist in Europe, along with a performance by the Four Tenors. We then moved to a nightclub and danced 'til breakfast at sunrise! We're still on cloud 9!

William: During the past decade, there have been numerous events, which have adversely impacted the financial strength of the United States economy. In response, many companies were forced to adjust their business and financial models. How were your businesses impacted, and wisely, what adjustments did you make?

Colin: Add to that the COVID-19 and 80 plus days of quarantine. Like every other product and service, business came to a grinding halt. Almost every event we've booked has been postponed to 2021. I pivoted the efforts of my team and we recently launched **Thrive Hospitality**, a consulting hospitality company. We've been working in hospitality for the past ten years as the creative director for NetJets and the award-winning Mira Hotel in Hong Kong, among many others. We're the brand storyteller. We glamorize COVID-19 protocols, create banqueting programs, and work with the design and development teams to ensure the most flexible and functional spaces. We also create programming using our Hospitality concept where we bridge hospitality and

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entertaining with what you smell, hear, touch, taste, and see to create memorable moments that seduce the guests. All this is designed to deliver a better guest experience that translates into increased performance metrics across multiple revenue sources.

William: Has 'luxury' become a bad word?

Colin: The word 'luxury' has changed and morphed over the years. Each time there's a correction in the markets, 'luxury' gets a bad rap. I used to think 'luxury' came in a small orange box with a brown saddle stitched ribbon. It was exclusive in a sense and synonymous with being special. While these luxury goods are still special, it's now ubiquitous and you can buy Hermes at train stations and airports around the world and of course online.

I now believe luxury is not a product but rather a feeling. It's when all the senses are in harmony with one another and you need for nothing. It's that rare sensation of feeling truly content. It's much harder to achieve than just creating a transaction.

William: What were the lessons you learned during these periods?

Colin: The best lessons I've learned in my business career have all come through hardship. It's when we're most challenged our greatest ideas come about. I'm grateful for all the knocks along the journey; they've seasoned me and given me the confidence to weather any storm. I must admit – this has been the most challenging time by far.

William: How important to you, and your team, is effective leadership?

Colin: Your team is as good as the leadership that guides them. When things don't work out as planned, the ability to pivot and be compassionate, empathetic, and agile are key. A good idea is just an idea without an excellent team to put it into action.

William: How do you manage your emotional well-being?

Colin: I liken it to the swan theory. The swan is quiet and serene above water, but its feet are paddling at 120









mph below the surface. I like to be calm on the outside regardless of what is happening on the inside. It's important to lead with confidence and to create a positive environment – particularly when the cards are down. I find daily meditation and exercise vital during these times.

William: What would your team say is your effective management style?

Colin: Collaboration. I like to listen to all opinions and options and then decide on what is best for the health of the company and the best way forward.

William: It's difficult not to have a conversation currently without referencing the challenging time in recent human history, the COVID-19 crisis. Never could I have imagined during my lifetime the world would be impacted in this manner and to this extent.

Colin: For sure, and I touched previously on this topic. In these unprecedented times we plan for the worst and hope for the best. We're a resilient species and this will all be behind us one day. We'll come out smarter, better, and wiser for sure.

William: Always looking for opportunities to extend help and provide guidance, you recently launched Thrive Hospitality which is an extension of Colin Cowie Lifestyle. Give us more thrilling details about this new endeavor.

Colin: We see this as an opportunity to reset the experience bar. Everyone, for the time being, is required to introduce and be compliant with radical new social distancing rules and hygiene protocols. Most importantly, we're all being forced to instill a much greater sense of safety and confidence during a time when there's conflicting data, misinformation, inadequate resources, and a great deal of uncertainty. We use our protocols to create a safe environment that helps guests feel safe and feel good.

William: Why do you believe the hospitality industry is ready for the Thrive experience?

Colin: As we come out of this lengthy quarantine any client-facing business will need to demonstrate safety. It's important safety 'feels right' and not clinical where

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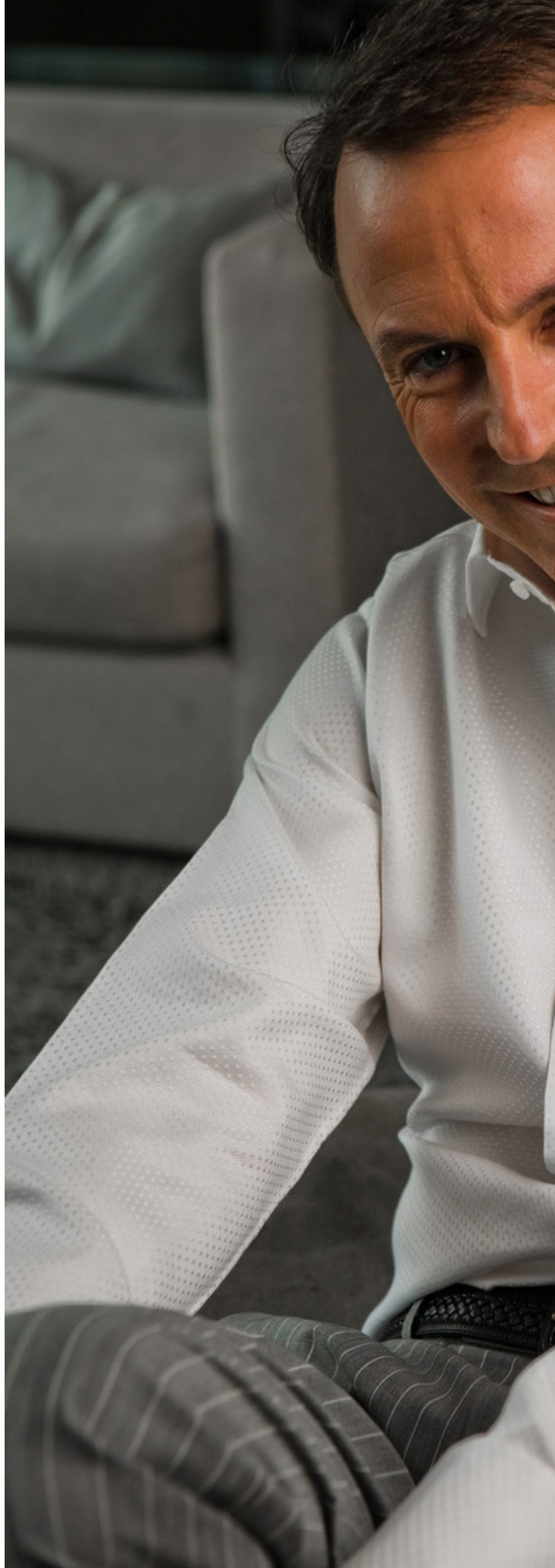
team members just execute rote behavior. We integrate the steps in a seamless manner to add style, glamour, and acceptance. It's an interesting time to create ways to make these protocols elegant and chic. I believe proactive customer service and the hospitainment programming we design will result in creating an emotional connection with the guest, thus buying brand loyalty highly valuable in the hospitality space. What we've heard from many of our clients is we offer a myriad of connected services that would ordinarily make them hire three different consultants. We act as a conductor of sorts who ensures all the instruments work harmoniously together to sound right. I reiterate, we see things differently because of our experiences and that often opens the eyes of our clients to seeing the big picture. Things that work individually can be good, but things that work together are AMAZING!

William: *How have you prepared to demonstrate the appropriate levels of sensitivity and empathy in today's hospitality industry climate?*

Colin: This is a big subject given the wide degrees of human emotions. Is there such a thing as too safe or too empathetic? Given we serve a broad spectrum of thresholds, we simply employ a filter of common sense. We need to create safe environments for our teams to work in. We need to make sure they can get to the workplace safely and we're set up with social distancing in the workspace with all the necessary cleaning and sanitizing. It's important to give the teams the right feeling as well as tools and vernacular to communicate with guests. Training the teams on the new protocols is vital so they can deliver the service with confidence and style. I believe once we accomplish this, we can encourage guests to return for a positive experience they'll share and tell their friends about.

William: *As we emerge as a society on the other side of the COVID-19 crisis, no doubt many aspects will be different. From a client perspective what do you believe will be most changed?*

Colin: There's one thing I know for sure. After each correction, the consumer always comes back smarter and more budget conscious, constantly looking and





shopping around for the best deal. I'd imagine this time around will be no different.

William: What about from a business perspective?

Colin: This is uncharted territory and I believe it'll take years for us to reach the 'new normal', unless of course a cure or vaccine is introduced. So many segments of the market are inflated and need a correction. This scare has changed the way we look at business, because suddenly "forever" is not so forever anymore. I'd imagine in the next 36 months many big companies will change hands, and there will be a big correction in inflated rents. I'd think at some stage the playing field will level out, paving the way for opportunity on all fronts. We just need to get there.

William: Colin, what keeps you on fire?

Colin: I love what I do and I'm a deeply passionate and driven person. I've wanted to focus on our hospitality division for the past three years, and this pandemic was the 'spark' that inspired us to launch during this dark down time. I've always believed if you work hard and smart, you'll always find light in the dark.

William: Of what are you most proud?

Colin: Making it this far! I'm extremely proud of this new endeavor and how we were able to pivot and use our energies and resources to a segment of the market that is looking for these services right now.

William: Of what are you most grateful?

Colin: I'm most grateful for the lessons along the way. They made me a better person and a better leader. During this quarantine I've asked myself the question WHY many times. I believe there's a reason this happened and affected every single person on the planet. I came up with two words I believe we need to focus on: Gratitude and Humility. They have been lost along the way. We're moving too fast and taking on too much. We don't take time to do the things that matter and count. The world will be a better place if we keep remembering this.

William: Are you living your best life?

Colin: Indeed! ●