

# Crobar

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**Crobar** is an awarding winning and internationally renowned nightlife brand owned by partners, and founders, Ken Smith and Callin Fortis. Originally friendly competitors in Chicago, they joined forces in 1989 to collaborate on more than a dozen successful restaurants, lounges and nightclubs in Chicago, Miami, and New York City. It was the duo's impact on the revival of New York's big club nightlife that earned Fortis and Smith a spot in Vanity Fair's Spotlight spread on "The Kings and Queens of Clubs" in 2004. (Vanity Fair, April 2004)

The Crobar "chain was born" in 1992 when the first location opened in Chicago's Near North neighborhood, "thus launching the brand that would become the industry standard for DJ-driven American nightclubs." (100 Moments in Nightclub History, Club Systems International, Special Issue 2006).

Followed by locations in South Beach Miami on New Year's Eve 1999, and West Chelsea in New York City in December 2003, Crobar was recognized for its "award winning design, unsurpassed service and world-class sound, lighting and multi-media (that) invited club-goers into a kinetic, interactive scene" (NYC Official City Guide, [www.cityguidemagazine.com](http://www.cityguidemagazine.com)). Crobar New York was described as "a DJ's favorite playground, a diva's late-night martini, a drag queen's Sunday dance party ... the physical implementation of New York's melting pot social scene." (Nightclub & Bar, March 2006, [www.nightclub.com](http://www.nightclub.com))

As the designer of all of the pair's past projects, Fortis and his BigTime Design [www.bigtimedesignstudios.com](http://www.bigtimedesignstudios.com) was responsible for conceiving the re-invention of the historic Art Deco Cameo Theater into Crobar Miami, the re-design of Crobar Chicago to match, and the transformation of a 25,000 square foot industrial warehouse into Crobar New York. (Loft, April 2004, [www.loft.com](http://www.loft.com))

Recognized for its light system designed by SJ Lighting and superior Phazon sound system designed by Steve Dash as well as it's architectural design, Crobar was able to count many of the world's largest names in Electronic music as regulars, some as resident DJs – including Sasha, Tiesto, Danny Tenaglia, Deep Dish, Carl Cox, Sander Kleinenberg, Roger Sanchez, David Morales, Boris, Ferry Corsten, Larry T, David Waxman, Ralph Falcon, and Eric Morillo, to name just a few. (Nightclub & Bar, March 2006) (Top 100 DJs List found on [www.djmag.com](http://www.djmag.com) and [www.djlist.com](http://www.djlist.com)).

"I have played Crobar 5 times now, and every time has been amazing. I have been playing in New York since 1999, and I've played at almost every club there. I never found the right place to play for me until I found Crobar. Great Room. Super Sound System. And an awesome crowd." DJ Tiesto (Nightclub & Bar, March 2006, [www.nightclub.com](http://www.nightclub.com))

All three Crobar locations garnered regular nominations in national and international award categories and won numerous "best of" awards over multiple years for design, lighting, sound, resident VJ, resident DJ, as well as in the overall categories of best nightclub, best superclub, best megaclub, and best dance club.

Although as of April 2010 the North American locations have all closed there are future locations in development in Atlantic City, and Charlotte

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## CROBAR WORLDWIDE

The brand continues to expand with Crobar Worldwide. Launched in September 2005 with international partnerships in Argentina, the success of Crobar Buenos Aires led to the creation of Crobar South America. Plans are underway to open venues in Brazil and Peru, in addition to a series of special events, Crobar Outdoor, that will continue to bring the best electronic music in the world to South America – a ground breaking contribution to the international music scene. Crobar is the first North American nightclub to expand internationally in this way.

Crobar Lebanon opened April 3, 2008 with resident DJ Ali Ajami. With a Crobar license agreement, the Kayruz Brothers were behind opening in Lebanon. As of 2009, however, the Lebanon location had quietly closed with no other news. Smith and Fortis are currently in negotiations with partners in China for a Crobar Beijing.

## CROBAR CHICAGO

Opened in 1992 and thriving for 10 successful years, Crobar Chicago closed for renovation in late 2002. “Owners Ken Smith and Cal Fortis hit their first nerve with Crobar Chicago, a gritty industrial space that referenced the city’s house music roots.” (Club Systems International, January 2003, Vol 3, No 7). After a full club renovation designed by Callin Fortis and BigTime Design, Crobar Chicago re-opened in the same location in the fall of 2003 and experienced a second peak tying with Crobar New York for Best Mega-Club in URB’s 5th Annual Massv Contributor’s Poll 2004 (URB, January 2005).

“It had to happen sometime: under the guidance of designer ... Callin Fortis ... Crobar Chicago grew out of its bare-warehouse, no-frills, ugly duckling phase and blossomed into nightclub adulthood.” (Club Systems International, January 2004) The revamped club won Best Nightclub, Chicago City Search 2004; Best Interior Design, and Best Lighting, Club Systems International, January 2004; and Best Sound System in a Nightclub, New City Chicago 2005.

Other AWARDS: Insider’s Chicago: Best of the City, National Geographic Traveler 2004; Best Club, AOL City Guide 2005; Nominated Best Dance Club, AOL City Guide 2006

The original Crobar was known for playing Trance and House, headlined by resident DJ Tony Arzadon. It later attracted world-renowned DJ’s such as Paul Oakenfold, Roger Sanchez, Sander Kleinenberg, Erick Morillo, Fedde le Grand, Starkillers, Richard Dinsale, Bad Boy Bill, Robbie Rivera, Deadmau5, and David Guetta.

Crobar Chicago closed on April 17, 2010

## CROBAR MIAMI

Crobar Miami opened on New Year’s Eve 1999, and within one year became “an obligatory stop in the South Beach nocturnal tour ... (it’s) edgy ‘anything goes’ attitude successfully attract(ed) trendy revelers and chic crowds.” (Ocean Drive, December 2000, The South Beach Nightlife Guide 2001). The award winning nightclub was located in the historic Art Deco Cameo Theater located at 1445 Washington Ave, Miami Beach always

recognizable by its vintage marquis.

**AWARDS:** Best Super Club, Club Systems International's First Annual Club World Awards (January 2003, Vol 3, No 7); Best Nightclub, City Search 2001-2004; Best Dance Club, Best of Miami Bars and Clubs, Reader's Poll 2003 & 2004, Miami New News; Best Dance Club, The Street, 2004; and Best Resident VJ, Club World Awards 2006, Club Systems International.

Crobar Miami closed on April 23, 2006 with a performance by noted house music DJ, and Crobar regular, Erick Morillo. After a total renovation and re-design by Callin Fortis and BigTime Design, the venue re-opened as "Cameo" under new ownership in February 2007.

## CROBAR NEW YORK

When it opened on December 11th, 2003, the 25,000 square foot mega-club at 530 West 28th Street was one of the first in the wave of superclubs to transform industrial West Chelsea into New York City's newest nightlife destination "that could keep even the most attention-deficit-disordered clubber happy." (New York Magazine, Best of New York Nights, March 14, 2005). As "explosive dance clubs" go, this West Chelsea "behemoth" takes the cake, hosting the "most popular DJs on the world circuit" in a "cavernous", "Ibiza-size" space where the "sweaty, cruising crowd" ranges from "suits to sweatsuits"; there's also a "tight" hip hop room and a "mellow" VIP area for "lower-stress high times", but wherever you wind up, it's a guaranteed "wild night" - and proof that "big clubs are back." (Zagat Survey 2005/2006, New York City Nightlife)

After its first year, Crobar New York was described as the "undisputed heavyweight champion of New York nightlife" (Club Systems International), winning a litany of "best of" awards in 2004, 2005 and 2006 including: "Best Megaclub", "Best US Club", "Best Super Club", "Best Lighting System", "Best Video System", and "Best Interior Design".

**AWARDS:** Best Mega-Club, URB's The 5th Annual Massv Contributor's Poll 2004; Best of NYC 2004, "Best bar in which to hide from ex in a tropical forest of bamboo", Village Voice; Best of New York: Best Mega-Club, New York Magazine 2004; Venue of the Year, Event of the Year (Grammy & BPM Event), Scene Magazine, End of the Year Awards, 2004; Editors' Top 100 Clubs 2005, Nightclub & Bar magazine's 20th Anniversary; Best Dance Club, AOL Cityguide NYC 2005; 50 Hottest Nightlife Venues in New York City, Zagat 2005; Best Mega Dance Emporium, Best in New York, Shecky's Bar, Club & Lounge Guide, 2005; Best Super Club, Best Lighting System, Crobar New York, SJ Lighting, Best Video System, Crobar New York, Artfag & V Squared Labs, Best Interior Design, Crobar New York, BigTime Design & ICRAVE Design Studio, Club World Awards 2005, Club Systems International; Best Superclub, Best Resident DJ, Best Resident VJ, Best Resident LJ, Club World Awards 2006, Club Systems International; Nominated for Best Dance Club, AOL Cityguide NYC

After three years dominating the big club experience in West Chelsea, Ken Smith and Cal Fortis, brand owners of the Crobar franchise, moved on and out of the nightlife haven they were instrumental in revitalizing. Despite the club's critical success, Ken Smith and Cal Fortis saw the pendulum swinging away from the mega-club experience. The rise of nightlife in West Chelsea started to fall over the summer of 2006 with a deterioration of the neighborhood's reputation, particularly West 27th Street, as a safe haven for clubgoers.

Although Smith and Fortis were no longer active in the club's operations at that point, Crobar New York was temporarily closed on January 5, 2007 for numerous complaints and violations. As a result of that as well as a violation of the Crobar trademark and license agreement, Crobar New York was closed on February 2, 2007. The location reopened under new management as Studio Mezmor on February 17, 2007 without the involvement of Smith and Fortis, but was closed again in June.

Given the trend toward downsizing to more intimate lounges in New York City, Smith and Fortis plan to take Crobar on the road as a special event experience both nationally and internationally.

## External links

- [1] (<http://www.loft.com>)
- [2] (<http://www.vanityfair.com>)
- [3] (<http://www.cityguidemagazine.com>)
- {<http://clubsystemsinternational.com>}
- [4] (<http://www.nightclub.com>)
- [5] (<http://www.djmag.com>)
- [6] (<http://www.djlist.com>)
- [7] (<http://www.cityguidemagazine.com>)
- Crobar (<http://www.crobar.com>)
- Crobar Buenos Aires (<http://www.crobar.com.ar/>)
- Cameo in Miami Beach (<http://www.cameomiami.com/>)
- Crobar becomes Mezmor article on Clubplanet (<http://www.clubplanet.com/Articles/1642/Bye-Bye-Crobar-Hello-Mezmor>)
- - Information on Mansion Nightclub (Formerly Crobar) (<http://www.nightcure.com/Miami/clubs/18/Mansion/Mansion.html>)

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