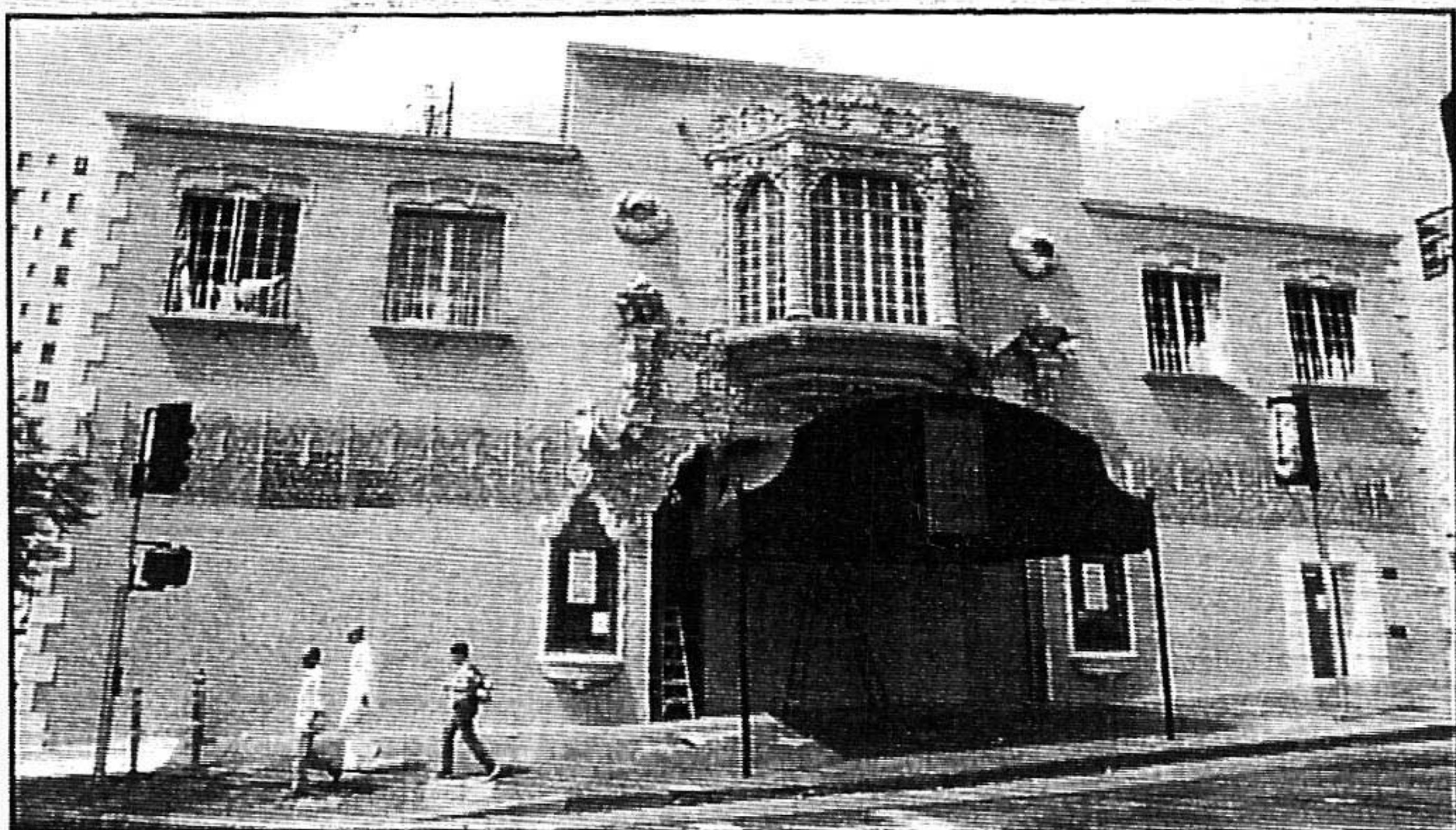




The Avalon Hollywood opens today in the building that housed the Palace for decades. Below, a worker readies the venue's retooled stage.

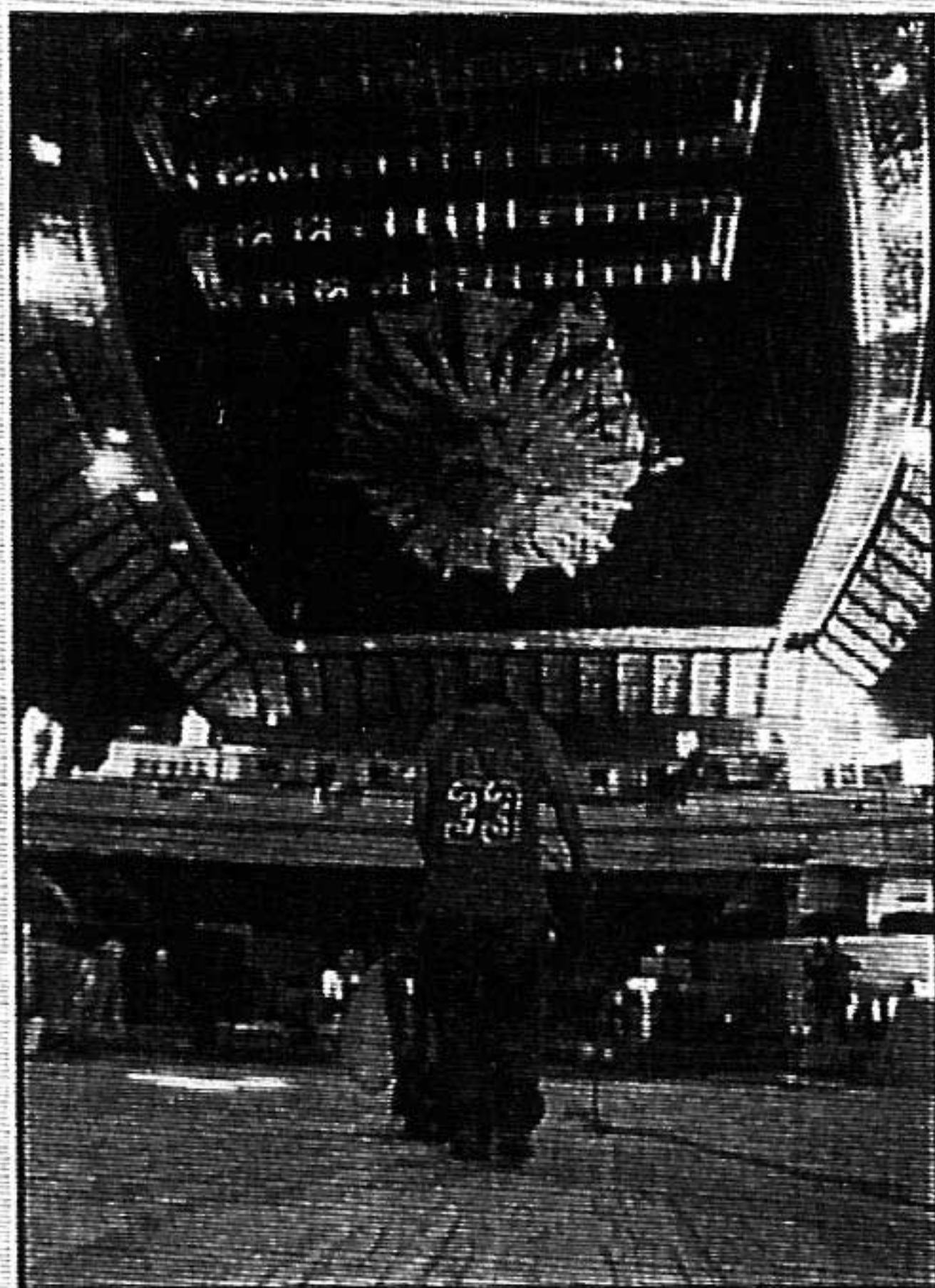
Changing of Palace guard

Avalon, nightspots reviving space

By Tamara Conniff

A homeless man regularly polishes the Walk of Fame stars at the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street. He lovingly scrubs the gold enameled names — Grace Kelly, George Montgomery, Constance Binney, Artie Shaw — until they shine.

The famous corner — now home to a porn shop, a tattoo parlor and a wig store frequented by drag queens — has lost the glamour it had during the late 1920s when the original Brown Derby sign illuminated the sidewalk and the Palace (then known as the Hollywood Playhouse) held lavish live events. But glamour — or at least a



good party — is on its way back to the famous intersection.

Today, John Lyons and Steve Adelman of Hollywood See **AVALON** on page 24

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73rd year

Avalon

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Entertainment Partners will reopen the Palace doors as Avalon Hollywood — a fresh new concert hall and dance club. A lounge/night spot called the Spider Club also will be on the premises, and Los Angeles restaurateur Warner Ebbink (101 Coffee Shop and Swingers) will open a French bistro called Le Royal there in the coming weeks.

The goal, Adelman says, is to revitalize the neighborhood and give locals a place to call home. Ebbink shares this vision and plans to make Le Royal an accessible, low-key dining experience offering no entrees that are more than \$25.

Avalon Hollywood already has a New York counterpart. Lyons and Adelman, who opened Boston's famed Avalon club in 1999, have given Manhattan's the Limelight a face-lift as well. The Limelight, which is housed in a former church complete with gothic stone walls and stained glass windows, reopened over the weekend as Avalon New York and also boasts a Spider Club. Lyons and Adelman secured 30-year leases with options to buy on both the Palace and the Limelight. Between the two venues, the ambitious duo has invested about \$6 million into renovations.

"What we do is we create a certain club experience," Adelman says. "And what better markets to do it in than in New York and Los Angeles?"

To create Avalon Hollywood, Lyons says he overhauled the entire Palace — from its art deco ceiling to the base boards. Lyons, a sound engineer, took special care in perfecting the acoustics in the space, which has been a constant source of frustration for artists over the years. In addition to soundproofing the walls and ceiling, Lyons installed his signature Avalon Series speaker system.

Lyons redesigned the balcony area into a lounge spot with plush couches and ottomans, and at the very top, there are individual cabanas directly accessible from the Spider Club. Most importantly, Lyons says, there are good sight lines to the stage — even from the couches.

"We're trying to create a concert experience that's a little bit different than your standard concert experience," Adelman says. "Usually when you go to a show, it's a four-wall show, and you stand around. This is not that. It's all about comfort and great sight lines and great places to sit."

Clear Channel Entertainment has signed on as Avalon Hollywood's exclusive concert booker (the Manhattan space does not have a steady booker yet). In lining up talent for the new venue, Clear Channel's Eric Herz says he is making a "concerted effort" to change the image of the former Palace. Because of its poor acoustics, the Palace in recent years was known for showcasing B-level acts and has-beens. Buzz bands would play the venue only

if other Los Angeles clubs were already booked.

Thus far, Herz has landed such acts as Stereophonics — which will open the venue tonight — Liz Phair, the Streets, Hot Hot Heat, Cake, Spearhead and Switchfoot. Meanwhile, the Spider Club in Los Angeles has a separate entrance on the north side of the building. The inside is designed with a Spanish/Moroccan flare, reminiscent of the early 1960s, and will feature DJs and spoken-word performances, and there are even plans to stage plays on the outside patio.

The Limelight's reputation as a B-level club also has been washed away by the renovations. Instead of simply relying on the church architecture to create the vibe, the space has been redesigned as an upscale locale.

"That's the first thing we tried to do with the Limelight was exorcise (the bad reputation) out of there," Adelman says. "We took the good elements — the landmark and beautiful historic

elements — then put something more contemporary and relevant on top of that."

While Avalon Hollywood and Avalon New York have separate identities and bookers, the two Spider Clubs are connected. About 500 Spider Club VIP cards have been sent out to a select group of artists, celebrities and tastemakers and offer access to both locations.

"It's not about being exclusive; it's about being inclusive," Adelman says. "There are a lot of people who go back and forth between New York and L.A., and the problem is they can never get in. There is always this big scene at the door. ... You get to the door, and there's always some 25-year-old wannabe actor telling them they can't come in. So our deal is to create a place where they can go. It's comfortable; it's about service."

The Los Angeles and New York venues also will showcase emerging visual artists through revolving installations and art exhibits. ■