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## Chalet Hollywood: artist Piero Golia hosts a creative speakeasy in Los Angeles

By Carren Jao

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Artist Piero Golia has launched Chalet Hollywood, a *gesamtkunstwerk* that repurposes an abandoned storage area in Los Angeles into a low-lit, intimate space for invited members that blends the aesthetics of cabaret and a European mountain getaway.

*Photography: Joshua White*

All legends were once follies. Nothing so well describes conceptual artist Piero Golia's latest venture. Hidden amid Hollywood Boulevard's storefronts hawking exotic costumes, tourist tchotchkes and overpriced luxury nightclubs, the Chalet is a creative meeting place where unforgettable nights unfold for a whole year.

Opened in September, the Chalet's guests have thus far included a former Beverly Hills ambassador; the women of LA Ladies Choir, who nourish successful careers in art, fashion, literature and theatre; and choreographer and creative consultant (to the Rolling Stones, among others) Stephen Galloway. 'I've always dreamed of a place where you can invite artists, actors, scientists - where they all meet and everything is free and beautiful,' says the Naples-born Golia of his utopian project, which took three years and two bankruptcies to get off the ground.

Golia worked with architect Edwin Chan (previously of Gehry Partners for over 25 years) on the design of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, repurposing an abandoned storage area and transforming it into a low-lit, intimate space for invited members that blends the aesthetics of cabaret and a European mountain getaway.

One-armed leather seats topped with copper-accented throws by LA fashion label Libertine are interspersed with low-slung lamps that give off a soft light. And Chalet members can share their favourite refreshments with their guests from their own drinks cabinet, custom-designed by Chan. Everything about the space invites you to linger and see where the moment takes you, because all too soon the night will only be a memory.

In the tradition of Craftsman architecture, every piece in the ephemeral space tells a story. The lighting, wall installations and furnishings are made of eight-by-eight white oak beams, specially milled from a forest in Pennsylvania purchased by Golia especially for the project. In the amphitheater, a Mark Grotjahn painting faces a piano, handed down through generations at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and lent by artist Christopher Williams. Meanwhile, next door - visible through a cutout in the wall - is the lounge where Pierre Huyghe's aquarium dominates, creating a natural centre for social interaction and conversation. Even the hallway boasts a major Jeff Wall photograph from 2000. With such an array of artwork it's no wonder that Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) is arranging monthly tours of the Chalet.

*We caught up with Piero Golia - whose work has been shown everywhere from the Gagosian Gallery and Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, to Amsterdam's Stedelijk and Rome's Maxxi museums - to find out more about his new creative venture.*

### **How did you conceive of the idea for the Chalet?**

Three years ago, for the first time in my life, I made some money. I thought I should spend it in a wise way. At the time, I wanted to open a place where I could invite all my friends. Los Angeles has been built for people not to meet in reality, but I think meeting is always a good idea. I wanted a place for special people to meet hoping great things will happen.

### **What was behind the name 'Chalet'?**

The name came courtesy of a museum in Paris called Palais de Tokyo. It used to do a group show abroad called Chalet de Tokyo. Marc-Olivier Wahler asked me to collaborate and we spoke a lot, but unfortunately they were never able to fund-raise for this. I kept the name Chalet because it fits the spirit of that home in the mountain. It's a place where you invite your friend and your friend's friend and your friend's friend's friend, hoping that they will be very happy.

### **What role does architecture play in the Chalet?**

Architecture is very important to create something exciting. I've known Edwin Chan for a long time and have always been a fan of the way his architecture develops around the scope of it. I asked Edwin for what I call the 'Frank Lloyd Wright package', which means the architect comes in and designs everything, from the doormat to the chandeliers. He completely took me at my word, understanding and amplifying

the idea I had of what the Chalet would be.

**How do the furnishings complement your vision for the space?**

The modular white oak furnishings guide you through the Chalet but leave you enough freedom to establish your own situation in the space. Everything has been designed for a reason. An extruded piece, for example, can be used as a table or a throne, but it's also a way to prevent people from banging into the painting.

**How did you choose the artworks that appear in the Chalet?**

I dreamed the Chalet would become a monument for people in Los Angeles and I felt I should include very important artworks. For this I have to thank the generosity of the artists. I have always loved Mark Grotjahn's paintings; I believe they are amazing. And I am obsessed with Pierre Huyghe's aquarium. Christopher Williams' piano is an important historical piece, coming from Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Somebody told me Joseph Beuys himself once played on it. The photograph in the hallway is by Jeff Wall. It depicts a sapling supported by a post. I think it summarises perfectly the idea behind the Chalet: the youngest growing strong with the support of the older. It's about learning.

**What was the most difficult part of this project?**

There were many difficulties, but first and foremost was money. We had to stop construction twice because of cash flow. But in the end I was really lucky. I have many friends who have helped me and now we're open.

**Getting to the Chalet on the right night is also part of the challenge. We heard about the special coins that you created for the Chalet, which act like Willy Wonka's Golden Tickets. Can you tell us about them?**

Lots of friends really helped build [the Chalet]. I couldn't pay them for what they're worth, but I could pay them in solid silver. The idea is you can keep the silver coin or you can decide to come to the Chalet one night and it'll cost you your coin. There is a choice between the object and the experience.

**What is your barometer for success at the Chalet?**

I dream for the Chalet to be a legend in LA, celebrated in the tourist guides, because that would truly make it public art. I dream that people will love the Chalet and they will remember it forever.

**Even though it'll disappear after just one year?**

Do you remember your first love? It's like that. There are things in life you never forget.



The design by architect Edwin Chan incorporates lighting, wall installations and furnishings made from eight-by-eight white oak beams, specially milled from Golia's forest in Pennsylvania

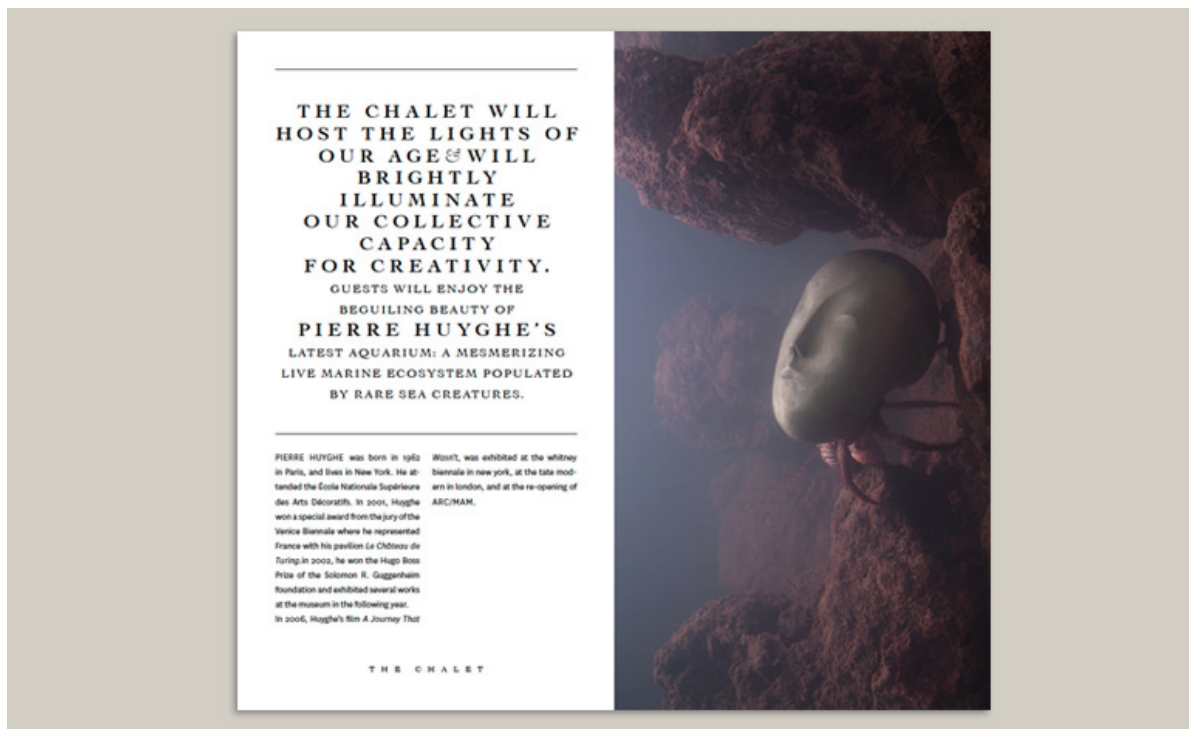


Golia has created a limited-edition silver coin for the Chalet, which grants access like a Willy Wonka Golden Ticket. 'The idea is you can keep the silver coin or you can decide to come to the Chalet one night and it'll cost you your coin,' says the artist, who has handed some to friends who collaborated on the project as a thank you. 'There is a choice between the object and the

experience'



An aquarium by Pierre Huyghe dominates the lounge, creating a natural hub for conversation



The Chalet is a by-invitation-only members club. A spread from the membership brochure features a close-up of one of Huyghe's artworks. 'I am obsessed by his aquariums,' says Golia. *Artwork: copyright Mark Grotjahn*



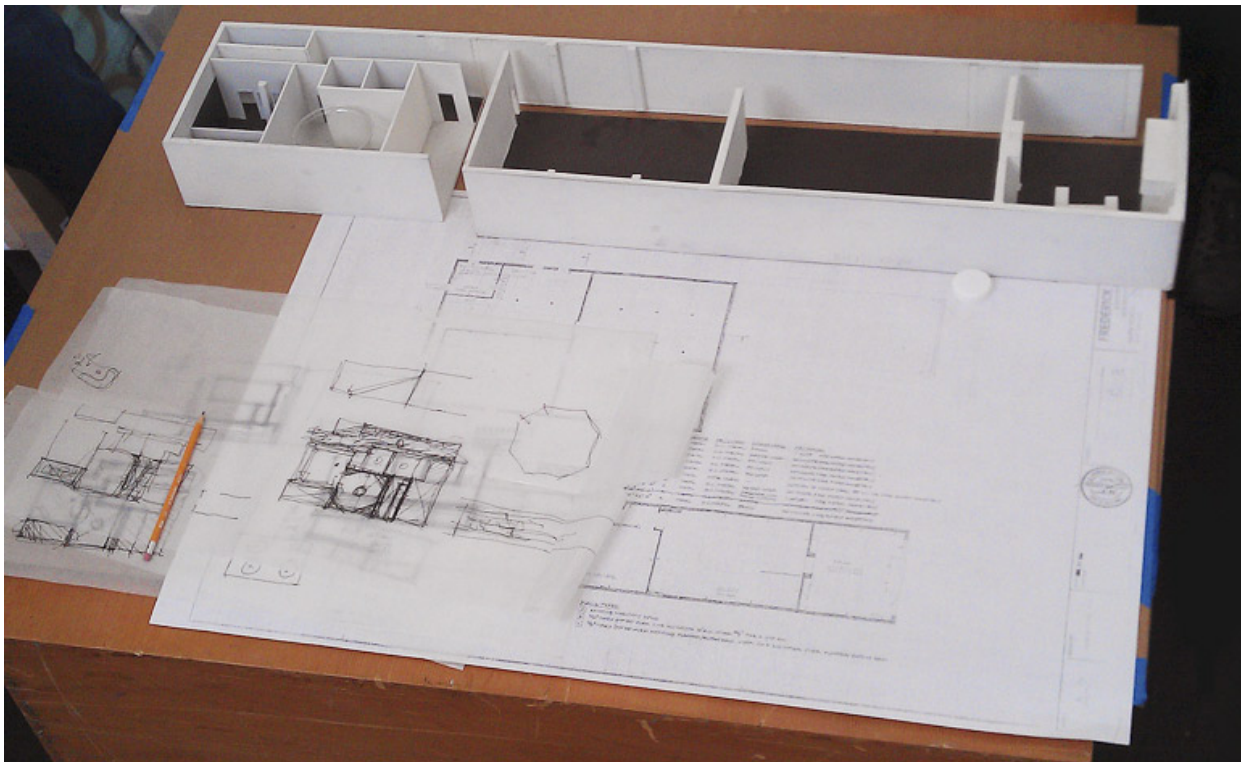
Another spread shows a painting by Mark Grotjahn, who has also contributed a work to the Chalet. *Artwork: copyright Mark Grotjahn*



Grotjahn's artwork hangs in the amphitheater - visible from the lounge through a cutout - which is also home to a historic Kunstakademie Düsseldorf piano lent by artist Christopher Williams



Chalet members can share their favourite refreshments with their guests from their own drinks cabinet, custom-designed by Edwin Chan, which echoes the oak beams used throughout the space



Design sketches for the Chalet, by Chan



A 3D model by Chan shows the amphitheater, complete with sketches of Grotzahn's works



A model of the wooden structure, showing the graphic interlocking of the beams

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